

Message #17

II Corinthians 5:16-21

I read a story of a husband and wife, who had an only son who died and they eventually split up and went their separate ways. They left the area where they had originally lived and moved to different parts of the country. It happened one day that the husband was going to be back in the city on a business trip and he decided to go to the cemetery and visit the grave of his only son. As he was standing there looking at the grave, he heard someone walking behind him and he turned and there was his estranged wife. She too was back in the same city and she too had gone out to visit the grave of her son. In a very awkward moment, they looked at each other and they looked back at the grave and then they reached out their hands and joined them together and were reconciled right then and there. The death and grave of a son had reconciled this estranged husband and wife.

There is the death of a Son and an empty grave that is able to reconcile any sinner with the Holy, Righteous God. There is a precious doctrine that is only found in the New Testament that gives us amazing information about how one death can actually and really reconcile us to God forever. As Dr. Chafer said, there is a doctrine that gives us “the man ward aspect of Christ’s work on the cross.” **This doctrine is the doctrine of reconciliation** (*Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 91).

The actual word “reconciliation” (καταλλασσω) is a word that means to **change something completely** or **completely transform something** like a relationship that changes one who was an enemy into a friend (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 236). Dr. Chafer said it is very legitimate every time you see the word “reconciliation” or “reconcile” in the English Bible to substitute the word “change completely.” **When it comes to God, what reconciliation means is that a person’s relationship with God is changed from hostility to harmony, from enmity to amity.**

What most people do not realize is their need to be reconciled to God. All people have sinned against God (Rom. 3:23; **II Cor. 5:21**); all people are enemies of God (Rom. 5:10); and all people are heading to the wrath of God (Rom. 5:9). Our relationship with God is fractured and we need to be reconciled or to state it another way, we need a complete change of status in our relationship with God.

Now when it comes to the subject of change, God is not the one who changes, nor does He ever need to change. We are the ones who need to be changed so we can have a relationship with God. Reconciliation is about what God does in order to change us so we may have a relationship with God.

The “therefore” that begins **verse 16** points back to the previous thought that Jesus Christ died on the cross so that all may believe on Him and be saved. The proof that His death is able to do that is He rose again. So Paul says in view of the fact that Jesus died and then rose again, we persuade men to believe on Jesus Christ and be reconciled to God.

IN VIEW OF THE SACRIFICIAL AND SUBSTITUTIONARY WORK OF JESUS CHRIST ON THE CROSS, PAUL WAS AN AMBASSADOR FOR JESUS CHRIST WHO PERSUADED SINNERS TO BE RECONCILED TO GOD THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.

Now in these verses, Paul develops the critical theology and message of the doctrine of reconciliation.

THEOLOGICAL REALITY #1 – Being reconciled to God means we recognize no one according to the flesh/human body. **5:16a**

The Greek emphatically stresses that Paul knew this theological truth personally. In fact the verb “we recognize” (οιδαμεν) is one that stresses that one actually has this knowledge (*Ibid.*, p. 311). Paul, who had been caught up to heaven, actually knew you cannot go to heaven by anything you do in your human flesh body.

What this means is that being reconciled to God has nothing to do at all with anything we do or are in our flesh. No human/flesh works can reconcile us to God; no human/flesh religion can reconcile us to God; no human/flesh laws can reconcile us to God and no human/flesh rituals can reconcile us to God. Nothing we do in the flesh, nothing anyone can ever do in this human body can reconcile us to God.

You will never be reconciled to God by anything you do in your flesh. You may be good and kind and religious. You may try to be a good neighbor and try to live by a series of commandment codes, but you will never be reconciled to God because the only way one is reconciled to God is by faith in Jesus Christ.

THEOLOGICAL REALITY #2 – Being reconciled to God means putting no recognition in Jesus Christ as just a flesh man. **5:16b**

No one will ever be reconciled to God by just believing that there was a man in history whose name was Jesus. Let’s face it; Jesus was a real human person who was very well-known in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas. No one will ever be reconciled to God by simply believing that Jesus was a man who did really exist in the flesh. If you think Jesus was just a good man or a good prophet or a good teacher or a good moral example, as most people tend to think, you will never be reconciled to God.

Every year at Christmastime millions of people meet to remember the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Almost everyone acknowledges that Jesus Christ was born in the flesh. But he was much more than just some normal, cute Jewish baby; He was God. Paul says we no longer look at Christ as just incarnate.

Being reconciled to God means we understand Jesus Christ is the God-man-resurrected Savior.

In reconciliation, we look to the fact that Jesus was God and He was raised from the dead and is seated in the heavenlies at the right hand of God.

Paul says the way we know Christ is that He was born, He was crucified, He was raised from the dead and then He ascended up into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God.

Old Charles Wesley got his theology right when he wrote: “Hark the Herald angels sing, glory to the new born King; peace on earth and mercy mild, **God and sinners reconciled.**” He saw the fact that Jesus Christ was a Savior who could reconcile sinners to God.

THEOLOGICAL REALITY #3 – Being reconciled to God means one is a new creation in Christ. **5:17**

Now the prepositional phrase “in Christ” means that one has believed in Jesus Christ as the crucified and risen, God-man Savior. One places his or her faith in Jesus Christ to save from sins and not in anything else. **The moment one acknowledges that to God and believes totally and only in Jesus Christ, by positional calculation of God he is a “new creation.”**

Now the adjective “new” (καινη) refers to something that is brand new. We may remember that there are two different adjectives that may be translated “new.” The Greek word “neos” (νεος) means new or recent in time (you purchase something used that is new to you in time) and the Greek word “kainos” (καινος) refers to brand new in quality in the sense of never having been previously in existence (you purchase something brand new that has never been in existence before) (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 225-226).

What Paul is saying by using this adjective “new” is that the moment one believes on Jesus Christ that person has a brand new status that has not been previously in existence with God. He is brand new in his relationship with God. At that moment the sinner is reconciled in his relationship with God.

We may notice that Paul says “if any man” which literally reads in Greek “if any one.” That “if clause” refers to any one. Any one of any background, of any ethnic origin, of any gender, of any religion or any sin may become a brand new creation in the sight of God by believing on Jesus Christ.

Now this is a statement about one’s position, not about one’s practice. You cannot get this new status by behavior, but by belief. In fact, the context flat out states we don’t recognize anything about our flesh as being able to change our status with God.

Often times you will hear people say how they believed on Christ and became new and gave up old habits that weren’t good. That does often take place when one believes on Jesus Christ, but that is not what this verse is talking about. **This verse means that the moment one believes on Jesus Christ, he is a brand new creation in his positional status with God.**

The sinner is reconciled to God through the substitutionary cross work of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ died on the cross one time to reconcile any sinner to God if that sinner will believe on Him.

S. Lewis Johnson told the story of an obstetrician who was dying in his death bed in the hospital and he called for his minister because he wasn't quite sure what he needed to do to have eternal life. When the minister got there, the doctor said, "I have heard of a new birth and wonder how I may have it?" Well the minister said to the doctor, "Well you have been a good man, you have served in the community and have been an example to others so you really don't need a new birth." Well the obstetrician said, "But the N.T. says I need to be born again. Didn't Jesus say that?" The minister admitted he did. Then the doctor said, "I have brought many babies into the world and when I do the first thought that almost always goes through my mind is that this baby has a future and no past." The doctor said "that is what I need right now." I know I am a sinner and my past has not been all that good and I need to know I have a future without a past" (*II Corinthians 5:16-19*, p. 5).

That is what Paul says happens the moment one believes on Jesus Christ; you become a brand new creation and the sin past and sin case are gone.

THEOLOGICAL REALITY #4 – Being reconciled to God means we recognize God reconciled us to Himself through Christ. **5:18a**

The potential of reconciliation with God is a gift God. God is the One who makes reconciliation possible. It is a gift He has given to the world. It is a free grace gift. Reconciliation starts with God, ends with God and is through Christ for God.

THEOLOGICAL REALITY #5 – Being reconciled to God means we have the privileged responsibility of proclaiming reconciliation. **5:18b-21**

Undoubtedly, Paul was thinking about the apostolic ministry and responsibility God had given to him to speak and write about the great grace salvation and the doctrine of reconciliation. The proclamation of the message consists of the following reconciliation facts:

Reconciliation Fact #1 - Reconciliation means God does not calculate the world's sins against them. **5:19**

These next verses are some of the richest theological verses in all of the Bible. Now the Greek verb "count" (λογίζομαι) is the word that refers to imputation which means a judicial and mental calculation (*Ibid.*, p. 270). The word "trespass" (παράπτωμα) refers to all times in which humans have done wrong and stepped off the path of the righteousness of God.

When God decided to offer reconciliation to the world, He made a judicial calculation not to count all unrighteous violations that this world had committed against Him.

He decided to send His own Son into this world in spite of the fact that this world rebelled against Him and His Word.

What this verse means is that God's amazing grace makes reconciliation to any person in this world possible. Any sinner in the world may be reconciled to God because of this fact. You may have stolen, committed adultery, committed some homosexual act, had an abortion, lied, gossiped, been drunk or on drugs; the fact is God offers you His "outstretched arms" to be reconciled in your relationship with Him.

It is possible that any person in the world may actually be in a position in which God does not "count" trespasses against him. In other words, through the cross work of Jesus Christ it is possible for any sinner in this world to actually have a status with God in which He does not "count" or "calculate" their sin against them.

Reconciliation Fact #2 - Reconciliation is by faith alone in Christ alone. **5:20**

Now there are two aspects of reconciliation that are developed by the cross of Jesus Christ.

- 1) The cross work of Jesus Christ changed the world's position and made it savable. **5:19**
- 2) The cross work of Jesus Christ can change the individual sinner and make salvation possible and actual. **5:20**

Paul says we appeal to people and beg people to believe on Jesus Christ because it is by believing on Jesus Christ that your sin case is closed. At the moment you believe on Jesus Christ, God calculates you as being reconciled to God.

Reconciliation Fact #3 - Reconciliation imputes our sin to Christ. **5:21a**

Verse 21 is one of the most important verses in this Epistle and as one writer said, one of the most important verses in all of the writings of the Apostle Paul.

God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf. Now how did he do that? And what does that mean? Well whatever it means we know that God did it by judicial calculation by judicial imputation. God made a judicial decision and calculation that Jesus Christ is "made sin." We know this is by judicial calculation because Christ, Himself, never sinned.

There have been three views as to what it means that Christ was "made sin."

View #1 - Christ was made sin as our substitute and in our place went to the cross and experienced the full brunt of our sin and the wrath of God which we deserved.

This is what Isaiah predicted in Isaiah 53. This is what Peter said in I Pet. 2:24.

View #2 - Christ was made in the likeness of sinful man with a real human nature in order that He might take our place in His substitutionary work. Paul said this in Romans 8:3

View #3 - Christ was made a sin offering on our behalf which enables us to be reconciled to God.

The fact is all three are true. Jesus Christ took the wrath of God that we deserve, so we could have His heaven that we do not deserve. God made a judicial calculation that our entire sin case, which keeps us from being reconciled to God, may be closed through faith in Jesus Christ.

Reconciliation Fact #4 - Reconciliation imputes Christ's righteousness to us. **5:21b**

The result of God calculating our sin to Jesus Christ is that He also may calculate Christ's righteousness to us and the moment He calculates Christ's righteousness to us—**we are forever reconciled to God.**

In the mind of God, the moment we believe on Jesus Christ we actually become righteous. God calculates us as reconciled to Him and actually calculates Christ's righteousness to us.

Now do not miss this point. This does not say we live righteous lives, although we certainly should seek to do that. This does not say we are in a right standing with God, although that is true. What this says is "we actually become righteous." Just as God calculated our sin to Jesus Christ, He calculates us as having Christ's righteousness.

The moment God makes this calculation, we become a brand new creation and we are reconciled to God.

There are some wonderful benefits for one who has been reconciled to God:

- 1) One reconciled to God is forever at peace with God. Col. 1:20
- 2) One reconciled to God has eternal security and eternal salvation. Rom. 5:10
- 3) One reconciled to God has been completely set free from the O.T. Law. Eph. 2:14-18
- 4) One reconciled to God is no longer calculated by God as being a condemned sinner.

II Cor. 5:17-19

- 5) One reconciled to God is calculated as having Christ's righteousness. **II Cor. 5:21**

So the question is this—"Are you reconciled to God?" "Do you believe totally and only in Jesus Christ to save you?"

There is the grave of a Son and God is waiting there for you. If you will by faith believe on Jesus Christ, you will be reconciled to God.