

Introduction

You will recall that last time we examined 5:18-19 and found that Paul told us about his own reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ. This applies to all believers—all Christians have been brought into a harmonious relationship with God, out of that enemy standing they had before salvation. In addition to this, God gave to Paul specifically and believers generally the service of reconciliation.

That service or ministry is not one in which *we* work reconciliation between other people and God, but rather, verse 19 tells us, it consists of telling people that God reconciled the world to himself in Jesus Christ. This speaks of the universal provision that God has made to make it so that all men could be saved. God’s reconciliation-ministers are also to announce that God has committed to us people the stupendous message of reconciliation. So, we see that the ones who were reconciled become messengers of the reconciliation that has been provided.

Note again that God is the reconciler, and that man receives reconciliation (Rom. 5:10-11). God is active, man is passive. The provision is made (objective side) and from our perspective God stands at the ready to receive any sinner who will come to experience that reconciliation himself through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (subjective side). Remember that we do not believe that man does this “receiving” all on his own, however, for God must help him (John 6:44, 65).

Ambassadors for Christ.**Verse 20**

We are ambassadors. As ones to whom the ministry and word of reconciliation has been given, we are like heaven’s ambassadors on the earth. An ambassador is an official representative of the sender. We call that person an *envoy*, a *diplomat*, or an *emissary*.

1. The government we represent – Christ and God.

Christ is now absent from the earth. He speaks through ambassadors. And we are truly representing him and God the Father, as emphasized in the phrases “for Christ,” “through us,” and “on Christ’s behalf.” We stand in the place of Christ (“for Christ,” “in Christ’s stead”). There is not one “vicar” or substitute of Christ on earth—there are many (in a different sense than the Catholics use that term). Many people work in Christ’s behalf, ambassadors for him.

This ambassadorship carries a heavy **responsibility**, for the way that God calls men to the gospel is through the proclamation of the Word through us, not by any other means (Rom. 10:14-15). You can imagine a failure in the line of communication between a government through its ambassador to another government. It could be catastrophic.

The ambassador role is a **privilege** as well. Being a servant of the king is a great honor! If you think serving Christ is a burden, then something is not right.

It is a shameful thing when Christ’s ambassadors are **treated poorly** (Eph. 4:1), but that’s the way He predicted it would be because the world hates the light. I’ve asked before where is the diplomatic immunity for God’s ambassadors? Well, it is not recognized. We still have to carry out the task.

2. The earnestness of our sender – God pleading.

This text tells us about the **passion of God** toward needy souls. He is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). He does not take pleasure in the death

of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11). See Matt. 11:28-30 for an example of Christ calling people to himself, pleading with them to come. See also Matt. 23:37 where Jesus says he would have gathered the people to himself, but they would not!

Note that this “God pleading through us” implies the **authority** behind the messenger is the very authority of God (Matt. 28:19-20). Even though I speak it, assuming I do so accurately, it is authoritative. “I am authorized to tell you this message from heaven!” We come from the Ruler of all, not some insignificant government. We can proclaim an authoritative message—not because we are “so good,” but God is behind our message.

Away with the childish **attempts to ignore God** by saying “That’s just your opinion!” or such like statements that suggest we cannot understand the meaning and authoritative force of what God says. Of course we can.

3. The passion of our representation – We pleading also.

We understand the urgency and pleading from God’s side and that should impact our own manner in presentation. If we understand that God truly cares about souls, so ought we! The idea of this is an **impassioned plea**, not just giving facts and figures. This beseeching comes because God is pleading through us. We’ll see later that the acceptable time is TODAY (6:1-2).

The text says “we are” ambassadors and this specifically refers to the apostle authoring this book. But I think for **anyone truly concerned** about people’s souls, this concept rubs off on them too. So the question is—do you see yourself this way? Pastors are supposed to. But so are all Christians—Eph. 4:12 indicates that the body has some role in ministering. Maybe you are supposed to be an ambassador, but are not taking the job seriously?! All believers do represent Christ (remember the letters in 2 Cor. 3:2-3?), at least in the way they present themselves for others to observe. The question is how accurate is your representation? Beyond that, to be an ambassador is not just “passively” representing, but actively representing—doing something proactive.

4. The message to our audience – Be reconciled.

Notice that the Bible uses an imperative form “you be reconciled.” There is that imperative or command nature to the gospel—God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). But in this context the imperative forms a strong urge or request. Truly, people *must* be saved, and we *invite* them to be saved. If you are reading these words and know you are not on good terms with God, it’s high time to make sure that is remedied.

Application for Verse 20

For you believers, think of your service for the Lord. Maybe someone is gripped by the truth right now, thinking that they should move into more serious diplomatic work. Take careful attention at this point of the Bible. This is why I entitled the message “diplomatic Christianity.” This has an intended double-meaning—we certainly ought to be tactful as Christians, but we also are diplomats—ambassadors—carrying the message of reconciliation with us.

MAP

How/Why Reconciliation?**Verse 21**

The last phrase of verse 20 told us that the ambassador's message is one of urging the audience to be reconciled. Verse 21 explains how this is possible (sin has been dealt with) and why God would do this (because he wanted us to have his righteousness). If one does not heed the call to be reconciled, that "effort" on God's part is sort of wasted. No benefit comes to the unbeliever!

This verse explains how it is possible that God can deal favorably with sinners. If you really understand something of the depth of your own sinfulness, you will grasp the wonder of this truth.

1. Step #1: Man's Sin Imputed to Christ

Christ was "made" sin for us. What does this mean? Well, it does *not* mean that God turned Christ into a sinner. God does not make anyone a sinner (James 1:17, 1 John 1:5). It also does not mean that Christ turned himself into a sinner either. Christ knew no sin—that is, he did not "know" it by experience. He certainly knew OF sin, but he did not personally know it in his life, like all of us "know" sin—what it is, how it works, what it does to us. We are told the same truth in other words in Heb. 4:15 (without sin); 7:26 (holy, undefiled, separate from sinners); 1 Peter 2:22 (did no sin, see Isaiah 53:9). This is a cardinal doctrine of Christianity really, yet it is always under attack. The Last Temptation of Christ, The Da Vinci Code, and the like come up every few years. But they are dead wrong, and blasphemous besides.

The offering for sin had to be pure. Way back in Exodus 12:5 we are reminded of this. The phrase "without blemish" is used there and throughout Leviticus, Numbers, and Ezekiel. It is then used in 1 Peter 1:19 to refer to Jesus Christ.

But even though the Christ was pure, He took sin unto himself. He was *imputed* humanity's sin. It was *put to his account* (in economic terms). We know this is talking about imputed sin, not only because Christ was the perfect lamb, but also because verse 19 introduced the idea of imputation of sin—sin *was not* imputed to man, but it *was* imputed to Christ at the cross.

2. Step #2: Christ's Righteousness Imputed to Man (Possibly)

Note that man "becoming" or "being made" righteous has to refer to imputed righteousness in this context. This is the only perfect kind of righteousness, and is necessary because of God's perfect standard. Our own righteous acts or attitude, while they should be on the upswing as we grow in Christ, are NOT what is being spoken of here.

If Christ was imputed the guilt, punishment, shame, and demerit of sin, we are imputed the merit and benefit of a righteous standing with God (Job. 9:2).

Just as we defended above the idea that sin *was imputed* to Christ, we also defend here the idea that righteousness is *imputed* to believers, not infused in them or imparted to them. We know this is the case because of the parallel in the verse—one imputation is exchanged for another. The same idea applies in Rom. 5:12-21 where the Bible teaches about the imputed righteousness of God because Christ took our imputed sin. It is an "equal exchange." The parallel MUST be maintained. If we are turned into actually righteous people, then Christ was actually turned into a sinner. But that is obviously heresy! Besides, we know that is not the case. Many of our best actions are still tainted with sinful thoughts and

motivations. We simply must have a realistic view of ourselves – we were sinners and we still are. Sure, there is a great change, but eradication of sin does not happen this side of glory!

I say "possibly" imputed because while God wants us to receive this righteousness, there is a note of uncertainty here because not all men actually end up doing that.

Applications For Verse 21

For the non-Christian, you must be reconciled because God made the provision for it, and He wants you to be reconciled. Besides, we want you to do so as well. We urge you!

Maybe you misunderstand the basis of salvation. Know that apart from the imputed righteousness of Christ, you would go nowhere with God. Thank God for His supply!

MAP

Diagrams

NKJ:

²⁰ Now then,¹ we are ambassadors for Christ,
as though God were pleading² through us:³
we implore⁴ you on Christ's behalf,
be reconciled⁵ to God.

²¹ For He made⁶ Him
who knew no sin⁷
to be sin for us,⁸
that⁹ we might become¹⁰ the righteousness of God¹¹ in Him.

Could carry on to 6:1-2 also as they fit right in here.

Supplying the antecedents of the pronouns: For GOD made CHRIST, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in CHRIST.

Greek:

²⁰ ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ οὖν πρεσβεύομεν ὡς τοῦ θεοῦ παρακαλοῦντος δι' ἡμῶν·
δεόμεθα¹² ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ, καταλλάγητε τῷ θεῷ. ²¹ τὸν γὰρ μὴ γινόντα ἁμαρτίαν
ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς γενώμεθα δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ.

Literal Translation:

²⁰ Therefore, for Christ we are ambassadors, as though God were pleading through us: "We beg you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God." ²¹ God¹³

¹ Therefore.

² beseech, urge, exhort, request, implore, appeal. In the gospels, this term is used of people who came to Christ earnestly requesting him for healing; Paul's friends earnestly urged him not to go into the theater where the Demetrius riot was ongoing. The word is also used for exhortation in a more forceful way, or encouragement in a sensitive way, but here there seems to be a passionate requesting.

³ Content of the pleading follows in the next phrase.

⁴ So this imploring really amounts to God's imploring through the apostle. This word means to ask, pray, or beg. The asking nature of this word shifts the context more toward an invitation than a command (see the note on "reconciled").

⁵ This is an aorist passive imperative. Standing alone it would be a command, and the gospel does have that flavor to it in many passages. But here it is more of the invitation and entreaty. It has an urging request nature to it, not a command with a hard edge to it.

⁶ Has a double accusative of object (Him) and predicate (sin). Here, God did something to bring about a state or condition. It could be rendered "caused."

⁷ Here the KJV is confusing—this phrase is placed after "us"

⁸ The sense of this "made him sin" has to be determined in concert with other passages of Scripture and theological constraints. He paid for the sin's punishment, guilt, demerit, and shame. Christ is very clearly said to be the perfect lamb of God without sin, so it must be that he did not become sinful or become a sinner or somehow morph into sin itself. This "made" has to be in the sense of imputation because of the context of v. 19. The sins were not imputed to men, but were imputed elsewhere—onto Christ.

⁹ Would you call this a purpose, result, intended result?

¹⁰ I cannot find a reference to this particular use in BDAG. Hmmm.

¹¹ See Rom. 1:17, 3:21-22, 10:3.

¹² Here is another present tense urge word plus an aorist imperative. I wonder if I can find some more like this, and Rom. 12:1, Eph. 4:1 to see what the imperative construction is saying (once-for-all, or what?)

made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, in order that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Observations:

20, 21 – The "for" Christ, "on Christ's behalf," and "for us" are all from the preposition *uper*.

The Basis on Which the Message is True

- imputation of human sin to Christ
- imputation of Christ's righteousness to humans

Does our law allow substitution? or imputation?

Once reconciliation is effected for you, then you move onto the other side of the fence, so to speak, and become yourself one who can bring that message of reconciliation to others. You ought to.

¹³ Actually, just "He."