

God Reconciling Sinners to Himself

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[0 : 00] Well now just before we turn to the scriptures let's bow our heads in prayer. Our blessed God, we give you thanks that we can bring our own needs before you as we prepare to consider your word.

And you know where we are in our experience. You know what to do to help us. And we just pray oh Lord that your Holy Spirit of promise may work in us this evening.

That he may do us good, that he may speak to us and apply the word in a way that will help us and encourage us in you.

Oh Lord we know that you are sovereign in all things and nowhere do we see this more than in the work of salvation. In all its aspects.

For to bring a sinner out of darkness into your marvelous light is a thing impossible for man to do. But we bless you that it is gloriously possible and actual with you.

[1 : 16] When by your Spirit you work and work in a saving way. The matter is settled. The matter is settled. And we pray that in like manner it may be true for us this evening that you will settle your word in our hearts.

That we may rejoice that you met with us and talked with us in the way. And we ask all this for the glory and honor of Christ.

Amen. Well now we are going to just spend a wee while this evening in 2 Corinthians 5 and the last section.

From verse 18 through to verse 21. This is a great passage of Holy Scripture and it is an exceedingly full passage on reconciliation.

And what I want to do this evening under his blessing and God's blessing is really to focus on God reconciling sinners to himself.

[2 : 23] Now I think it is fair to say by way of introduction that our whole approach to reconciliation tends to be molded by what we are familiar with in worldly terms.

We think for example of industrial disputes and we think of ACAS for example coming in and mediating between two estranged parties and trying to get them together and resolve their differences.

And the popular view of reconciliation tends to be like that. The trouble with that is you see that it puts the parties on a more or less equal footing in that you are trying to get agreement for them both and from them both.

They may not be exactly equal but the idea is to try to get a compromise position where their differences or their estrangement is resolved and they come together.

We see it in the political world too. We see it if you just go back to recent crises in different parts of the world.

[3 : 54] You see where somebody comes in, usually somebody from the UN comes into a situation with his team and he tries to reconcile people, he brings them together to resolve their differences.

That there is a state of peace, there is a state of being reconciled. But the trouble with all that is that it takes us away from the biblical view of God and man, of reconciliation between God and man.

Because in the biblical teaching, in the theological viewpoint, in scripture, it is not like that. It is not about us coming together and discussing the issue and resolving it.

It is what God himself does. It is God who sovereignly presents to us his package, his way. And it is our simply to receive gratefully, thankfully, what he is giving.

We can't understand, therefore, reconciliation between God and man as a negotiated settlement. That's simply wrong. It's not the way to view the thing.

[5 : 13] It's not something that man contributes to. That God decides, well, yes, I'll go that far with them and that'll do, we'll solve it that way.

It's not like that. God is sovereign. God has himself determined this is the way reconciliation is accomplished, is effected, and is to be received by people.

And I think if we think about it like that, then we'll not go wrong. We'll understand what exactly happens. Because that's what the good news is about.

It's about what God has achieved and what God gives us by his grace. And not what we ourselves imagine we might be able to achieve as in terms of reconciling God to us.

The idea, the important thing is that what we cannot do, what is impossible for us, is gloriously possible and has been accomplished by God.

[6 : 24] And so our first point this evening on the teaching here, God reconciling sinners to himself, is this. That reconciliation originated with God.

You see, verse 18 says, Paul says this, Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself. That's, we'll come to the rest by and by. But that's where we start. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself. It is all of God.

It is from God. It is out of God, that's it, where. The creator and the sustainer of all things is the one of whom it can be said, he has reconciled us to himself.

The context determines what's going on. You see, verse 17, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

[7 : 30] Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new. That is all those whose lives are touched by the reconciliation that God himself originated.

All things are of God. He is the originator of this reconciliation for sinners. He it is who makes new creations in Christ Jesus.

That's verse 17. And what Paul, I think, has in view here when he says, Now all things are of God. In the context, it's all things that were necessary from God's standpoint to ensure that sinners from all the world would be reconciled to him, would become new creations by his grace, and that all that was necessary to that end, he himself has done, and he applies that.

This reconciliation originated with him. Because, you see, if you think about it, there's a necessity here.

There's a necessity. God took the initiative because the problem in the relationship between God and man is God's problem in the first place.

[9 : 04] God is offended by the sinner's sinfulness, by his state of rebellion. However that rebellion manifests itself, it is in the heart for a start-off.

God, the Bible tells us, is angry with man in his sin. In Adam we are a fallen race. And this is something we have to, those of us who believe by grace we are reconciled to God, we have to keep reminding people of, in Adam we are a fallen race.

We are sinners from the heart, from goal. And the result is that God's wrath is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness.

I remember years ago reading in Professor John Murray, some people say that the greatest sin is unbelief.

But you know, the greatest sin is self-righteousness. You see? Because self-righteousness tells God, it's this way, not your way.

[10 : 22] And however it manifests itself, it's saying no to God's view of things. And whether it is religious self-righteousness, or secular self-righteousness, or false religion self-righteousness, whatever brand it is, it is saying no to God's way.

And the wrath of God, says Paul in Romans 1.18, is being revealed against all unrighteousness of men.

And self-righteousness is unrighteousness. Think about it. Because it says no to God, and God's way.

And man being unrighteous, unself-righteous, simply cannot do God's will from the heart. He's not prepared to do God's will from the heart.

He doesn't want to do it. And he will not do it until God reconciles him to himself. And the reconciliation man needs as a sinner, as a rebel, as a self-righteous person, that reconciliation, God himself originated.

[11 : 43] It is reality. Now all things are of God. Who, says Paul, has reconciled us to himself, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.

God must change the state or the standing of man. We were thinking earlier today on Ruth. And Ruth's standing, she wasn't, Poesus wasn't saying, may God reward you for your good work. You've done your best. He'll reward you. No, we saw that she had come to trust in him. She had been brought by his grace into a right relationship with him.

God did it. That's who. That's what made her stand right with God. And she trusted God, the God of her salvation. And you see, God changes the state of man.

God does it. And he brings him into fellowship with himself. He brings him into this real state of being reconciled to God.

[12 : 56] God does it. God removes the cause of his own hostility to man in his sin. God removes his own alienation from the sinner.

God must do that if we are to be reconciled to him. And the news is, all things are of God who has reconciled this to himself.

He's talking to the Corinthian believers there, don't forget. All things are of God who has reconciled this to himself through Jesus Christ.

So he must remove the cause of his own offense. He must deal with the cause of that offense.

He must deal with our sin, with our guiltiness, with our liability to punishment. He must change that position and bring us into a right position.

[13 : 55] And part of that story is he must deal with his own wrath. He must pour it out elsewhere, which is another part of the gospel. He poured it out at Calvary on the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it is in this way that he reconciles himself to sinners and sinners to himself. And all attempts by people to effect reconciliation to God are doomed.

We were saying in the introduction there, it's not about sitting down with a negotiator and getting a deal that we approve and God approves.

It's not about that. It's about what God has done, what the package God has provided.

We take that thankfully and with gladness. Yet how many you see try to achieve this reconciliation by their own religious exercises as we thought earlier today, by their own good efforts.

[15 : 17] And you know, false religions, the false religions of the world have this in common that they seek to secure a better afterlife by their own efforts.

They seek to be reconciled to God by all that they do themselves. And it's simply according to the gospel, it's a non-starter. The good news says all things are of God who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ.

And so we need our firm conviction in the first place that the all things pertaining to reconciliation originated with God.

The package we need has been formed in the mind of God and became reality in Jesus Christ. And our wisdom is to be glad that there is such a package for us.

And the second thing then flows out from that and we've anticipated it a little. Reconciliation was effected through Jesus Christ.

[16 : 35] All things are of God who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ. And clearly the point that Paul is making here is all the things that are necessary as we've said to make us new creations in Christ and reconcile people to God.

He has done, he has effected in Christ. It's through him. It's through his death. That's what's in the screen so to speak for Paul.

It is through the death of Christ. And that was in the forefront of the apostles' thought here. That the means whereby God effected this reconciliation was the death of Christ.

We've touched on that in talking about him as a propitiation, as dealing with God's wrath. But I just want to underscore that it is through Jesus Christ, and that means through his cross work.

And the wonderful thing is that that death was for an innumerable multitude. He says he has reconciled the world to himself. He's lifting up the vision of the Corinthians far beyond Corinth and that locality to the world.

[18 : 07] people who were alienated from God far away. He talks to the Jews about those who were alienated from the covenants of promise have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

God did this effectively. Reconciliation was effected then he's saying through Jesus Christ. And all those who were heading for endless war were brought to benefit from this wonderful reconciliation.

For Paul God was working through that unique death of Jesus and he was doing something un-dreamed of by the great sages and philosophers of the world.

When Christ died reconciliation was accomplished. we have a ministry of reconciliation because of what God has done.

Of course John 3.16 tells us in its own particular way that very thing. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

[19 : 31] Romans 5 verses 9 and 10 in Christ we who believe are saved from the coming wrath and reconciled by his death.

And these things we ought to mark well in our understanding because it helps us to appreciate this important doctrine of reconciliation.

two things we may just underscore again. God dealt with his own wrath. His hostility towards us as sinners is alienation from us because of our sin.

And he dealt with that through the death of Christ. He is telling us that reconciliation is an accomplished fact through the death of Christ.

It is reality and it is a reality for as many as the Lord our God will call. And it is his gift to bestow.

[20 : 40] We touched on that earlier today but I want to underscore it here too. It is the gift he bestows. He bestows it in the gospel.

it is his package for us. But not only does he deal with his own wrath he deals without guilt and sin.

He gives us this wonderful assurance that through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ we can say not dare to hope but can say emphatically I have the forgiveness of sins.

anybody who takes their own inner life and their outward actions seriously anyone who is honest with themselves will say their life is not what it should be it is not even what it could be.

They may have no interest in religion at all but they will say that if they are honest if you get interacting with them. They will say well I know it is not and then they may begin to say but my neighbour is you know really bad.

[21 : 54] But they have a sense you see that all is not well. They have a sense of that. And the fact of the matter is the Lord is saying to us here the way to be relieved of that sense of sin that burden that seems to be there okay I admit you'll not get the unbelieving person readily saying it's a burden of sin they just feel it's a burden they feel uncomfortable with it because conscience is prodding and conscience prods even the hardest soul it's accusing and it seldom excuses because we're sinners and much indeed most of what's done is out of keeping with the law of

God and so you see the good news tells us that not only does God deal with his own wrath against us but he deals with sin he nails it to the cross and that's what someone who receives the package of reconciliation sees I have the forgiveness of sins through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ trusting to what God has done in his work of reconciliation and you see Paul goes on to develop this a bit in verse 19 that is he says that is that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself not imputing their trespasses to them and has committed to us a word of reconciliation and you see this non imputation of our trespasses in other words he doesn't put to our account any longer the trespasses we are guilty of and the logic of this is no he has he has imputed them he has put them to Christ's account he dealt with them in the death of Christ and we can say he carried when we think about the death of Jesus he carried my sins far away like the scapegoat in the imagery of the day of atonement of Yom

Kippur one goat was slaughtered bearing sin the other goat was sent out to a land far away to carry sin that was figuratively laid upon it he carried it far away it was put to his account it was laid on his head doesn't it we never to be called up against a sin and to condemnation again that is good news that is the news about the reconciling work of God on our behalf not imputing their trespasses to them and you see verse 21 takes it up again for he made him that is Christ who knew no sin to be sin for us to be the scapegoat for us and to be the lamb of sacrifice to in order that we might become the righteousness of God in him and you see it's

I hope it's clear to see that is on the one hand imputing our trespasses to him and on the other hand that is imputing his right standing with God to us that's the way whereby God reconciles us to himself in Romans 5 I mentioned already Paul says in verse 10 much more if he had said earlier if Christ died for us much more verse 10 shall we be saved through his life now why does he say that how can we be saved through his life because when he rose again it was the authentication of his right standing with God he finished the work reconciliation was accomplished other things were accomplished too but reconciliation was accomplished a righteousness was one if you like for all

who would receive it afterwards by faith we shall be saved by his life because we are justified we stand accepted in the court of heaven by the imputation of Christ standing to us reconciled and you see in him we have an everlasting righteousness it is given to us it's put into our account just as surely as our trespasses were put upon him were nailed upon him and dealt within him and you see therefore at least I hope you see that the whole notion of a negotiated settlement in the matter of getting right with God of being reconciled to God the whole notion of a negotiated settlement is simply excluded we cannot sit down at the bargaining table with God we can't appeal to anything in ourselves or any good we've done no we must receive the package from him as something that originated with him as something that was effected through [28 : 37] Christ we cannot bring anything to that he might consider worthy of going into the pot of going into the deal for the Jew it may be some great rabbi for the Muslim it will be Muhammad for people in Roman Catholicism it will be Mary or some super saint and so on but the fact of the matter is we can bring nothing to the negotiating table we simply receive what God himself has done as a whole package and if we are wise with the wisdom that's given from heaven we receive it with thankfulness and with praise and it's important to see it that way and to receive what he has said you see that is verse 19

God was in Christ reconciling God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself not imputing their trespasses to them nay rather but to Christ for them indeed verse 21 he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us the lamb of atonement the scapegoat he made him to be all that he put to our account his righteousness and he put upon Christ our trespasses he made him to be sin who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God in him and it's important then to look to the Lord to give us an assurance that this belongs to us and we receive it simply by faith and the last thing I want to consider is reconciliation is given to us by God you find it there in the last part of verse 19 and has committed to us the word of reconciliation now then verse 20 we are ambassadors for Christ reconciliation is given to us well we sought to show how it is given because it originated with God it was effected through Christ it's a package and there's no negotiation on it we simply receive it empty handed by faith free from it but it is given to us in order to give it to others and that's this last point he's committed to us the word of reconciliation he has placed this word in us that's how it can be translated he has placed this word of reconciliation in us and this is true for all who truly believe the gospel of course you may be thinking you shall well surely the apostles and ministers and evangelists in a way they're the real ambassadors that's what they're there for and that's fair that's fair comment that's fair comment but it's not the whole story because you see he has given us who believe who have come to experience the reconciliation he's given us that that we can pass on the news to other people he's we're to tell people we've become new creations in Christ what that means we're to tell them what it is to be reconciled to God God's done the whole thing for us he's done the deal for us God's and the key point that Paul is making here is that all who are truly converted have a responsibility to pass on this good news to others of course ministers and preachers and evangelists have a special responsibility and it's certainly right to pray for preachers in that connection that they will see that their ministry is blessed of God that it will be evident that he's using it to apply the word in a saving way but you see there is something we can all learn here notice what he says we are ambassadors on behalf of

Christ it's easy for us and we've often heard it said an ambassador represents his superiors whether it is a national government or the United Nations or some august assembly the ambassador represents that assembly or some leading figure or whatever he's there to communicate not a wit of what he thinks but of what he's told to say that's why sometimes in the political scene you'll get a cabinet minister or you'll get a minister in opposition saying something that the leader doesn't agree with and there's a wee apology comes actually I didn't say that if he's a bit of a kneel he tries to massage it to make out well

[35 : 04] I didn't actually say that but he did really he's just trying to get round that he has to apologise eyes but not so an ambassador an ambassador communicates exactly what he's told that's where you notice they're very careful in what they say when they are called to speak to the public and the media they're very precise in what they say they have to be they're representing their leader or they're representing the country and they've got to be precise they've got to communicate what they're told to say they're not allowed to give their own opinion and there's something very profound and profoundly important in this as regards those who are the Lord's people and preachers of the gospel of course we are to communicate what the Bible says what

God says in his words and not what we fancy people will like to hear for the minister of Christ it is a most important matter that he conveys accurately and comprehensively yes and courteously the message of his king because God is placing us in a situation where we are responsible to him we are accountable to him we are communicating God's message and to a lesser degree in terms of responsibility that's true for every Christian believer that's why you need to make it your business to know what you believe and to communicate the message of the gospel to others excuse me in a way that's helpful and accurate one of the things

I don't agree with great Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones is I never take a drink of water he said when you've got a bit of fatuquen in your throat I don't know I'll get by without a wee drop water to return we are ambassadors for Christ verse 20 as though God were pleading through us we implore you be reconciled to God now I hope that you understand of this be reconciled to God is clearer now and you know that what you're telling them is receive the package from God and you're receiving your reconciliation the matter's dead you don't need to come to the table and try to hammer out the deal you'll go to hell doing that you come with nothing in your hands and you receive a full reconciliation pardon and freedom and joy and peace and believing and that's what we have to tell people you can't get beyond that if you're faithful to this ministry of reconciliation this is what makes what Paul is saying so important to us and we're to see ourselves each in our own position as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ as his ambassadors you see the importance and the trustworthiness of the message doesn't lie with the ambassador himself but it lies in this that it is God's message and all those ministers who have who have dared to adulterate the message will have eternity to spend regretting that some of you have read Brown Lenore's sermon on the rich man and Lazarus and in it he depicts ministers in hell who had lied to the people who had not communicated the message of the gospel but another hash of a thing that made them think it was ok if they did their best they would get into heaven that's a lie against souls it's a lie against

God's message no this is a trustworthy message it's a glorious message it's a life transforming message God is beseeching you through his ambassadors look at it there in verse 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 receive what he has done and experience the blessing in so doing we are under authority and of course this applies chiefly to ministers of the gospel and preachers of the gospel we are under authority strict instruction to declare the whole counsel of God Paul himself said to the

[41 : 20] Corinthians 1 Corinthians 9 16 woe is me if I preach not the gospel and a core part of the gospel is the doctrine of reconciliation all things are of God who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ Christ and in that connection we are encouraged to learn to speak to people earnestly and tenderly in Christ's stead be reconciled to God we're to tell them to take advantage of the grace of God of God's reconciling work we're to tell them to take advantage and enter into this status of being reconciled receive the holy package from heaven from God and enjoy its benefits and it's only of course when we begin to open up that package we see so many aspects to the wonderful work of

Christ but it's work that brings us near to be reconciled to God God himself originated it God himself effected it through Christ and he gives it to us freely and we who have received it are to freely give it to others to help them to take advantage of this grace of reconciliation reconciliation and this doesn't mean reconcile yourself to God no but avail yourself of what he has done in Christ in his death and resurrection and my dear friends it's important for us to meditate on these things and to make sure that we've made them our very own and to remember that we are given them in order to communicate them to others to plead with them tenderly and earnestly receive this reconciliation reconciliation be reconciled to God for he that is

God made him that is Christ who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him may he bless his word to us He peace