

05/03/2026 Ambassadors of Reconciliation
2 Corinthians 5:18-20

Welcome...

Last week, we stood in awe of one of the most powerful identity statements in all of Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

When you come to saving faith in Jesus, you are no longer what you were. You are not defined by your past, your sin, or your failures. You are a new creation in Christ.

As Pastor Dan shared in his sermon, it is the difference between a death certificate and a birth certificate. In Christ you are not just improved... but made new. Not modified... but regenerated.

But Paul does not stop with identity. In our text today, he moves from what God has done in you... to what God now does through you. From a new creation... to a new commission. The same God who transformed you now sends you.

And here’s the key truth: You were not just saved from something—you were saved for something. And what is that something? The ministry of reconciliation.

Let’s read 2 Corinthians 5:18-20...

Have you ever had a job where no one really told you what your job was?

You show up on day one, and instead of clarity, you get something like: “Just jump in and help where needed.” At first, that sounds fine... until about day three.

You’re trying to figure out: Am I supposed to lead or just assist? Is this my responsibility—or someone else’s? Am I doing too much... or not enough?

So, you start guessing. One day you take initiative—and someone says, “Hey, stay in your lane, that’s not really your role.”

The next day you hold back—and someone else says, “Why didn’t you take care of that?”

You feel like you can’t win. You’re constantly second-guessing: “Am I doing what I’m supposed to be doing?” And here’s what happens over time. Without a clear job description you lose confidence, you get frustrated, and you lose motivation.

Why? Because there’s no clear job description. And many Christians live their spiritual lives that way.

They think: “Now that I am a born-again Christian, what am I supposed to be doing? Am I just supposed to go to church? Do I need to be in discipleship relationships with others? Do I need to share the gospel with unbelievers—or is that just for pastors and missionaries?”

There’s uncertainty. There’s hesitation. There’s passivity.

But here in 2 Corinthians 5:18–20, God removes all confusion. He gives you a crystal-clear calling:

You are an ambassador for Christ.

You have been entrusted with the message of reconciliation.

You are to represent God, as though God is speaking through you, and faithfully make Christ known.

No ambiguity. No guessing. No unclear expectations. This brings us to our main point:

Main Point: 2 Corinthians 5:18–20 reveals four gospel realities of reconciliation that compel us to faithfully make Christ known as His ambassadors.

The Source of Reconciliation — God’s Initiative (v.18a)

The Substance of Reconciliation — Christ’s Work (v.18b, 19a)

The Stewardship of Reconciliation — Our Commission (v.18c, 19b)

The Speech of Reconciliation — Our Plea (v.20)

My prayer for you and for me is that we will clearly see God’s job description and you will embrace and fulfill your role—you are God’s ambassador, entrusted to make Christ known.” We are ambassadors of reconciliation. In order for us to fulfill our job description we must first understand:

I. The Source of Reconciliation — God’s Initiative

Notice Paul begins with a sweeping statement in verse 18, “All this is from God...”

What is “all this”?

Everything he has just described: salvation, forgiveness, new creation, the total transformation that takes place conversion.

And Paul says: All of it is from God. This is foundational. Because reconciliation assumes a broken relationship. And the Bible is clear about who broke it.

I will give you a clue - it was not God. It was us.

Romans 1:25 describes us as those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, and worship and serve the creature rather than the creator.

Ephesians 2:1-2 says we were dead in our sin and walked according to the course of this world, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Colossians 1:21 says we were “hostile in mind.”

Romans 5:10 says we were “enemies” of God.

And here’s the sobering reality: Enemies do not initiate reconciliation. Dead people do not revive themselves. Rebels do not surrender on their own.

God must act first. And He did.

J.I. Packer wrote: “The gospel is not good advice—it is good news. It tells us not what we must do, but what God has done.”

That’s what Paul is saying. Reconciliation does not begin with your effort. It begins with God’s initiative.

God made the first move. Not because we deserved it. Not because we asked for it. But because of His mercy. This truth humbles us.

Paul is talking about two very distinct concepts here that we need to understand before we go any further. And those are justification versus reconciliation.

Justification is essentially a legal um judicial term like in a courtroom. Imagine a courtroom where you're on trial for capital offenses. The judge looks at the evidence, bangs the gavel, and acquits you. He says not guilty. The charges are completely dropped. The penalties paid, which I mean, that is incredible. If I'm facing a life sentence and the judge clears my record, I am absolutely thrilled naturally.

But I'm also walking out the courtroom doors and hoping I never ever see that judge again. It's a legal transaction. I'm out of jeopardy, but the judge and I aren't suddenly going to grab coffee together.

Justification deals with the legal standing. But the shift to reconciliation, takes what God has done a massive step further. The judge actually steps down from the bench, takes off the robes, and enters into a deeply personal friendship with the accused and makes us not only His friend but His family.

Reconciliation moves from the cold reality of a courtroom to the warmth of a living room.

Paul is the only author in the New Testament to use the noun “reconciliation” and the verb “to reconcile.” When the verb is used in the active voice, Christ or God is always the subject; when it is used in the passive voice, humans are the subject. In other words, “God reconciles; man is reconciled.”

The terms always portray God as the reconciler and sinners as the ones reconciled.

In Romans 5:10-11 Paul declares, “We also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”

So, reconciliation is not something we accomplish—it is something we receive.

If reconciliation begins with God’s initiative, the next question we must ask is—how does God actually accomplish that reconciliation?”

II. The Substance of Reconciliation — Christ’s Work

18b -19c, “...who through Christ reconciled us to Himself... that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them...”

The text moves from the source of reconciliation to the means. How does God reconcile sinners? Through Christ. Not through your effort. Not through man-made religion. Not through moral reform.

God reconciles through a Person, Jesus Christ. The phrase “in Christ,” along with the phrase “through Christ” in verse 18, identifies the Son of God as the agent of reconciling.

The phrase in verse 19 “reconciling the world” does not teach universalism, the false doctrine that all people will be saved. It picks up the “all” in verse 15...

So, the phrase in verse 19 “reconciling the world” does not teach universalism, the false doctrine that all people will be saved. But it also means God’s reconciliation is not limited to “us” and includes people who are in “the

world.” So we who have been saved by the grace of God should not look down on “the world.” At one time we too were very much part of that world and needed reconciliation to God.

We are ambassadors for Christ and when we share the gospel we don’t try to first prescreen the hearers to find out who will believe and who will not. When presenting the gospel, we simply say, “Jesus died for your sin, and He rose again from the dead. His death is sufficient to pay for your sins if you will put your faith in Him.”

Notice the goal in verse 18, “reconciled us to Himself.” Reconciliation is Relational — “to Himself.” God doesn’t just fix your behavior. He restores your relationship with Him.

This is only possible because of Christ’s work. At the cross, two things happened simultaneously:

Our Sin Was Placed on Christ
Every sin—past, present, future
Fully imputed (credited) to Him

“The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” — Isaiah 53:6

Jesus was treated as if He lived your sinful life. Jesus did not just carry sin—He bore its penalty.

“He was pierced for our transgressions... crushed for our iniquities.” — Isaiah 53:5

Jesus absorbed the full justice of God.

This is the other side of substitution:

Our sin imputed to Christ.
His righteousness to us.

This is the great exchange: Jesus receives our sin, and we receive His righteousness in return. His imputed righteousness is not something we earn or achieve; it is a gift received through faith. Paul writes in Philippians 3:9, “Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.”

John Stott said: “The essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting Himself for man.”

Reconciliation occurs because God was graciously willing to design a way to have all of our sins removed. Psalm 103:12 says God removed our sins “as far as the east is from the west.” Micah 7:19, God has “cast all our sins into the depths of the sea” and Isaiah 38:17 God has “cast all our sins behind His back.”

A few weeks ago, Paula and I were talking Susan and her son Patrick who were visiting Cal Poly from their home in New Jersey. Susan’s brother-in-law was the athletic director at the Naval Academy in Annapolis. She said to me, “You must have had a great record to get an appointment to the Naval Academy.”

I smiled and said, “My acceptance was a miracle.” Because the truth is... I didn’t have a great record.

In high school, I was living for myself— my agenda... my pleasure... my way. I had fallen in with the wrong group of friends, and on October 4, 1980, I was arrested... and spent a night in jail.

I remember the date clearly—because it was my father’s birthday. The next morning, my father came and picked me up from the police station, and he said something that stuck with me: “Having a police record will keep you from getting into the Naval Academy.”

In that moment, I knew—I had disqualified myself.

But about a month later, on November 15, I went to a Young Life retreat that my soccer coach had invited me to. I had heard the gospel before—my sisters had shared it with me—but this time, something was different.

I heard the invitation of Jesus in Matthew 11:28: “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest...” And by God’s grace... I responded and prayed, “Lord, forgive me and save me.”

Then, a few months later, in April, I received something I never expected: An offer of appointment to the Naval Academy. And when I looked into it... I discovered something even more shocking: My police record had been erased.

Now listen— that was a mercy... but it was only temporary. Because even if your record is cleared in this life... you still have a greater record before God.

A record of sin.

A record of guilt.

A record that cannot be erased by effort... or time... or good intentions.

But here’s the good news of the gospel:

At the cross, God does something far greater than clearing a temporary record.

He cancels your debt of sin. Colossians 2:14 says:

“He canceled the record of debt that stood against us... nailing it to the cross.”

On the cross: Your sin was placed on Christ

Your guilt was counted to Him

Your debt was fully paid

And in its place...

You are forgiven.

You are declared righteous.

Your record is wiped clean.

So when you die and stand before God and He asks, “Why should I let you into heaven?” What will you say? How will you respond?

The answer is: Not because of my record... but because of what Christ has done with my record. If you have not repented of your sin and turned and embraced Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then I beg you now: Be reconciled to God.

And if Christ has fully accomplished our reconciliation, the question becomes—what does God now do with that message? And the answer is: He entrusts it to us.

III. The Stewardship of Reconciliation — Our Commission

Verse 18b-19... “...and gave us the ministry of reconciliation... He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”

This is where the text turns from theology to mission. God does something unexpected. He entrusts the message...to us.

Notice the end of verse 18, “God gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” This is not optional. It is not for a select few. Every believer is called. You are not a spectator in God’s mission. You are a participant.

Notice the end of verse 19, “He has committed to us the word of reconciliation,” “Committed to us,” means entrusting to us...” This is stewardship language. God has placed something valuable in your hands: the message of Jesus Christ that saves souls.

Oswald Chambers wrote: “The call of God is not to special work, but to Himself—and once you are His, He will use you as He pleases.”

And how does He use you? As a messenger of reconciliation.

The end of verse 19 says... He has committed to us the word of reconciliation

Logos is the Greek for “word” at it is more than just a synonym for “message.” Philip Hughes explains:

In Greek thought, logos indicates what is true and trustworthy as opposed to the term “myth” (mythos) which is descriptive of what is fictitious and spurious. Socrates, for example, declares that a particular story is “no fictitious myth but a true logos.” Hence the term “logos” carries with it the implication of truth and genuineness, and is accordingly peculiarly appropriate as a synonym for the gospel, which is “the word of truth.”

In a world of religious myths, Christians proclaim the truth about the only way that people can be reconciled to God and, thereby, escape hell and enjoy heaven forever.

In John 14:6 Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me.”

In John 5:24 Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”

Jesus is the One who saves, and the Holy Spirit is the One who convicts the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment, yet we have been given the privilege of being ambassadors for Christ.

Every believer plays a part in this ministry of reconciliation.

Let me ask you: Think back to when you became a Christian. How many of you believed, how many of you came to saving faith, the first time you heard the gospel? Let’s see a show of hands.

Most people don’t come to Christ the first time they hear the gospel.

1 Corinthians 3:7 says, “One plants the seed; another waters, but God brings growth.”

Sometimes we are the first to plant a seed in sharing the gospel, sometimes we are watering seeds that have already been planted, and God is the one at the right time that causes that seed to come up out the darkness into the light and begin to grow.

Recently a woman named Susan, and her son Patrick, came from New Jersey to visit Cal Poly. When Susan found out that I had graduated from the Naval Academy, she told me that her brother-in-law was the athletic director.

But imagine being handed a message that could save someone's life. You know where they are. You know they are in danger. And you have the only message that can rescue them.

What would you do? You wouldn't hesitate. You wouldn't delay. You would go and tell them.

Friends, that is exactly what God has done. He has entrusted you with the message of eternal rescue. This reframes your life. You are not just: A teacher, a nurse, a mechanic, a landscaper, a student, or a retiree.

You are: An ambassador in your workplace, a missionary in your neighborhood, a messenger in your relationships.

And if we have truly been entrusted with this ministry of reconciliation, then the final question is—how are we to carry and communicate that message to others?

IV. The Speech of Reconciliation — Our Plea

Verse 20...

This is the climax of the passage.

The Apostle Paul (having been entrusted with the ministry and message of reconciliation) employs a bold analogy to describe his ministry, that of the ancient ambassador in the Roman Empire, a man of immense authority.

An ambassador is someone sent by a king or government, speaking with the king's authority, representing his character, and delivering his message in a place that is not his home.

So when Paul says: "We are ambassadors for Christ..." He is saying: We represent Christ in a world that is not our home. Philippians 3:20 says our citizenship is in heaven and we eagerly await our Savior from there.

An ambassador does not represent himself. He carries the character of the one who sent him. He reflects the values of his kingdom. His life either honors or dishonors the king.

Friends, your life is a visible representation of Christ. People form impressions about Christ based on: How you speak, how you respond, how you treat others.

An ambassador does not create his own message. He does not edit it. He does not soften it. He does not replace it. He delivers what he has been given.

We are not called to invent a message. We are called to proclaim the good news of the gospel and beg people to: "Be reconciled to God."

An ambassador speaks with the authority of the one who sent him. That's why Paul says: "God making His appeal through us..."

Don't shrink back from this, as if this verse is referring only to apostles. Do you remember what Peter said about who you are in 1 Peter 2:9? You are Christians: "You [you!] are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light"

You are the voice of His excellencies. That's not an apostle only calling, nor is it only a missionary calling. That's your Christian identity. It's who you are — the mouthpiece of the excellencies of God.

You don't need to be eloquent—you need to be faithful. You are not alone in evangelism; the Lord is with you and speaking through you.

We are sent into a world at odds with God... to call people back into relationship with Him.

Romans 10:13-15 tells us, "...for 'Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!'"

Notice the urgency in the last verse of our text, in verse 20 — "We beg you" This is not casual. This is pleading. This is earnest.

Why? Because eternity is real.

When we pray for opportunities and boldness, we never know how God will answer. One morning I went for a walk. On my way back home, I saw my neighbor Kim walking her dog. I said good morning and asked how she was doing and she told me that her husband died of a heart attack in the night.

I told Kim... and I asked if I could pray for her. I put my hand on her shoulder and I prayed...

A couple hours later she called and asked if I would speak at her husband's memorial service. It was not at a church, and it was not really a religious service at all. But there were a lot of people there, and most did not know the Lord or go to church. So, now I had the opportunity to be an ambassador and share how they can be reconciled to God.

If you are in Christ, you are a new creation. You are reconciled. And now—you are sent with a clear job description. You are not on your own, your Sovereign King is at work, and He chooses to use you, to make an appeal through you.

God wants you to know that: You are sent. You are authorized. You are entrusted with the good news of the gospel. You are responsible to share it with others

So ask yourself:

Who has God placed in your life?

Where is my mission field?

Am I faithfully representing Christ?

Because God is making His appeal... through you.

Don't miss the divine appointments God is placing before you—step into them this week and faithfully make Christ known as His ambassador.

And if you here and don't know Christ as your Savior, I beg you: Be reconciled to God! What are you waiting for. Turn from your sin and your self-sufficiency and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray...