

Ministry of Reconciliation - 2 Cor 5:16-6:2

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Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0 : 00] Verse 16. Let's listen to God's Word. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.

Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old has gone. The new has come. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

[1 : 16] We implore you, on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

As God's fellow workers, we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.

I tell you, now is the time of God's favor. Now is the day of salvation. Thanks very much, Ralph. Please keep your Bibles open at that passage in Corinthians. We're not going to be moving out of chapter 5, but it would be good to keep your focus right there.

[2 : 32] Let's pray together. Our Father God, we thank you for your word, for it is not only true, it is powerful.

It is your means for revealing to us the greatness and the beauty of who Jesus Christ is. And our prayer is that our focus would be upon him, and we would learn what it is to be reconciled to him, and to be Christ's ambassadors.

Father, we are helpless, so we ask that you would pour out your Holy Spirit upon us as you have been doing. Continue to give us the Spirit that we might understand your truth, not just with minds, but that our hearts would be changed and transformed, that we would see with your eyes, and we would live according to your ways.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. But from our reading, I think the main theme of the text is crystal clear.

It's summarized for us so well in verse 18. Have a look at verse 18. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

[4 : 28] To reconcile is simply to restore a relationship that has been broken, to bring peace and harmony where there's been hostility and fear.

And in this context, it's our restored relationship with God. Louis Zamperini was always in trouble as a kid.

His mother encouraged him to go to church. In fact, she'd give him money for the collection, but he would skive off and go spend it in the fair. For Louis, God was just a hindrance, not a help.

But he was an excellent runner. In 1936, he made the U.S. Olympic team and ran in the Olympic Games. World War II cut short his running career, and he became a gunner in the Air Force.

On one excursion, his plane was shot down, and for 47 days, Zamperini drifted on a small raft on the open sea. Surviving attacks from the air, he was eventually captured by the enemy.

[5 : 41] He was now a prisoner of war. For two years, Zamperini was held in captivity, where he suffered terribly.

Solitary confinement, constant beatings, unbearable torture, and the routine of daily hard labour. Miraculously, though, he survived.

At the end of the war, Zamperini returned a hero, but deep down in his life, he was struggling. Tortured from his time in the war and troubled by his past, he attended a meeting where he heard the good news about Jesus Christ.

Through Christ, he received forgiveness from God and was reconciled to God. His life was dramatically changed.

Almost immediately, he returned to visit those who had treated him so cruelly in the prison camp. Zamperini was on a mission of reconciliation.

[6 : 54] No longer did he hold a grudge. No longer did he seek revenge. No longer did he hate. He had come to experience personally God's forgiveness, and he wanted his captors to know that they too could be forgiven and reconciled to God.

Amazingly, as he spoke in that prison, the guards who had once tortured him turned to Christ and experienced reconciliation for themselves.

It's a remarkable true story. You can watch it on film. It's called Unbroken. Now, if you are a Christian, that's a picture of your story.

Look again at verse 18. All of this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

You see, we too, individually, and as churches together in the Court Kerry Project, we are on a mission of reconciliation.

[8 : 13] Four things we're going to look at together from this text. Here's the first one. God's desire that all are reconciled.

God's desire that all are reconciled. Verse 16. So, from now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view.

Something dramatic has happened. Something has changed about how we see people. Look at the rest of verse 16. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

Paul is writing and he's remembering back to a point in time where he had a wrong view of Christ. Christ was completely insignificant, completely irrelevant, with nothing to offer.

But now he has been changed. He has come to see Christ in the right way and he has come to see that through Christ there is forgiveness and reconciliation with God and that has changed everything.

[9 : 22] It has changed how he views the world and how he views people. It gives us a new perspective.

Let's read the beginning of verse 16 again. So, from now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Because of Christ and all that he has done, we now see people from God's perspective.

We no longer see people from a worldly point of view. You see, we don't judge people on the basis of their social status, their religious heritage, or their sexual identity.

From God's perspective, as he looks at the world, we are all the same. We are all separated from God and we all need to be reconciled to God.

So, being rich or poor, Catholic or Protestant, Muslim or Hindu, gay or straight, that is not the big issue. The issue is, we are all outside of God and we all need reconciled to God.

[10 : 40] But that's not the only thing we see about ourselves. Not only is there a new perspective, but there's a new creation. Follow with me the flow of thought.

Let's read again the beginning of verse 16. So, from now on, because of Christ, we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Now, verse 17. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. We no longer view people as condemned sinners that must be judged. No, we now see people who, through Christ, can become a new creation.

Isn't that how Louis Zamperini saw his once captors? He wanted revenge. He wanted justice. But now, because of Christ and the change in his life, he saw the prison guards as people who could become new creations in Christ.

You see, I think we all need to take off the worldly lens and put on the God lens. And that's a challenge for each one of us.

[11 : 58] Instead of walking around and inwardly condemning those I see, I need to walk and look at people from God's perspective and see what people can become.

New creations. Brand new people. You see, while we so often look in condemnation, God sees transformation.

Verse 17. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone and the new has come. We can be so concerned about trying to change what people believe and how people behave when God is saying, I have come to do something far more radical and beautiful. I have come to bring about a new creation, a brand new beginning, a fresh start in the lives of people. I have come to bring reconciliation, to restore that broken relationship so that you are at one with God.

So first, God's desire that we are all reconciled to Him. Second, God has made it possible for all to be reconciled.

[13:21] God makes it possible for all to be reconciled. Verse 18. All this is from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ.

You see, if God needs to reconcile us to Himself, it clearly implies the world is separated from God. there is a division that exists, a relationship that is broken.

No longer is there peace and joy, but fear and hostility. No longer that communion, the fellowship that Adam and Eve enjoyed in the Garden of Eden, it has now been broken.

And we can't fix that relationship. We can't do anything to make God love us. But thankfully, God has taken the initiative and done something about it.

God has made reconciliation possible. First, it's all from God. Look at verse 18 again.

[14:34] All this is from God who reconciled us to Himself.

God reconciled us.

This is something that God has already done for us. You see, knowing that our relationship with God is broken, knowing our inability to make things right, God has taken the initiative, intervened, and provided the means by which we can be made right with God.

Rather than divorce us, God has reconciled us. And reconciliation is not something I can do. I can't make peace with God.

God makes peace with us. Restoring our relationship with God is something that God does. It's not something that we can do.

[15:45] And here's how God does it. Look at verse 18. All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ.

And what did God do through Christ? Well, jump down to verse 19. It explains it for us. That God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting our sins against us.

Let me try and expand and explain that. Suppose I were to walk out on my wife Kirsty, destroying the marriage and the relationship.

Because of what I've done, I can't make Kirsty, my wife, accept me or forgive me. I have no right. I'm a guilty party.

Kirsty, on the other hand, has every right to reject me. That would be just and that would be fair.

You see, the only way the relationship can be restored is if Kirsty, who is innocent, chooses to forgive and no longer holds my failure against me or over me.

[17:12] Rather than sign divorce papers, which is what I deserve, she reaches out to me and reconciles, which is what I don't deserve.

And I think that's a picture of what God has done for us through Christ. Again, look at verse 19. God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting our sins against us.

If Christ or in Christ, God does not hold our sin over us or against us, why? Because it has all been dealt with in Christ.

The divorce papers have been torn up at the cross. God has every right to reject me, condemn me and judge me. But now reconciliation has been made available and the good news is it's not just for you and it's not just for me.

Look at the middle of verse 19. God is reconciling the world. This is good news for every single person.

[18:28] God does not write people off. There is no sin that is so great that God has not dealt with in Christ.

His gift of reconciliation is open to all people. So God longs for all people to be reconciled.

God has made it possible for all to be reconciled. And third, God has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation.

God has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. Look at the end of verse 19 with me. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

God longs to restore the relationship with him for a purpose so that we might join him in his mission of reconciliation.

[19 : 37] Our relationship with God is restored so that others can also know the joy and beauty of a relationship with God. Remember our friend Zamperini?

Once he had experienced reconciliation he wanted others to experience the same. We are ambassadors.

And in case we're not clear about all of this look at what God says to us. Go back to the end of verse 18 the last part of verse 18. See what it says? God gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

The end of verse 19 he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. Verse 20 we are therefore Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us.

God's desire to reconcile the world to himself has been entrusted to people like you and me. God has called us to be his ambassadors his representatives his spokesperson.

[20 : 56] Now just to think about that to entrust that responsibility to you and me is insane. Why not entrust it to Christ?

Why not ask some of the angels to come and do the job? Surely they would do a better job than you or me. during the summer I was involved with the TIM team.

Some of you here were part of that an outreach program doing street evangelism and doing door to door. And while doing door to door I had this strange experience.

When I went to knock on the door I would pray this prayer. Lord please help me as I speak. which was quickly followed up by another prayer.

Lord I hope they're not in. Surely God can do better than failures like me.

[22 : 01] Well I think God knows what he is doing when he is entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. If God can take people like us who don't want anything to do with God and radically change us and transform us into a new creation then God can also make his appeal through us.

Look at the end of verse 20. We implore you on Christ's behalf be reconciled to God. You see it's not my ability and it's not your personality that is going to see one single person reconciled to God. We cannot do it. It's all of God through his message. Look at verse 20, 21.

God made him, God made Christ who had no sin to be sin for us so that in Christ we might become the righteousness of God.

It's too good to be true but the fact is it is wonderfully true. To unpack this I want to quote from a dead man, a good dead man, Martin Luther.

[23 : 41] You can follow the quote on the screen, it's a little long but just follow with me as we read through. He unpacks very helpfully verse 21.

Christ bears all the sins of all men in his body. Not that he is guilty of any but that he received them being committed or done by us and laid them upon his own body.

We must know Christ to be wrapped in our sins, in our curse, in our death and in all our evils as he is wrapped in our flesh and blood.

Whatever sins I, you, or we all have done or shall do hereafter, they are Christ's own sins or else I would perish forever.

If Christ be made guilty of all the sins which we all have committed then we are delivered from all sins but not by ourselves not by our own works and merits but by him.

[25 : 08] That is good news. Not advice to live a better way. This is what Christ has done for us.

But even better this is only half the message. Look at let's read verse 21 again. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us. Here's the second half of the message.

So that in Christ we might become the righteousness of God. If we are in Christ if we have entrusted our life to Christ we have been covered and clothed in the beauty and the purity of Christ.

We are no longer seen by God as a reckless sinner but now a reconciled son with access to God the Father and adopted into God's family.

We can put it this way. Christ is treated as we deserve to be treated so that by faith in Christ we are treated as Christ deserves to be treated.

[26 : 22] Let me say that again. Christ has been treated as we deserve to be treated so that by faith in Christ we are treated as Christ deserves to be treated.

How else can we be reconciled? How else can our relationship with God be restored? Well Christ takes my sin and gives me his righteousness.

This is a message that reconciled Luther, it reconciled Zamperini, it reconciled those prison guards and it's the message that reconciled you and me and can reconcile the world to God.

One more. God urges us not to waste his reconciliation. reconciliation. God urges us not to waste his reconciliation.

Chapter 6 verse 1 As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.

[27 : 43] As we've walked through the text God's grace has been seen in two ways. First God has reconciled us to himself and second God has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

You cannot have one without the other. We have been reconciled to God for the purpose of being Christ's ambassadors. So verse 1 we urge you we plead with you not to receive God's grace in vain.

Do not waste the grace of God that has been poured out on our lives. Don't just see God's grace as your ticket into heaven and then go and live as we want.

It's so much more than that. God's grace means as we saw verse 17 you are a new creation. Verse 20 entrusted with the message of reconciliation a new creation in Christ.

I am now God's representative where I live and you are God's spokesperson where you work. God has reconciled us to himself so others can experience reconciliation.

[29 : 03] Don't waste the grace that has been given to you and here's why. Look at verse 2.

for he says in the time of my favor literally in the time of grace I heard you and in the day of salvation I helped you.

I tell you now is the time of God's grace. Now is the day of salvation. today this day is a day of grace the offer of peace not hostility the gift of joy not fear.

Yes Christ is going to come again. Quickly look back at chapter 5 verse 10. Chapter 5 verse 10.

Christ will come again 5 verse 10 for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

That day will come and we will all have to give an account but until Christ comes it is a time of grace. Salvation not condemnation reconciliation not judgment.

[30 : 29] It is a beautiful day of grace. As we close I have two questions. for us all here's the first question and I ask it to us all are you reconciled to God?

Are you reconciled to God? Today we can run to God with all our sin all our mess all our failures and we can receive forgiveness and experience a restored relationship with God because of what Christ has done for us.

Today is a day of grace. Do not wait. Run to him and receive the welcome of a father.

Know his forgiveness and enjoy a relationship with him. Here's the second question.

Are you Christ's ambassador? Are you Christ's ambassador? Today is a day we can go to the world to where we live the places we work with the message of reconciliation a message of what God has done in Christ for us that we can become a new creation.

[32 : 10] We can have a fresh start. We can be restored to God and have an eternity to look forward to. We can go because today is a day of grace.

Look at the end of verse two. I tell you now right now is the time of God's grace.

Now today this week as we disperse into our communities into our families into our work now is a day of salvation.

Let us not waste the grace of God to us. Let's pray together. Father, you have indeed been gracious to us and you have reached down through your son and made it possible for us to be restored to you.

Father, help us that we may go as people filled with your grace and filled with the power of your Holy Spirit, that we may go with your ambassadors as new creations, sharing of Christ, proclaiming Christ, so that other churches are planted, so that glory and honor goes to you.

[33 : 58] We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.