

2/14/24 Ash Wednesday with Communion, Lent Begins

Sermon- Be Reconciled!

Scripture- 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, CTW Psalm 51:1-10

Hymns- 33, 433, 147

Theme- In Lent we begin the process of reviewing our lives to determine our progress in the past year. In this passage, Paul begs us as Christ's representatives to be reconciled to God. If that indeed is your own personal goal for this Lenten season, how do you plan to go about it?

I. What does "To Reconcile" mean? It is bringing two things into agreement.

The key word in this passage is "reconcile." This is not a word that we use much in sermons or Bible study, but it's a good Bible word and it has an important truth to teach us. This evening I want to see what we can learn from it.

A. Let's start by making sure everyone knows what the word means.

The most obvious example is getting your monthly bank statement. Now, I know that not everyone does this anymore because of the electronic age, but most people at least know how it works.

Are you a person who actually reconciles your bank account each month? Do you like to know where you're at in the account and fix the mistakes that have crept in.

So let's make it a simple example. You get your statement from the bank and it says you have \$900. However, the checkbook shows that you have \$1,000. So, you go through first and see what checks that have not yet come through. Let's say there are three transactions that add up to \$75 that haven't cleared. Now you're only \$25 off.

But what's that \$25? You then look at the statement and realize that you bought something for \$25 and forgot to write that in your checkbook. You write it in and now your checkbook and the bank's statement **are in agreement** on how much money is in the account.

The two things **are now in agreement**. They have been "reconciled."

- Now keep that in mind as we look at this passage and how Paul uses the idea of being reconciled.

II. We find that there Are Half-Truths This Passage Exposes.

A. The FIRST half-truth states: "In Christ, God met us halfway."

Hear these words again: 2 Corinthians 5:18a – ". . . God, **who reconciled us to Himself** through Christ . . .". Does that sound like half-way to you?

Some people speak of salvation as a "meet us in the middle" type of arrangement. We were way over here in our sin and God was way over there. Along came Christ right in the middle and brought the two sides together.

It is true that Christ is the mediator of our salvation, but the idea of being "reconciled" gives us a clear picture of how the two sides came together.

The wording is important in this verse. God "reconciled us to Himself through Christ."

Let's go back to the checkbook analogy again. When it comes to our banking accounts, sometimes the bank makes a mistake and sometimes we make a mistake. (Let's be honest, it's usually us.) But you have to identify who made the mistake and make corrections to that account so the two can be in agreement.

When we look at the spiritual reconciliation that is spoken of here, there are two differences.

First, the mistake is entirely with us. We know that God is perfect and therefore we know that His "accounting" is without error.

Second, we also know that our sin guilt is massive and ongoing. It's not a single small mistake like the \$25 error I spoke of earlier. Rather it's a ton of sin and a ton of guilt.

This takes us back to Paul's phrase. Notice that He says that **God reconciled us to Himself**.

God worked to make our erroneous "accounting" right again. He worked to bring us back into agreement with Him.

This is where the "meet halfway" idea dies. God did not "meet us halfway," as though part of the error was on His part.

This is not like a marital fight where both partners can honestly apologize because part of the blame falls on each of them. **None of the blame here falls on God. It all falls on us.**

So Paul says that God reconciled us to Himself. God worked to make our erroneous accounting right. All of this happened, of course, through Jesus Christ.

Now, we need to be careful when speaking of "accounting" as though this was merely a matter of technicalities. We are talking about sin guilt. We are talking about countless times when we chose to do ignore God's will.

But having understood that, we know that God did not meet us in the middle; God brought us all the way to where He was. We were wrong, He was right, and He reconciled us to Himself.

Grasping this truth requires that you acknowledge that you are a sinner. That's a challenge for many people today because we are so quick to minimize sin. But this is the truth that we are

given here: God reconciled us to Himself because we were in the wrong.

B. The NEXT half-truth: “The point of the cross is to forgive sin.”

2 Corinthians 5:19a (“ . . . that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.”).

Now, let me state immediately and emphatically that forgiveness from sin can happen because of the cross. But this passage reminds us that there is more to the cross than merely forgiving us of our sin while leaving us in our guilty mess.

Look at the **first half of v. 19**. It tells us that God did not count people’s sins against them. This expresses the wonderful truth that in Christ there is forgiveness of our sins. This is good news indeed!

It shares that same truth that we just spoke of, only this time letting us know that it was God’s intent to reconcile the whole world to Himself. In a moment we’ll talk about the reason that doesn’t happen, but it is the **heart of God** that everyone would be saved.

Verse 19 tells that because of the cross, God is able to not count our sins against us. Divine forgiveness finds us. But it’s important to understand that there is more to it than that. And this is a point where many Christians get off track.

Verse 21 speaks plainly to that point. It also shares the great truth that there is forgiveness in Jesus. It begins, “God made **Him who had no sin to be sin for us**”

We know that Jesus was without sin and that He took our sin upon Himself. But the second half of the verse gets directly to the point that I want to make. **Jesus did that “so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”** The “so that” is important – it tells us the end result that God had in mind.

And that end was that we might become the righteousness of God. The point to be made here is that we aren't just forgiven so we can say that we're forgiven even though we get left in our mess of sin. **We are forgiven so that we can have something better – that we can be righteous.**

That's why the original statement is only half-true. "The point of the cross is to forgive sin." Yes, the cross does forgive sin but the point of the cross is much more than that.

He did it so that we might become like God, able to live a life for Him. Being righteous doesn't mean sitting around being holier-than-thou. **It means that we are able to live out the great and good things that God has for our lives.** It means that we are able to become like Christ.

C. And Yet Another Half-Truth is that: "We should tell people to come to church."

2 Corinthians 5:18b states that: He gave us the ministry of reconciliation, and **19b** states that He has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

Understand that Many Christians get nowhere near evangelism. Even for those who do, though, the standard request is that they come to church. Now, understand, I am in favor of people coming to church.

But our message is ultimately not, "You should come to church."
Coming to sit in a pew is not the change that people need in their lives. They need something much deeper.

The second half of v. 18 tells us that we have been given "the ministry of reconciliation." What does that mean? It means that part of our job as Christians is to **share with people the good news that they can be reconciled to God.**

Now, it doesn't necessarily mean that we **have to** use those exact words, but it does mean that the message we proclaim is that people **can be made right with God.**

Verse 19 echoes that call: "And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation."

Verse 20 shares it in the most memorable of the three verses: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, **as though God were making His appeal through us.** We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."

The opening phrase about being ambassadors of Christ is fairly well-known, although not its context. **Again, we are to point people to Christ, not merely church.** Christ is the one who can save them and change them. **Coming to church is something that will come along with that.**

The next phrase is challenging. Why does he say "as though" the appeal was coming through us? My best thought is that ultimately all that is convicting us has its origin in the Holy Spirit, but often the appeal of the Holy Spirit comes through us.

That may be by Him giving us the words to say. That may be by using the example of the life change that we've experienced. In any and all these ways, **it's clear that God is working through us to draw people to Himself.**

D. And Finally the half-truth: "God did everything for our salvation."

2 Corinthians 5:20b says "We **implore you** on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."

God obviously took the initiative for our salvation. God paid the high price for our salvation. But it is not true that God has done everything for our salvation. **Despite all that God has done, there is one thing remaining for His offer of salvation to be effective in our lives. That one thing is our faith.**

In the second half of v. 20, Paul implores those who are unsaved to be reconciled to God. He says that because they are not yet

reconciled to God. God has certainly done His part in Christ, but we must add our part: our faith in Jesus.

That faith is expressed not merely in a verbal assent but also in obeying Him as Savior and Lord.

So there we have the focus of your task for the 40 days of the Lenten Season: "be reconciled to God." God has made a way for you to be made right with Him – accept it! Where have you been and where are you going?

Approach this table with the desire to be reconciled with He who has set and provided the elements of your faith.

Amen?, let us pray...