

The Message of Reconciliation

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Date: 08 August 2021

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[0 : 0 0] us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. When I was in high school, which was a long time ago, if you wanted to see the evening news, you had one option. 6.30, you tune into CBS, NBC, or ABC. That was it. No internet, you know, no phones, but so if you wanted the national news, you tuned in at that time. And I remember in high school that I was beginning to get interested in world affairs. And I remember tuning in every night at 6.30, and there was a character, a figure that was appearing with great regularity. His name was Philip Habib.

You may long since have forgotten him, may never have heard of him before. But he was the special envoy to the Middle East. And every evening it seemed as if he was somewhere else. He was in Cairo, speaking to the Egyptians. He was in Tel Aviv, speaking to the Israelis. He was in Beirut, speaking to the PLO. And you kind of think, well, if there's a special envoy, what has caused that to be? Why is this man in all of these different places speaking to all of these different people? Well, the answer to that question is this, is that this was the time of the Lebanese Civil War. The Camp David Peace Accord, which was brokered between Israel and Egypt, was unraveling. So this man, Habib, was sent as an envoy. You see, he was on speaking terms with each of the parties. He could talk to those who wouldn't talk to each other as a means of bringing enemies together. So if you think of a special envoy, there must be a special problem that requires such an envoy. When we come to the Bible and we talk of reconciliation, when we are told that we need to be reconciled with God, that presupposes a problem. That presupposes a separation.

[2 : 0 0] One of my great heroes, C.H. Spurgeon, who was the Prince of Preachers, the London preacher of a previous century, he was once asked, Mr. Spurgeon, how do you reconcile divine sovereignty and human responsibility? He said, I don't. Friends do not require reconciliation. And that idea is that reconciliation is not required if there's friendship, if there's fellowship. But reconciliation is required if there is enmity, if there is hostility. A special envoy to the Middle East is not required if there is harmony and peace in the Middle East, but is required if there's warfare and bloodshed. And as we turn to the Bible, we see that we are fallen people. We don't need to turn to the Bible. We can see that in ourselves. C.S. Lewis, who described himself at one point as the most reluctant convert in Christendom, had to admit that we are all of us creatures are fallen and we are all very difficult to live with. This problem is universal. It cuts across cultures. It cuts across age groups. It cuts across educational levels and class distinctions. You and I have a problem that we, using the language of Job, we are not right with God. And we can't make ourselves right.

We can't fix what has been broken. We can't restore what has been lost. We can't undo what has been done. And that's why the Apostle Paul is so crystal clear when he says that all of this is from God.

So the message of the Bible is not what you need to do to get right with God. The message of the Old and the New Testament is what God has done to enable you and I to be right with him. He takes the initiative. He does the work. He pays the price. He settles the debt. And this word reconciliation, you see, we're often, we often think of when we read Paul's letters, Paul takes us into different scenes. He uses different kinds of words. A lot of times he takes us to the law court. If you read Romans chapter 1, 2 and 3, Paul is giving an extended indictment. It's as if you and I are in the dock, in front of God the judge, and we are told that there is none righteous, no, not one. Not one of us is good. Not one of us is right. So that's legal language. But what we have here is relationship language, reconciliation. And sadly, we are all too well aware of separations, of divisions. We fall out. Friends fall out with each other. There's separations within families. Neighbors fall out with each other. You know, you can multiply this. And yet, what we have here in the Bible is that God is illustrating what Jesus has done using law language, using marketplace language.

When he talks about ransom or redemption, a price being paid, but using relationship language. And he's saying there's a broken relationship that is in desperate need of being mended, and you and I can't do it. We can't mend that broken relationship. We can't restore. Remember the great poem of John Milton, *Paradise Lost*? That paradise is lost. We can't restore it. We can't renew it. We can't regain it.

[5 : 40] But God can fix what you and I have broken. And what is not clear to Job in the Old Testament, if only, if only, if only there was this mediator, if only somehow, some way, is now clear.

Because Jesus has come, and Jesus has lived, and Jesus has died, and Jesus has risen again, so that the separated can be reunited. Those who are no longer on speaking terms can be brought together in a new and a lasting relationship. And as we turn to the passage before us, 2 Corinthians chapter 5, which is a magnificent portion of the New Testament, I want to identify that first of all, Paul gives us motivation. You see, God doesn't need to do that. God can simply tell us what to do. He has the authority. You know, he's the maker of heaven and earth. He can simply say, do this, and you do it. But what God very often does is he gives us the motivation for why we do what we do. I was reading a book earlier this week on speeches, and this is by Philip Collins, *The Art of Speeches and Presentations*. Now, if you're of a generation like me, Philip Collins is not the drummer of Genesis, but Philip Collins is the speech writer for Tony Blair, who's Tony Blair. You can Google that later. But what Philip Collins is saying is that there are three kinds of speeches, messages generally. The first kind is informative information. I hope today you'll have some information maybe that you didn't have before. So a speech gives information to an audience. But he says a speech doesn't just give information. A speech should do two other things as well. A speech should persuade, and we're going to see some persuasive language in Paul's letter in just a moment. But a speech should also motivate. So there you have three. Information, persuasion, and motivation.

Now, Paul has a message for this audience, but he wants to remind them of why they should do what they should do. So what is our motivation? Or what should our motivation be? Well, Paul identifies three aspects of this great truth that should impact us. This is what God has done, and this is what we ought to do.

[8 : 10] So notice in verse 10, we began in 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 10. Paul says there's a judgment day coming. He says we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Time goes. That's what Job was saying.

The days are fleeing by quickly. The days, the weeks, the months, the years, they pass, and they pass ever so quickly. And a day is coming when you and I will appear before Jesus, whether you want to, whether you like to, whether you believe in him, whether you don't. That day is coming, Paul says. Let's just get this as a foundation to begin with. There's a day coming when you and I will stand before Jesus, and we will receive from him a reward for that which is done good or punishment for that which is done bad. So the Apostle Paul himself is right with God, and you, if you're a Christian here today, you are right with God. So you don't need to fear the judgment seat of Jesus, but what you do need to remember is that time is short and there is a reckoning that you and I will be asked, what have you done? What have you done with your time? What have you done with your treasure? What have you done with your resources? What have you done with what God has given you? And that is the judgment seat of Jesus. Motivation one. Verse 11. Since then, we know what it is to fear the Lord.

The fear of the Lord. Was it Solomon who said the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. A right relationship with God brings with it right priorities, right focus, right understanding.

So there's a day coming, that's the future, but today we have this understanding of who God is, or we ought to have this understanding. Now this is one of the challenges of translation is each language has its own nuance. So fear is not fear in the sense of phobia, you know, of all the, I think of bats. I don't particularly like bats, so I don't know what that's called.

There must be a technical term for that, but I'm afraid of bats. You know, if one swoops in my, I wouldn't like that very much. That's not the kind of fear that's being spoken of here. Fear is that all reverence, honor of recognizing that God is God. And if we recognize that God is God, we fear him, we revere him, we honor him, we glorify him. We put him in his proper place. We put ourselves in our proper place. So you see, Paul is saying that if we have a right knowledge and a right relationship, inevitably that should produce within us right behaviors, right actions, right desires, right goals.

[11:11] He goes on to say in verse 14, there's a third and a most powerful motivation for Christ's love compels us. So not only do we know that there's a judgment coming, not only do we have a right understanding of who God is and who we are, but we've come to know something of the love of Jesus Christ. And the love of Jesus Christ is powerful. The love of Jesus Christ is transformational.

The love of Jesus changes the way we think, changes the way we feel, and should change the way we act. So Paul is saying, let's understand why we do what we do. Oh, he's got something to tell us. He's got something to command us, but let's understand the foundation first. Because if you think the Bible is just simply a list of rules and regulations, well, it's not a very attractive proposition, is it? It's not, I don't think it's accurate because the Bible isn't that. The Bible does contain rules and regulations, but it's not primarily a rule book.

But if you understand who God is, and if you understand what God has done, and if you understand that there's a day coming in the future, well, you will have a personal encounter with that God.

I remember just a few weeks ago, I was, I'm a chaplain in the local prison, and I was walking along one of the landings, and one of the guys says, are you one of the chaplains? I says, yes. He said, I don't believe in God. I said, well, that's your, completely your prerogative. And he said, I don't believe God exists. I said, that's, again, I mean, I didn't start the conversation. That was his opening gambit. And I said, but let me tell you this. You might not believe in him, but he believes in you, and there's going to come a time where you are going to meet this God that you don't believe in.

[13:06] Take my word for it. All I'm saying is that it'd be better to be ready for that now, rather than to be surprised later. So there's a day coming. This motivation, the love of Christ, compels us, propels us, encourages us to do something. Then Paul goes on from our motivation to our message. He says to this Corinthian audience, and the Corinthian church, again, this is not technical language, was a messed up group of people. They had a lot of problems.

They got it wrong a lot of the time. Kind of reminds us of ourselves, doesn't it? We're messed up in a lot of different ways. We get it wrong a lot of the time. And yet Paul is persistent. Why? Because God is persistent. God doesn't get rid of us when we get it wrong the first time, or the second time, or the hundredth time. He perseveres. He persists. And Paul has a message for these people, and it's a message that is to become their ministry. So you see, the Christian message is not just a passive thing.

It's not just something you receive. It's something, yes, you receive, but then it becomes something that you live, something that you speak, something that you do. It's not just sitting and receiving, because there's an active element here. So the message becomes the ministry. And Paul says, the message is characterized by this word of reconciliation. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is gone, verse 17, the new has come. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. Verse 19 tells us, committed to us the message of reconciliation. If you're a Christian today, you have a message.

And if you're a Christian today, you have a ministry. And that ministry should be characterized by this word of reconciliation. What the Apostle Paul does, and what he continues to do, is that he highlights that the main elements of the Christian message are two. He wants to remind us that we need to know what God has done for us, and we need to know what God has done in us. One of the great preachers of the modern era, and by modern, I mean the last 300 years, was John Wesley. John Wesley had a born-again experience.

And the moment he was born again, he began to preach about this new birth. Remember, Jesus said, you must be born again. And John Wesley put it this way. He said, if any doctrines within the whole compass of Christianity may be properly termed fundamental, they are doubtless these two. The doctrine of justification and that of the new birth.

[16:10] The former, relating to that work, which great work which God does for us, in forgiving our sins, the latter to the great work which God does in us, in renewing our fallen nature. For us and in us. What has God done for us? Well, we see this in verse 15.

He died for all. That those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again. This is what Jesus has done for us. This is external to us. This is not what we've done for God, but this is what God has done for us. Now, as a person who likes to read old things, last night I was reading an old sermon as I went to bed. It was preached 251 years ago. It was the funeral service of George Whitefield preached by none other than John Wesley. Now, as we talk about this topic of reconciliation, we recognize that Christians do fall out.

We can fall out with each other. We can say things that we wish we hadn't said. We can hear things that we wish we hadn't heard. And if we're honest, we can hold grudges. We can have, there are people that we are less inclined towards. And John Wesley and George Whitefield fell out. Over some theological points. They did reconcile. And it was obvious when Whitefield went to the United States, they said, Mr. Whitefield, if you were to die overseas, who should preach your funeral sermon? Should it be your old friend, John Wesley? And Whitefield simply said, he is the man.

[17 : 48] So when news filtered back to England that Whitefield had died in Massachusetts, it was John Wesley who preached. And in this 251-year-old sermon, Wesley identifies these points. Because he and Whitefield had disagreed on some things. But they were of a clear mind that the Christian message could be summed up in two words, regeneration and justification. The new birth and the work of Jesus on the cross.

That was what they preached. That's what Paul preaches. That's what the Bible commends us, what God has done for us and what God has done in us. Look at verse 17. And if you're not familiar with this passage, verse 17 deserves to be underlined and highlighted. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. When Jesus comes to dwell in your heart, there's a change. There's a change in attitude.

There's a change in action. There's a change in behavior. There's a fundamental change that takes place inside. Jesus said to Nicodemus, unless you are born again, you can't even see the kingdom of God.

No matter how hard you try, no matter how good you are, you must be born again. God must do a work in us if we are ever to know him. God must change our mind. He must change our heart. He must transform us from the inside out. If anyone is in Christ. Now again, the language, it's trying to make sense of one language and another language. It really says, if anyone is in Christ, voila, new creation. That's who you are. Not what you will be, but that's who you are. So Christian here today, you are a new creation.

Christ is in you. You are no longer dead. You are alive. You are no longer lost. You are found. Your eyes are now open. You can see. Your heart is now transformed. You can feel. Your mind is now renewed. So this is what God has done in us, and what we see here is what God has done for us.

[19 : 56] Verse 21. So these two verses, verse 17 and verse 21, are critical New Testament texts. God made him who had no sin. So there we have it. Jesus Christ had no sin. No sinful thoughts, no sinful actions, no sinful words, never deviated from God's path, never did anything he shouldn't have done, never didn't do anything he should have done. And that reminds us that the definition of sin is not just a list of bad things that you don't do. But sin is all those good things that you just never get around to doing. All those kind words, never get around to speaking. All that generous action that just never seems to happen. So there are sins of commission. Those are more obvious.

And there are sins of omission. They are less obvious, but equally damning. God made him who had no sin. Now, this is a complex idea. Jesus Christ had no sin. That's difficult in itself to understand.

A human being, 33 years, no sinful thoughts, words, or deeds. That's difficult enough to grasp. But then you have the one who had no sin became sin. That somehow, somehow, the sins of others are placed upon him. That the sinless one becomes sin. Why? So that in him, we might become the righteousness of God. Now, as we try to unpack this, we have these two themes going on here. We have sin and righteousness.

You and I are under the sin category. We have sinned and thought, word, and deed. We are categorized as being sinners by practice and sinners by inheritance. So we're in the sin category. And there's the righteous category. And that's a much smaller category because the only one who is righteous is God.

And Jesus is God. Perfectly righteous. So you have this amazing interchange, exchange. The one righteous one takes the sin of the many. So that the many who are sinful now have the righteousness that belongs to him. There's an exchange going on here. Our sin to his account.

[22 : 14] His righteousness, his goodness to our account. So that's what Jesus has done for us on the cross. It's outside of ourselves. It's not what you've done for Jesus. It's what Jesus has done for you.

He has become sin so that we might become the righteousness. How can a mortal be right with God, Job says? Paul says, let me tell you. Let me tell you how he can become right with God. Look

at Jesus on the cross. There the sinless one became sin. Why?

So that the sinner can become righteous. The righteous in the place of the sinner. So that the sinner can have the place of the righteous one. So Paul says, this is our message. This is our ministry. All of this is from God. Jesus Christ is that special envoy. Jesus Christ is that mediator, that arbiter that has a right relationship with God and has come down to our level to bring us and God back together again.

So therefore what we receive, we now are called to share. He gave us the ministry in verse 18 of reconciliation. And we're told in verse 20, we are therefore Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us. We receive and we become. We receive this message. We are now made alive. And notice both verse 17 and verse 21 has this small word in.

If anyone is in Christ. If anyone is in Christ so that in him we might become the righteousness of God, you and I by faith have now been united to Jesus Christ. And this union is the source of all of our blessings. He is the great benefactor. He's the great giver. We are the beneficiaries. And all of these benefits belong to all of God's people. So you are justified. You are adopted. You are reconciled. You are born again. Every child of God has all of these privileges based upon their being united with Jesus.

[24 : 39] If any man is in Christ, new creation, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. And this theme of being an ambassador. Let me give you an illustration. When Heather and I traveled many times up to the state of Maine. Maine is about 10, 12 hours from New Jersey. Long drive.

So we get to Maine. We're tired and we're hungry. We check in at a B&B; and we are going to this, oh it's magnificent, this lobster restaurant. And a couple right behind us checking in at the same time, they said, where are you going for dinner? We said, well there's this great lobster place two miles down the road. They said, we'll see you there. Sure enough, five minutes later we're sitting down to our lobster dinner. This couple is sitting down to their lobster dinner. And we got to talking and I said, I'm from New Jersey but I live in Edinburgh. Oh, the man, Phil, he said, I am from South Carolina but we used to live in London. I said, that's really interesting. I must have said, I'm a minister in Edinburgh. I said, what did you do in London? And he said, well I was a civil servant. His wife said, Phil, tell him what you did. He said, well I was United States ambassador to Great Britain. Oh, that's interesting. So he represented the President of the United States to the Queen and to the Prime Minister for four years. He was the ambassador. If you've ever been to London, the U.S. embassy is on one side of Grosvenor Square, one of the most prestigious addresses in Mayfair. Now, if I was officially meeting him in his capacity as ambassador, I was not going to refer to him as Phil. I would refer to him as Your Excellency. Why? Because an ambassador is a high privileged position.

They speak on behalf of kings and princes and prime ministers and presidents to kings and princes and prime ministers and presidents. They have a high status, they have a high honor, and they have a residence that befits their high status. But it's just me and Phil having a lobster in the state of Maine. The Apostle Paul says, we are Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf. Remember I said persuasion? You see, the gospel is not just information. The gospel is not just motivation, but the gospel is also persuasion. That we should use the gifts that God gives us to persuade people, to plead with people. And this word in verse 20, this word that we have here, making his appeal through us, we are beseeching you as, so we implore you on Christ's behalf. Some versions have beseeched, NIV has implore. There's a commentator called Lenski who put it this way. He said, this word is remarkable in every way, in this connection.

[27 : 40] Here is the God of heaven and of earth and Christ his son, who by his death reconciled all to God, and here are their high ambassadors representing God in Christ. On the other hand are transgressors, and lo, these ambassadors are sent by God in Christ to beg these transgressors to be reconciled.

Yet here is a secret. In Romans 5.10, they are called enemies. It is love, condescending love alone that wins enemies, overcomes their enmity and hostility, and thus works reconciliation in them. No threats of law can do that, no demands, but only the gospel voice that admonishes and begs. An ambassador is a high position, but as ambassadors for Jesus Christ, we are to take that position of begging, beseeching, imploring, pleading with people that they might too be reconciled with God.

We don't take that high position and stay in that high position. We go to people, just like someone went to us. Think of your story. Think of how many of us have benefited from the conversations of others, the prayers of others, somebody taking the time to explain what the Christian message is. If you're a Christian now, that's your commission to go and to tell, to plead and beseech, to implore and to beg. And I want, before I leave, I want to mention one thing, and I have to say that I've read this passage many, many times, but I've never really read verse 15, never certainly read it as I ought to have read it.

[29 : 13] Because not only do we have a motivation, not only do we have a message and a ministry, but we now have a model for living. A friend of mine once had a series of photographs. He went to the Louvre in Paris, and he showed me all these photographs, different paintings, different sculptures, and I didn't recognize any of them. He showed me this painting. I said, what's that? He said, oh, that's the painting right next to the Mona Lisa. Nobody ever sees it because they're looking at the Mona Lisa. There's a statue. What statue is that? Oh, that's the statue right next to the Venus de Milo.

Nobody looks at the other statues. They're looking at the Venus de Milo. And when I'm reading 2 Corinthians 5, verse 10 to 21, I read verse 17. I read verse 21. Very rarely have I ever read verse 15, but I want to close on this because this is critical. Jesus died for all, verse 15, that those who live should no longer live for themselves. Someone who doesn't yet know Jesus is living for themselves, living for this present age, living for their desires, their hopes, their dreams, their joys, their desires. That's what they are living for. But today, if you are a Christian, let me tell you what your model for living now is. That those who, that he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again. That's a great summary of what the Christian life is. We are living for him who died and was raised again. It's what Jesus wants. It's what his priorities are. It's his desires. It's his goals. I'm now living, but I now live. It's, no, it's actually not me who lives, but it's Christ who lives in me. What he wants, I want. What he desires, I desire.

What he prioritizes, I prioritize. So we have a motivation. We have a message that brings us into harmony with God. We have a reconciliation through Jesus, but we now have a model that we no longer live for me. You no longer live for you. We now live for him. And you see, that's the key. You see, the Corinthian church had a lot of problems, but if they were living for Christ who died for them and was raised again, most of those problems would disappear. And most of the problems of our lives would disappear if we live for him who died. And if we live for him who raised, was raised again. You see, it's all about Jesus past, what he did. It's all about Jesus present, what he's doing. It's all about Jesus future, what he will come to do. And the sooner we recognize that he is the source of life, the foundation of life, the definition of life, the joy of life, the sooner we will be living lives that are pleasing to him and attractive to others. And lo and behold, you live these kind of lives. You express these kind of messages and others will come to see for themselves and coming to see they will believe. That's our hope. That's our prayer. That's our confidence. That's God's promise.

[32 : 20] And may he bless his word. That we, having been reconciled, that we might in turn become his special envoys to our families and to our friends. May God bless us, we pray. We're now going to sing our fourth and our final hymn, We Will Feast in the House of Zion. Let's stand together to sing.

We will feast in the House of Zion. We will sing with our hearts restored. He has done great things. We will say together we will feast and weep no more. We will not be burned by the fire. He is the Lord our God.

we are not consumed by the flood. We are not consumed by the flood. Upheld, protected, gathered up. We will feast in the House of Zion. We will sing with our hearts restored. He has done great things.

we will say together we will feast and weep no more. In the dark of night, before the dark, my soul be not afraid.

we will feast in the house of Zion. We will feast in the house of Zion. We will sing with our hearts restored. He has done great things. We will be the promised morning. Oh, how long. Oh, how long. Oh, God of Jacob, be my strength. We will feast in the house of Zion. We will sing with our hearts restored. He has done great things. We will say to God. we will sing with our hearts restored. He has done great things. We will say together. We will sing with our hearts restored. He has done great things. We will say to God. We will sing with our hearts restored.

[34 : 58] restored. He has done great things. We will say together, we will feast and weep no more.

Every vow we've broken and betrayed, you are the faithful one.

And from the garden to the grave, bind us together, bring shalom.

We will feast in the house of Zion. We will sing with our hearts restored.

He has done great things. We will say together, we will feast and weep no more.

[36 : 14] As we close with the words of Jude, Jude 24 and 25 as our benediction. To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence, without fault and with great joy. To the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord before all ages now and forevermore. Amen.

The przylegial of the wonderful world. Eyadesim shows this same place. Yead Kareem. Yes, the by Christ our Lord was eternal. inlet? Yes, the by our Lord's mercy as our grandeur. Do not assume you like to spend your hands. Deem our blood with the church ■■■ées. Be saying to God God please, Je■■■, Iona Oire, dearrett , you would have Ellerstak.

relationship utilisates. Prayer used by the people of Jesus Christ. Our Lord was Jesus Christ who's one of His angels.

armour of his ten■■■,rum■■■us himself. Mother open to Him. Your church is a very un IS size, Erica, or other people who's■■■ us about to poring.