



2 Corinthians 5:18-21
You Can Be Reconciled

Summary: God reconciles us through Christ, then sends us out to share the news with others.

On Friday, two exciting things happened. First, little Cora came home with a very proud, and tired, mom and dad – Christopher and Lynn Tison.

Second, the Supreme Court released it's historic Dobbs decision overturning Roe vs. Wade in what may be one of the most consequential decisions of our lifetimes. Many of you have prayed, and marched, and worked for life. In public and in private you have spoken up for the unborn and to God's great glory the laws of our nation have changed.

Unfortunately, as you know, this has infuriated some people. There have been threats that if abortion is not safe then neither are those who oppose it, which, I guess is another way of saying if we can't harm women children, we want to harm someone. And so, we continue to pray for God's protection of the living, for all those who associated themselves publicly with the pro-life movement and the churches, ministries, and pregnancy centers that have worked for decades to love moms and dads and children by advocating for life. And, we keep a vigilant eye. Our security team has been in regular contact with law enforcement and the same is true for our friends at Assist Pregnancy Center.

Also, overturning Roe vs Wade does not outlaw all abortion, it simply returns the decision to the states and for Virginia, Maryland, and the District, that means very little will change because our state laws permit and go out of their way to assist in the abortion process. So, we must continue to pray, and dialogue, and march, and lobby for life. And not just for the lives of the unborn, but also for the families at risk. There are many factors that drive a woman to consider abortion, it's rarely a first choice. So, we need to think and pray about what can be done to help her, and the biological father, feel that abortion is unthinkable because support is so abundant.

One last thing to say. Abortion is not the unforgiveable sin. If you have had an experience with abortion, you need to know that. You need to know that whether you encouraged someone to have an abortion, assisted someone in receiving an abortion, or received one yourself, the grace of Jesus Christ is on offer to you. Listen to me say: Jesus can forgive you like no one else can. And if you want to talk with someone about that, we can help you. We have counselors here at the church who can talk with you and pray with you and we can put you in touch with our friends at Assist who offer special counseling, prayer, and post-abortion Bible studies as well. If you, or someone you know needs help, reach out. And, maybe pay special attention to the theme of this morning's message.

Our sermon today is the third part in a trilogy of related sermons. Two weeks ago we looked at the fact that we will all be judged, last week we looked at the fact that we can be made new, and this week we learn how it all happens as we examine the fact that *we can be reconciled*. Reconciliation is what enables people facing judgment to be renewed instead of condemned, it's a stunning gift to us from God and it's what Jesus was doing for us at the cross.

Read with me and pay attention to how often you find this theme mentioned:

2 Corinthians 5:18 Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, 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.

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

Reconciliation is mentioned five times in four verses. You don't need a degree in literature to figure out what God's emphasizing here, right?

So, what is reconciliation? It's bringing two things, two people, two parties, two groups, together which have been previously separated. It's the move from fragmentation to fellowship, from hostility to harmony. It's the kind of thing we need a lot of in the world.

Why? Well, first and foremost, because there is division between people and God. The message of Christianity is that there is a holy God who created a perfect world and gave it to us explore and enjoy, but we, as human beings, decide to do whatever we wanted to do instead. We turn our back and rebel against Him – we either live as though He's not there, or we know better than He does, or we just don't care.

In general, people prefer their own opinions and ideas about life. The Bible calls that sin and it's found in things that we should do, but don't as well as things that we shouldn't do, but do anyway. And this is the source of most of our conflict—we choose self over God, self over others. It's not always bitter. It's not always ugly or mean. It's not always deliberate, in fact, sometimes we do choose to sacrifice or restrain ourselves. But the default mode of the human heart is to prefer self.

You know from personal experience what effect this has on relationships. You know what it's like to be disappointed, let down, or abandoned because someone else wouldn't do the thing you needed them to do, or because they put themselves first. And you know what it's like to do it to others. Sometimes we get fixated on our own needs and can't see or won't see what's happening with or to other people.

Well, if selfishness leads to breakdowns in *human* relationships, how much more does it affect your relationship with God? If you become fixated on what you want instead of on Him, should he just let that go? Should He not get angry? Should He not be indignant?

Here's something that helps us see the answer clearly – let's put another person in the picture. Let's say someone does something mean, something hurtful, to you. Do you want God to notice? Do you want Him to care? Do you want God to make things right, to ensure justice? Of course you do.

OK, but now assume that on a bad day, or in a moment of weakness, *you* were that person, *you* did something you're not proud of, said something you shouldn't have to someone else. Should God still be just as indignant? Should He be just as judgmental of what you have done wrong to them? Yes, of course. He should be righteously angry over the fact that something sinful occurred, *regardless of who did it, or why.*

And He is. All sin, whether it is against Him directly, or against another human being, is an offense to God. And His character demands judgment. He is righteous, He is holy, He is just, and that means He must not excuse your sin, must not excuse your shortcoming, must not excuse your rebellion. His standard is perfection, and if we don't meet it, we are distanced from Him.

But look with me at vs 21, this is another verse that I have highlighted in my Bible so I can find it easily and come back to it and reflect on it, notice it says: [21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.](#)

We'll consider what this means in greater depth later, but for now I want you to see what happens to us in Christ – [we become the righteousness of God in Him.](#) Now, I don't have a degree in philosophy or logic, and I went to public school in a small town, but I think the process of *becoming* something involves change, or transformation. In other words, I can't *become* Ben's dad or Madeleine's husband, *because I already am those things.*

I can only become something that I am *not* right now.

So, what am I saying? Simply this – if I [become the righteousness of God](#) in Christ, then before that happens, I am *not* the righteousness of God.

Friends, this is why people need to be saved! We have said before, there is a lot of confusing amateur theology going on out there. Some suggest that we're 'all God's children.' We're not. We're all made in the image of God. We all have equal value and worth as human beings and we deserve dignity and respect. But we are *not* all God's children. Only those who have been adopted through Christ are God's children.

We're not all good people who are going to Heaven one day. We're not righteous people who occasionally mess up. We're sinful people who need to [become the righteousness of God in Him.](#) Until we are in Christ, we are unrighteous, we need to become what we are not.

This is really important stuff – so important, that God didn't leave it to chance, He actually made it possible and calls us to receive it, and He does it all Himself.

From Genesis to Revelation you find God calling people back. After Adam and Eve sin God comes to them, tells them the consequences, and promises a rescue. As the people of Israel wander away from serving Him, He sends prophet after prophet urging them to repent. Finally, He sends His own Son to make our salvation possible and then establishes the church and empowers His people through the Holy Spirit to call others to God today.

Scripture is full of this theme of reconciliation, rescue, and reunion. Throughout the pages we read of those who are far away being brought near, strangers and foreigners becoming citizens, and walls of division being removed.

Jesus told us of the shepherd who leaves the flock to find the one who wandered away, and described Himself as the Son of Man who has come to seek and to save that which was lost. He gave us parables like the Prodigal Son.

It's the story of a young man demanded his inheritance early so he could go and live the life that he wanted, and it was fun, for a while. It was full of good parties, and good friends and good times, but then the money ran out and all the friends went looking for other parties until the young man found himself living in some really rough conditions. He finally came to his senses and decided to try going back home. We know it all worked out well, but the result wasn't fixed when he came walking back into town wondering if his father would chase him away or ignore him. It's a story with many points to make, not the least of which is, God the Father is open to reconciliation.

The point is, the idea of reconciliation is everywhere in Scripture, from front to back. And, notice this: it's always, first and foremost reconciliation *to God*. The message is not you need to be reconciled to City Gates Church, or First Baptist, or the United Methodist, or Anglican church, or this or that Bible or Community church – God uses the Church, but the message of the Gospel is, be reconciled *to God*.

The gospel is also not a call to be reconciled to good behavior. There's a fun, fancy, term you should know that came out of a study a few years ago investigating the beliefs of teenagers in the United States regarding God and religion. They discovered that many young people hold to what has been termed moralistic therapeutic deism. It's a generic spirituality that says there is a god, and knowing that helps me to have some peace in my life, gives me someone I can pray to every now and then, and gives me some sort of a general moral code for my life. It makes me a good person who feels good about being good.

It is what others would call a form of civic religion. It's One nation under god, and I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me god, without specifying who or what that god is, because yours might be different than mine. But, according to this view, that's just fine – what matters most *is that it works for you* and you're a good person. Again, this is not the message of the gospel. The gospel does not call you to get your act together and be reconciled to a form of morality and good living.

Nor is the gospel a call to reconciliation with prosperity or comfort or success, to upgrade to the spirituality of personal fulfillment and self-actualization. As JI Packer writes in his important book *Knowing God*:

No reader of the New Testament can miss the fact that it knows all about our human problems - fear, moral cowardice, illness of body and mind, loneliness, insecurity, hopelessness, despair, cruelty, abuse of power and the rest--but equally no reader of the New Testament can miss the fact that it resolves all these problems, one way or another, into the fundamental problem of sin against God.¹

Packer continues:

And unless we make it plain that the solution of these former problems depends on the settling of this latter one, we are misrepresenting the message and becoming false witnesses of God....

In other words, the message of reconciliation is not primarily a message of making all the bad stuff in your life more bearable or getting rid of it all together because you're 'too blessed to be stressed.' No. The message of reconciliation is a message of a restored relationship with God through Jesus and *everything else comes after that*.

And here is what I find to be most shocking of all – it's not that we ask for this reconciliation, it's not that we work out a negotiation or settlement, we don't meet God in the middle, He takes everything upon Himself. He makes it all possible. He takes the initiative before we even ask. He knows what's best for us and works to offer it, look with me at vs 18 and notice, that it is God [who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ](#). There's nothing outsourced here. Nothing done by assistant. It's not an automated process run by algorithm. He does it all Himself.

You need to understand how unique this is! In all other religions, people try to get the attention of god. In all other religions god or the gods are doing their own thing, and you have to try to make them care about you by doing good things or making some sacrifice. You know about the need in your life and now you have to get the gods attention to try and help. You almost bribe the gods to care and take action on your behalf. The God of the Bible is completely the opposite, He's reaching out to you, trying to get your attention! He knows you have a problem so He takes unilateral, divine initiative to seek [reconciliation](#) before you even know to ask.

It's like there's a bridge between you and God and you blow it up with your sin. You destroy the only way to access God, and He goes out and rebuilds it so that you can come back and then *He calls you to come!*

¹ Packer, *Knowing God*, 1993, 189-190.

God's offer of **reconciliation** is a demonstration of His love. It says you're a sinner – you are separated from Him, but you're also valuable to Him, desired by Him. No matter what others think of you.

I remember seeing a snarky, but funny, bumper sticker that said: "Jesus loves you, but everyone else thinks you're an idiot." Well, it may be true – on both counts. No matter how big an idiot or a fool or sinner of whatever your flavor may be, God still loves you and has made a way for **reconciliation** even though you may think it's too good to be true.

Scripture tells us that on Calvary:

- Jesus was our sacrifice for the penalty of sin – according to **Eph 5:2** He gave ... **Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.**
- He was our propitiation for the wrath of God against sin **1 John 4:10** **In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**
- Jesus was our ransom because we're in bondage to sin and Satan – according to **Mark 10:45** **the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**
- And, of course Jesus was our reconciliation because we were alienated from God by our sin – according to **2 Corinthians 5:19...** **God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them...**

It's really hard to read Scripture and miss the fact that Scripture says over and over again – we begin outside of a relationship with God, condemned for all the various aspects of our rebellion, incompetency, and ignorance, and yet, God, of His own accord, with His own initiative, and at His own expense undertook an effort to solve our problem with an eye to both justice and mercy.

One of the most beautiful summaries of all this is found in a passage some of you know well

Isaiah 53:4 Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.

5 But He *was* wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him,
And by His stripes 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.

And all of this so that, as we read back in **2 Corinthians 5:21** ... *we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

And I want to contend that this means far more than we think it does because typically, we only see half the gospel. We emphasize the fact that God has paid our debts. And that is true, that is good. But there is more. It's not simply that God has paid what we owe, He's also made us the *righteousness of God* and given us more than we can spend.

Imagine being so far in debt there's no way you could ever pay it off – the creditors are calling all the time, they've reposed your car, you've lost your job, they're shutting off your cable, you're in debt and you can't pay. And then someone gives you enough money to cover everything. All the stuff that's past due, all the stuff that's coming due, credit cards, student loans, car payments, mortgage, everything you owe – it's all paid off.

That's a pretty good feeling. That's good news. And that's how we often think of the gospel. *But that's only half the story.* You're not only pulled out of debt; you're given an inheritance that's larger than you can spend.

We often emphasize that when we come to Christ all our unrighteousness is forgiven, it's washed away, we're regenerated and washed clean. And again, that's true, but it's more than that – we also receive *the righteousness of God*. We are transformed, regenerated, renewed and filled with spiritual value. We receive the Holy Spirit in our lives who wants to grow us, guide us, empower us, who wants to give us the gifts of the Spirit to produce the fruit of the Spirit in us.

So, when we cross that bridge that God-repaired and come to Christ, we are not only forgiven of our *past*, we're given a whole new *future*! And, we become ambassadors who share this message with others. Look at verse 20 with me

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.

Christian, listen to me, you have a purpose, identity, calling, and authority – you are a personal representative of God on earth, calling others to receive what you have personally experienced. You get to play this incredibly important role in the lives of people, introducing them to, or reminding them of, truth.

You have received a powerful message, you have experienced a powerful transformation, and you have the tremendous privilege of spending the rest of your life advancing this truth with your lips and your life because, as we have seen together over the past several weeks, we will all face the judgment of God either for wrath or reward. But, we can be renewed in

Christ and escape condemnation, and that happens when we are [reconciled](#). It is a message of eternal truth that God wants us to hear and respond to today.

What does that response need to look like in your life? Do you need to be the ambassador who shares the message with someone near you? Or do you need to receive the [reconciliation](#) on offer to you? I don't know. But I know this – God, in His mercy, is reaching out to each one of us today, inviting us closer in to relationship with Him. I hope you'll take up the offer and make yourself increasingly available to Him today and that you will experience all that God has for you, all that He has prepared for you, as He [reconciles \[you\] to Himself through Jesus Christ, and gives \[you\] the ministry of reconciliation](#).

Let's pray.



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

2 Corinthians 5:18-21 You Can Be Reconciled

Summary: God reconciles us through Christ, then sends us out to share the news with others.

- If you could be an ambassador, assigned anywhere, where would you want to live? Why?
 - In what ways does the role of an ambassador help you understand your role and opportunities as a child of God?
 - Where has God stationed you as an ambassador? Do you see it that way? How can you/do you pray for and speak to the people around you in various settings?
- 2 Corinthians 5:19 could sound like all people are going to forgive of all their sins. How does verse 20 immediately refute that idea?
 - How do the following verses help you see God's heart and plan?
 - 2 Peter 3:9
 - Matthew 7:13-14
 - Revelation 20:11-15
- Have you had a powerful experience of reconciliation in your life, either with God or with someone else? What happened?
- Read Romans 5:10-11.
 - When were we reconciled to God?
 - What did we have to do with it?
 - What made our reconciliation possible?
 - What does that produce for us?
 - How should we now live?
 - How do these two passages (Rom 5 and 2 Cor 5) affect your understanding of the gospel and the Christian life? Do they help you see anything new? Does anything in your life need to change?
- How can reconciliation with God prepare the way for reconciliation with other people in our lives?
 - Why is it important to remember that God, the one who was offended, initiated the reconciliation?