

Series: A More Excellent Way

Today's Message: The Ministry of Reconciliation; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

I read a very simple definition of the word *reconciliation*. The definition offered by Charles Ryrie was simply, *to change*. That's very simple. If you remember last week, we looked at Scripture that called us to be reconciled with those whom we have a divided relationship. The definition *to change* makes sense in that context because we are either agreeing to *change* our attitude or behavior, or the other person is willing to *change* their attitude or behavior so that the relationship can thrive.

In 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 the apostle Paul writes about *reconciliation* in "a more excellent way." By taking us down to the foundation of reconciliation, which is God Himself and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we can see a most excellent reason for us, as believers to be eager to engage in the same ministry Paul had and that was a ministry of reconciliation. Through this ministry, as ambassadors, we make our appeal to people to be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ.

I) (5:18) Why Must God initiate reconciliation?

- A) First, Paul says, "All this is from God..." That is our first clue if we are to answer the question, "why must God initiate reconciliation." So, what does "all this" refer too?
 - 1) It refers back to 2 Corinthians 4:14-17. There Paul describes the total transformation of a person who comes to faith in Jesus Christ. This transformation is so complete in Christ that truly when Christ died, we died in Him; and when He was raised, we were raised in Him!
 - 2) So complete is the believer's death and resurrection in Christ that Paul says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, and the new has come!"
 - (a) God makes us a new creation. This is essential to our doctrine of salvation!
 - (i) We must understand that sinners cannot be reconciled to God. In other words, a sinner has no power to affect their adversarial relationship with God.
 - (a) Sinners are in rebellion against God. He is an enemy of God with no good intentions toward God (see Romans 3:10-20)
 - 1. Irreconcilable difference between God and man. Enmity (Rom. 8:7).
 - a. It is man who sinned. He is powerless and without the will to reconcile.
 - i. Romans 3:11b, 17-18; 5:6,8,10
 - b. It is God, who is holy, righteous, and good that is offended by sin and the sinner.
 - i. The unregenerate person has no ability to appease God's anger against sin, or to satisfy His righteous justice, or conform to His righteous requirements set forth in the Law of God.
 - ii. "God is angry with sinners every day." (Psalm 7:11)
- 3) But the next words of Paul sets forth the best news for sinners! (See point "B.")
- B) Next, Paul adds, "...who reconciled us to Himself through Christ..."
 - 1) This is the good news of the Gospel.
 - (a) Yes, God is angry with sinners to be sure, but God so loved the world that He made the way of reconciliation (John 3:16).
 - (b) Out of the overflow of His love, He desired to reconcile sinners to Himself, making them His children!
 - (i) "One of the [great] realities of God's person is that He is a Savior by nature." (MacArthur)
- C) So, we should see clearly that God initiates the reconciliation of sinners!
 - 1) We can go clear back to Genesis 3:8-9 and see this where God said to Adam, "Where are you?"

- 2) Ezekiel 34:16 God said, "I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick."
- 3) He is the eager reconciler! **Read Romans 5:9-11!**

II) (5:19) How reconciliation relates to the Gospel?

A) 5:19 tells us that God reconciled us to Himself **in Christ**. In verse 18 we saw it was "through Christ."

1) Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the agent of reconciliation.

(a) Ephesians 2:13 tells us plainly, "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by **the blood of Christ.**"

(i) **Read Ephesians 2:13-16**

B) "That God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them."

1) "...reconciling the world..." (This does not teach *universalism*.)

(a) There is a sense in which Christ died for the whole world.

(i) "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

(ii) "For God so loved the world..." (John 3:16)

(iii) Jesus is called, "the Savior of the world" in both John 4:42 and 1 John 4:14.

(b) Christ's death has infinite value. His sacrifice is sufficient to pay the penalty for as many or as few as God saves. And though the gospel is offered to all, his death actually removed the guilt of the sins of those who believe. (MacArthur gets credit for this paragraph.)

(c) A good saying, *Christ's sacrifice was sufficient for all, but efficacious only for those whom He came to save.*

(i) He came to save *His people from their sins* (Matt. 1:21). "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for His sheep (John 10:11,15).

C) God reconciled us by His act of forgiveness provided through the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ.

1) His death propitiated God in that God's justice was satisfied on the behalf of sinners and His wrath was turned away from sinners, providing the required righteousness for us who believe!

(a) 2 Corinthians 5:21

2) By His death on the cross He redeemed us from our slavery to sin.

D) Reconciliation illustrated.

1) Apart from the Gospel, if we compared our righteousness with the righteousness of Christ, we would be far from reconciled. Think of it like an accounting sheet. If we compared ours with that of Christ. Compare sinlessness. We are debtors. Compare righteousness: we are debtors. Good works that please God: debtors. Law keeping: debtors. Pure thoughts: debtors. Godward motivations: debtors.

2) But God reconciled us to Himself in Christ. Through faith in Christ all our debts are removed because the righteous requirements of God are satisfied in Christ. By faith in Him the books are reconciled. There is no outstanding debts standing against us!

(a) We didn't reconcile the books. God did in Christ! That is the Gospel declaration!

III) (5:20) What is the main work of the ministry of reconciliation, which we have been given?

A) The main work of the ministry of reconciliation: To be ambassadors of Christ calling the world to be reconciled to God. In other words, as those who have been reconciled, we have the **privilege** of calling all people everywhere to be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ!

1) Called to be ambassadors for Christ. This means that we are to carry the message of the Gospel to sinners as representatives of Him who reconciled us! **WE ARE FREE, AS CITIZENS OF HEAVEN (Phil. 3:20) TO REPRESENT CHRIST by PROCLAIMING TO LOST REBELS THAT THEY CAN BE RECONCILED TO GOD THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST!**

2) What is the call we are commissioned to proclaim? "Draw near to God...humble yourself in the presence of the Lord..." (James 4:8-10). We are to call people to the obedience of faith in Christ.

3) There is no greater calling, no greater initiative, nothing more urgent than the ministry of reconciliation. God has entrusted this ministry of reconciliation to each and every believer.