

The Ministry of reconciliation

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Sermon for June 19 2022

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Today we will be looking at question 25 from the New City Catechism. I will read the question, and together we will read the answer.

Question 25: Does Christ's death mean all our sins can be forgiven?

Answer: Yes, because Christ's death on the cross fully paid the penalty for our sin, God graciously imputes Christ's righteousness to us as if it were our own and will remember our sins no more.

Our passage is about reconciliation. What is reconciliation? It is the work of making peace. When you have conflict between two people, there is pain and distance. Reconciliation brings healing and restores fellowship. Why do we need reconciliation? We need reconciliation with God because of sin.

You remember what happened in the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned. In Genesis 3:8, we read:

8 "And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden."

The sin of Adam and Eve broke their warm relationship with each other and with God. They hid from God because they felt guilt and shame. Only God could solve this conflict by making peace between the human race and Himself.

This is the focus of our passage.

Let's read together 2 Corinthians 5:16-21:

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh.

Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;

19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.

We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Let's read together Isaiah 40:8.

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

Let's pray.

Gracious Father, we come before you, asking for the blessing on the preaching of Your Word. We pray that our hearts would be open to the work of the Holy Spirit as He uses the Word to nourish us. We pray that we would see Jesus nearly, love Him dearly, and serve Him duly. And we ask all this trusting in Jesus's precious name. Amen.

Let's see what this passage says concerning reconciliation. Verse 16 says:

16 "From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh.

Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer."

Before his conversion, Paul had regarded Christ and Christianity with contempt. He viewed Christ from a human point of view. This was why he persecuted the followers of Jesus. But as a new creation, Paul could not continue the persecution. Something significant changed in the way Paul saw people and Christ.

C.S. Lewis once wrote: "There are no ordinary people.

You have never talked to a mere mortal.

Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations -- these are mortal....

But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit -- immortal horrors or everlasting splendors."

Friends, we need this perspective. We are prone to regard people as ordinary, according to our social, cultural, and

ethnic categories. But we must see everyone as Christ does. Because we are not compelled by our own categories, but by Christ's sacrificial love for us. Verse 17 reads:

17 "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

By nature, we are all dead in our sin and we deserve death, as God warned our father Adam. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death." But in union with Christ, the second Adam, God gives us the gift of eternal life. We begin "a new state of being." Despite our messy lives, we are given a fresh start.

Think about building a house from scratch or renovating a very old house. Which of the two projects is more difficult? Building a house from scratch is often easier. You can make a plan and follow it step by step. But if you renovate an old house it can cost more money and take more time.

Renovating an old house is more difficult. However, the result can often amaze people. A beautifully restored old home can be more impressive than a house built on an empty plot of land. Have you ever made a big mistake, something you immediately regretted? I personally have. A fresh start would be nice. Sometimes it would be nice to go back and do something over again. And do it right this time. Do you know that feeling? This is what God is offering to us in Jesus. A fresh start.

Friends, when broken sinful creatures are created over again, it is a greater miracle than the creation from nothing that we read of in Genesis. Scripture calls this "resurrection from the dead." Only God is able to bring dead sinners to life.

Kainos is the Greek word used for "new" in our passage. It means this new creation is superior to the old. Our new life in Christ replaces and buries our old sinful self. Paul is basically saying that we are to have nothing to do with our old way of life.

Verses 18-19 state:

18 "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;
19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."

Who is the active person in these verses? Does it say that we reconciled ourselves to God? No. God did it all.

First, in Christ, God reconciles us to Himself. We got ourselves in debt, and He paid the debt for us. Second, God Himself gives us the ministry of reconciliation. We are called to tell others of the fact that reconciliation with God is

possible in Christ.

When you have experienced something wonderful you want to share it, right? You may remember the story of the Samaritan woman? In John 4:28-30 we read:

28 "So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people,

29 "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?"

30 They went out of the town and were coming to him."

The Samaritan woman could not keep this experience to herself. Her friends needed--and all the world desperately needs -- this ministry of reconciliation. Brothers and sisters, our sin is an infinite crime because it is committed against an infinitely holy God. He cannot let sin go unpunished. As finite sinful beings we cannot merit favor with God. We need a Mediator to die on our behalf and also overcome death for us. And as we saw in our previous sermons, this Mediator has to be both God and man.

We are reconciled to God since now God's justice is satisfied and our sins forgiven. Because Christ's sacrifice of Himself was of infinite value, our debt is cancelled and now we are accepted. There is now no condemnation, as Romans 8:1 reminds us, because Christ was condemned on our behalf. Now God no longer remembers all my sins and yours because He has removed them.

Psalm 103:12 says:

"As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us."

This does not mean that we will not sin or that we can sin as we please. Rather, it is an assurance that even when we sin we can be sure of forgiveness because of what Christ has accomplished for us. What an amazing blessing we have in Christ!

Third, God entrusts us with the message of reconciliation. This means that we do not craft our own message. Instead, we tell people that God has made peace with the world in Christ. It is an already done deal.

Verse 20 states:

20 "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.

We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

After God makes us into new people, He gives us a new mission. He makes us ambassadors. He trusts us with the good news. Through His perfect obedient life, sacrificial death, and resurrection, Jesus has reconciled the world to

God. Isn't it amazing that he trusts us with that same message?

In February, the ambassador of Ukraine to the United Kingdom announced that his country could change its position on NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) membership for the sake of peace. President Zelenskyy trusted him with this responsibility as ambassador.

An ambassador is someone who is trusted with a mission and a message. An ambassador acts in the place of his superior. And here is the amazing thing. God is the King of the Universe. He trusts us with his message and gives us authority on earth to proclaim it.

We must be faithful. We do not tell people that they can make peace with God. We do not tell them to only make peace with one another. This would not be the message of the Master whom we represent. Rather, we declare that God has reconciled the world to Himself in Christ.

This is a privilege that we assume with humble boldness. God is pleased to accomplish redemption through you and I. We must be humble because the message and the ministry are from God Himself. I am not here today with my own message. Instead, I am here because I have been privileged to bring to you the message that God has assigned me.

Verse 21 says:

21 "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Verse 21 summarizes the focal point of the ministry of reconciliation. There is a great exchange that took place through Christ's life and work.

Our sinless Savior suffered the punishment that we deserved so that we may have favor with God. Isaiah prophesied about this great exchange in Isaiah 53:4-6:

4 "He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;

yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities;

upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned -- every one -- to his own way;

and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Christ, the spotless Lamb of God, bore our sins to take them away. By being made sin, He did not become a sinner.

That would have disqualified Him as a Savior. He was made sin in the sense that He bore our sin and its punishment in His body. In other words, "All our sins were credited to Christ, and the spotless perfection of his righteousness was credited to us." Because of this, we are declared righteous before God. Friends, do you want to transform the world and make it a better place? Be an ambassador of reconciliation.

I am from the Democratic Republic of Congo. In our country, we have had conflicts of different kinds for many decades. Many programs have tried to engage in reconciliation. For instance, the United Nations (UN) has been there for over 20 years. People expected the UN would establish peace. Instead, things continue to go from worse to worse. In 2012, rebels captured my home city, Goma, for 2 weeks. The UN representative was asked why the UN did not intervene to defend the city. He said that the UN's mandate was not to "make peace" but to "keep peace."

Peace making is riskier than peace-keeping. A peace-keeper can only watch when people are in great danger. But a peace-maker is ready to pay a deadly price to accomplish peace. The mission of the UN in my country has failed. Why? Its mandate is to "keep peace." Yet, there no peace to be kept!

So where is hope for Congo or any other country in conflict? True hope and peace are only found in Jesus. Jesus was ready to pay a deadly price to accomplish peace. Jesus was willing to pay with his own holy blood to establish peace with God for us.

As the church of Christ, we are the embassy of reconciliation. To make peace, we must proclaim this message of reconciliation in Christ. It is this message that addresses the core problem of the human race. This is where any other problem finds its solution.

I had a friend who was not a Christian, named Bob. Anytime I spoke with him he was hostile. One day he came to me and said, "Do you want to fight me? You always want to control me by your look!" "No," I said. "I just looked at you to say hi." Later, I discovered that Bob had a past dominated by terminal diseases, and many other psychological issues. He told me, "I hate God. I cannot believe in Him because then He would control me wherever I go." I said, "But we are all controlled by someone or something. What if it was a caring God who controls you?" In response, Bob was furious and left in the middle of the conversation.

One day another friend shared the gospel with Bob. As a result, Bob became a new creation, resurrected from death to life. After this, my relationship with Bob drastically changed, as well. Glory be to God! The story with Bob has a happy ending because Bob found reconciliation with God and then also with me. But sometimes we have conflict with people who are not believers. These may include our neighbors, family members, school mates, and coworkers.

We are called to pursue peace with them all. Romans 12:18 says:

"18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

Sometimes, seeking to live at peace with others is difficult. When we present the gospel of reconciliation to them, they might see it as unloving. They might respond, "Don't preach at me."

I don't know about you, but I often hesitate to talk about Jesus because I don't like rejection. But I must remember that they are not rejecting me. Brothers and sisters, we can be brave and face possible rejections because we have an unshakable security in God our Father. And because of this, we will still need to be loving, humble, gentle, and yet bold in the truth that we confess.


We are gathered here as people from different tribes and nations because we are no longer alienated from God. In Christ, God is pleased with each one of us. Because of this, we worship in one voice. Praise God for His work! My friends, let's go out this week and be ambassadors of reconciliation. Let's make it our goal to call those who are lost to be reconciled to God. All broken people need to hear this message of reconciliation. This is the only way they will find true peace. As we do all this, may we remember that all is from God. He alone deserves all glory and honor, forever and ever.

Ambassadors of Christ: let's go out and serve our King this week!

Let's pray.

Father God, thank you for Your Son Jesus Christ, who bore the punishment that our sin deserved so that we may be counted righteous in your sight. We thank you that we are reconciled to you and at peace with you. We pray that you would continue to work in and through us as ambassadors of reconciliation. Help us to do so boldly and humbly. Help us to always keep our gaze on Christ and the work He accomplished on our behalf in whatever we do. We pray all this for Christ's sake.

Amen!

 One Voice Fellowship