

Reconciled – 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Anniversary of Gettysburg

1. In 1913, the Federal Government held a 50th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg. It lasted 3 days.
2. Thousands of survivors of the battle bivouacked in the old battlefield, swapping stories, looking up comrades.
3. The climax of the gathering was a reenactment of *Pickett's Charge*.
 - a. Thousands gathered to watch as the Union veterans took their positions on Cemetery Ridge.
 - b. Then just as they had 50 years before, the Southerners emerged from the woods on Seminary Ridge & started toward them across the long, flat fields.
 - c. But this time, because of their age, instead of carrying rifles & bayonets they carried canes & crutches.
4. As the southern veterans neared the northern line, they broke into one final, defiant rebel yell.
5. The Union vets repeated the sound they'd made all those years before - a moan & sigh of resignation.
6. But then the Yankees, unable to restrain themselves longer, burst from behind their stone walls, & threw themselves upon their former enemies;
 - a. Not in combat, but in hugs of brotherly love & affection—
 - b. Because the war was over & reconciliation had come.

B. The War

1. The Battle at Gettysburg was the turning point of the Civil War.
 2. The skirmish on Cemetery Hill was the turning point at Gettysburg.
 3. What happened at *Calvary* Hill was the turning point in the long war between God & rebel man.
 4. It was there that the rebellion was put down & the slaves were set free.
 5. It was at the cross of Christ that provision was made for *reconciliation* between God & man.
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6. Reconciliation is the theme of the last verses of ch. 5.

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 18-19

18 Now all things are of God,

1. Meaning the “all things that have become new” in v. 17
2. God is the origin of all we have & are in Christ.

18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ,

3. *Reconciled* means to *bring together* those who've been at odds.
 - a. It's *more* than just an end to hostilities.
 - b. Reconciliation is a *nearness*, a *warm affinity* forged between 2 who'd been enemies.

4. What's unusual about Paul's use of this word is that it was *never* used in other religions.
 - a. The Greeks & Romans worshipped a multitude of gods but never had any hope of *friendship* with them.
 - b. Even among the Jews, reconciliation was rarely used to describe their relationship with God.
 - c. The few times it was it meant nothing more than the removal of His wrath.
 - d. It didn't carry any sense of *closeness to* or *friendship with* God.
5. When Paul says God ***reconciled*** us to Himself he reveals something ***astonishing*** about God –
 - a. God doesn't want us to come before Him merely as terrified, awe-struck worshippers.
 - b. He wants to have the closest companionship with us.

6. Have you ever had a falling out with a close friend?
 - a. Maybe when you were a youngster & one of you did something that made the other mad.
 - b. After a while you *longed* to be ***reconciled***.
 - c. You didn't even know what that word meant, but man! All you knew was that you missed your friend. You were lonely!
7. We moved a lot when I was growing up. In a couple places we lived, there were other boys my age with whom I became bestest friends.
 - a. It didn't matter how close we were, there was always the inevitable fight.
 - b. One of us would do or say something stupid & we'd fall to blows.
 - c. Then there were a couple days of brooding silence as we both agonized over the loss of the friendship.
 - d. But eventually one of us would go to the other & apologize.
 - e. The other was always quick to forgive & within no time we were running down the street together to some new adventure.
8. God created us to be His eternal companions.
 - a. By creating us in His image, he gave us the capacity to enjoy the most intimate of all friendships with Him. → Dogs.
 - b. But we rebelled against Him & made ourselves His enemies.
 - c. In most reconciliations, it's the ***offender*** who seeks out the ***offended*** & asks for reconciliation.
 - d. With God it's the other way around –
 - 1) We're the offenders, He's the offended.
 - 2) Yet ***He*** comes to ***us***, & tells us of His desire to reconcile us to Himself.
9. He made reconciliation ***possible***.

God, . . . has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ

 - a. Our sin is a spiritual & moral crime that must be punished.
 - b. Justice demands it. Sin cannot just be waved away; it must be paid for.
 - c. That's what Jesus did at the cross – He ***paid*** our ***debt***, was ***punished*** for our ***crime***—all of it.

10. God ***reconciled*** us to Himself thru Christ. He's changed us from ***enemies to friends***. But even more -

And—has given us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ that is, that God

was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

11. Not only have we been reconciled to God, He's included us in making the Great News of that reconciliation known to the lost.
12. Oh that reminds me – I **need** to tell you something. The management of the *PacView Mall* called Friday & asked me to pass this on to you today.
 - a. All the merchants & stores in the *PacView Mall* are offering **free Christmas shopping** to the members of CCO.
 - b. We've worked out a special deal with them. You can get whatever & as much as you want for free – starting today at noon & running through Friday.
 - c. All you have to do is at checkout tell the cashier you're a member of CCO.
13. Good news? Would you appreciate that? Would you tell your family & friends & encourage them to join CCO? → Okay, that particular offer **isn't** true.
14. But listen up because I have an **even better, more incredible offer**.
15. God has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ!
16. If it would be **lame** to **not tell** people about free shopping, how **tragic** is it to withhold the message of reconciliation with God?

17. One quick side-note here on the deity of Christ – look at v. 19 -

God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.

- a. The rules of Greek grammar are clear; Paul meant Jesus is God.
 - b. If He was only human, His death on the cross would have been like every other man's death.
 - c. It could accomplish nothing.
 - d. Because Jesus was God, the cross becomes the means of our forgiveness & reconciliation.
 - e. That's why Paul says our trespasses/sins aren't **imputed** to us; aren't attributed to our account.
 - 1) "Imputed" is an **accounting** term; to apply something to someone's account.
 - 2) When we put our faith in Jesus & believe the cross pays for our sin, our account is cleared of all debt.
 - 4) Our record is expunged, wiped clean.
18. If you apply for certain jobs today, they do a background check to see what's on your record.
- a. If you've been convicted of a felony, there are certain jobs they won't hire you for.
 - b. When they become adults some people petition the court to **expunge** their record of crimes they committed when they were juveniles.
 - c. But many times, there's a trace of that crime left behind that will surface years later & cause problems.
 - d. We who put our faith in Christ need never worry that some angel will one day be running through our files & discover some old infraction.
 - e. The blood of Christ has wiped our record clean, forever.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.

19. This is what we celebrate at Christmas – God became man so that we can be reconciled to Him.

B. V. 20

20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

1. As Paul ponders our *participation with God* in the ministry of reconciliation, he says we are ambassadors for Christ.
 2. We know what an ambassador is; he/she is an official representative of a nation, sent to another land to look out for his/her homeland's interests.
 3. But the *ambassador* of Paul's day had *added* significance.
 - a. In the Roman Empire there were 2 kinds of provinces; *Senatorial & Imperial* provinces.
 - b. Senatorial provinces were a willing part of the Empire. As such they sent a senator to Rome to represent their interests.
 - c. Imperial provinces were conquered territories that would jump at the chance to rebel & withdraw from the Empire.
 - 1) They didn't send one of their own to the Roman Senate,
 - 2) On the contrary, a Roman was sent *to them* as an ambassador to represent the interests of Rome.
 - 3) His mission was one of persuasion – trying to get the reluctant of the province to welcome Rome's benevolent rule.
 4. When Paul likened us to ambassadors of Christ it was with this background.
 - a. This world is in rebellion against its Creator & rightful King.
 - b. We're His representatives, urging rebel men & women to be reconciled to Him & His benevolent reign.
 5. When Reagan was president, George Shultz was Secretary of State,
 - a. He kept a large globe in his office.
 - b. When newly appointed ambassadors interviewed with him Shultz tested them by asking them to point to their country on the globe.
 - c. Without fail, every one of them spun the globe & put their finger on the nation they'd been assigned to.
 - d. The only exception was Shultz's old friend, the former Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield.
 - e. He'd been appointed as the ambassador to Japan.
 - f. Shultz said, "Mike, show me your country on the globe."
 - g. Mansfield spun the globe & put his entire palm over the US, saying "*That's* my country."
 - h. From that point on, whenever Shultz sent out an ambassador he said to them, "Never forget you're over there in that country, but *your country* is the United States. You're there to represent us. Take care of our interests and never forget you're representing the best country in the world."
 6. Christian – never forget you're *in* this world but not *of* it.
 - a. Your real country is the Kingdom of God, Your real Master is King Jesus.
 - b. You're here on His mission, to reconcile the lost to the One who loves them best.
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7. Paul then says –

We implore you

- a. Urge with all haste
 - 1) Actually, notice that the word “you” is in italics.
 - 2) Take it away & you get a better sense of what Paul meant,
 - 3) He wasn’t pleading with the Corinthians; they were *already* reconciled to God.
 - 4) Paul was speaking of the ministry of *every* believer.

We implore on Christ’s behalf,

- b. Because we are His spokesmen →

be reconciled to God.

8. If the *PacView Mall* really did offer us a week of free stuff, you can be sure I’d be saying, “I urge you with all haste, for goodness sake, go shopping!”
9. So how much more ought we all be urging people to be reconciled to God? [Now!]

Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s parents disapproved of her marriage to Robert. When she would not heed their demands to break off the engagement, they disowned her. For the next 10 years, she sent them a letter every week asking for reconciliation. They never once replied.

At the end of ten years, she received a large box in the mail. When she opened it she found all her letters to her parents not one of them had been opened.

Today those letters are among the most beautiful in classical English literature.

Had her parents opened and read, even a few of them, perhaps a reconciliation might have been effected.

C. V. 21

21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

1. Here’s how God reconciles us; Christ gets our sin—we get His rightness.
2. Though Jesus was sinless, on the cross God put on Him the sum of *all* sin.
 - a. I believe *this is why* the light failed during the height of His passion.
 - b. What He endured as He suffered for sin was so horrifying had others seen it they would not have survived. The sight would have destroyed them.
 - c. Some of our Reformed brothers believe Jesus did *not* die for the sins of the world, only the elect, only those who believe. This is called the *doctrine of limited atonement*.
 - 1) But in v. 19 we just read that -

God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.

- 2) In John 1:29 John the Baptist pointed to Jesus & said, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”
- 3) 1 John 2:2 makes it utterly clear –

[Christ] is the [atoning sacrifice] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

3. The greatest sin & great foolishness of the lost is that they refuse the forgiveness *He’s already secured* for them.
 - a. Forgiveness is free – to us. But not to God. It cost Him everything!
 - b. But it *is* free to us – take it!

4. Because in taking that forgiveness – as Paul says here, God not only takes our sin, He *gives* us His righteousness.
5. He makes us right!
 - a. Right with Him, then right with everyone & thing else.
 - b. We all want to be right – no one likes being wrong.
 - c. **Only God** can make us right. But here's the great, good news – **He has**.
 - d. He takes away that which made us wrong, our sin.
 - e. But He doesn't leave us in a **neutral** spiritual state; He imputes to us the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ.
6. This is what makes reconciliation with God possible.
 - a. We aren't just changed from enemies to **strangers**.
 - b. If God had removed our sin but left us without righteousness that's all we'd be.
 - c. By replacing our sin with His righteousness He gives us the **capacity** to have a rich, warm friendship with Him.
7. And just as the sin He removes from us in fact diminishes over time, so the righteousness He bestows becomes increasingly our experience.
8. And we begin to see our reconciliation with God worked out in our reconciliation with those around us.
9. Some years ago a believer, a white man who'd before his conversion been a terrible bigot, was waiting to catch a flight out of the airport in Atlanta.
 - a. There were no seats available in the terminal but he saw one of those places where men get their shoes shined; it looked abandoned. So he walked over and sat down.
 - b. A few minutes later, an elderly black man came around the corner, opened a drawer on the stand and began to shine his shoes.
 - c. As the Christian watched the deft & practiced hands make his shoes look like new, he realized his heart had gone through a complete transformation.
 - d. When his shoes were done, he paid the man, gave him a large tip, rose from his seat, then said to the elderly man, "Now, sir, I would like to shine your shoes."
 - e. The black man stepped back and said, "You're going to do what?"
 - f. The man said, "I'd like to shine your shoes. Come on. You sit down here."
 - g. The elderly man began to cry and said, "No white man ever talked to me like this before."
 - h. But he sat down and in astonishment watched while his shoes were shined.
 - i. Then he stood, the two men embraced, tears flowing down both their faces because genuine reconciliation was taking place.
10. Government-sponsored **integration** forced some people to change their **behavior**.
11. **Reconciliation** changes hearts.