

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:20-21, 6:1-2

Title: Ambassadors of Reconciliation

Truth: Christ's ambassadors urge people to be reconciled with God on the basis of the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ.

Date/Location: Sunday March 22, 2026 at FBC

Introduction

From verses 18-19, recall that we learned that the *entire* matter of Christian salvation comes from God. God has reconciled Christians to Himself through the work of Jesus Christ, more particularly through the death of His son (Rom 5:10). That reconciling work is broadly available to all who believe in Jesus, and it means that their sins are forgiven, not imputed any longer to them. In addition, Paul informs us that God has given us an important way to serve others, and that is by sharing with this message of reconciliation with God.

We learned quite a bit last time about reconciliation, using human relationships as a teaching tool and illustration, but focusing on this question: are you reconciled to God?

Paul draws this section of the letter to a close by calling for the readers to be reconciled to God and explains how that can happen.

I. Ambassadors for Christ, 5:20

A. First, he says that he is an ambassador for Christ. An ambassador is a spokesman...like the White House spokesperson who is bringing the message of the President to the media to distribute to the nation and world. Such a person is an envoy or messenger who carries an authoritative message from Heaven.

We understand by extension that this office applies to us today. Paul is not on the earth doing this work, but *you* are and can do this ministry as verses 18-19 expressed.

B. Note the following facets of being an ambassador for Christ:

1. Responsibility. You have a lot of "weight" behind you and riding on this.
2. Privilege. What an honor to serve the almighty King this way.

3. Knowledge. You have to know the message you are conveying.
 4. Wisdom, how to apply the knowledge of the ministry of reconciliation in various circumstances.
 5. Character. If you do not live like an ambassador, people will not find your words convincing.
 6. Compassion. You have to care about people other than yourself!
 7. Faith. You must believe in the message that you are sharing.
 8. Faithfulness to the message. It is not of our own devising, and we are not permitted to modify it or spin it in some way advantageous to us or that we feel is better or more palatable.
 9. Urgency. If someone is not reconciled to God, they will suffer.
- C. A heavenly ambassador's job is to urge other people to be reconciled to God by calling them to repent of sin and trust in Jesus Christ. Paul uses the most urgent language.
1. Pleading. To urge strongly, to appeal.
 2. Imploring. To ask for something pleadingly.
- D. The ministry we do for God is so connected to God and Christ that he says that it is effectively as if God is pleading through us, and we are making this plea on Christ's behalf. As ambassadors of reconciliation, we are messengers of heaven to earth. God is working through us. We are co-workers with God.

II. How Reconciliation is Possible: Imputation, 5:21

- A. In the last message, I explained the phrase "not imputing their trespasses" as forgiveness of sin. What forgiveness means is God does not hold your sins against you any longer. Before you become a Christian, God *does* hold your sins against you simply because they belong to you and you are responsible for them. Your offenses hurt not only other people, but they stand between you and God, and God rightly accounts them as yours. He reckons¹ them as belonging to you.
- B. To *reckon* is the language of *imputation*. It means that something is charged or accounted to someone. If I were to ask you to write out a short definition of the verb impute and then use it in a sentence,

¹ To consider or regard something.

you could say this: To impute means to charge or apply, like when “God charged or applied my sins to Christ.” Imputation is the noun form of the verb, and it is the word we use to refer to the concept. It is an accounting term to “account” or “credit” something to someone.

C. For God to forgive our sins, those sins had to be moved somewhere else, to another account. Like conservation of mass, the guilt of sin cannot just go “poof” into the ether. Guilt is guilt and it has to be addressed justly, like any good judicial system would do.

D. The Christian doctrine of imputation is a two-way transaction. Running in one direction, our sin is taken away from us (not imputed to us) and instead it is imputed to Jesus Christ. It becomes His not by commission but by reckoning. He never did any wrong; He is charged with and paid for the wrong you and I did.

But the Scriptures teach that this one-way imputation is not all there is and is not all that is required. In addition to being forgiven of our sins, we have to be constituted as righteous before God in His court. We need positive righteousness, not just neutrality.

E. Running in the other direction, Christ’s righteousness is applied to our account. It becomes ours. When this happens, our standing before God changes from “this person is accounted as a sinner” to “this person is accounted as righteous.” No wonder that we are safe in Christ, for who can lay a charge against one to whom God has removed all charges?

F. So, God accounts the sinner’s sin to Jesus so we can be forgiven. He further accounts Jesus’s righteousness to the sinner. Then on this basis of this “constitution” of the person as righteous He *declares* the person to be righteous and then forever treats him or her as such. This idea is called *justification*. Here is how you explain it:

God justifies me when He imputes my sin to Christ and imputes Christ’s righteousness to me. Then He can truly declare me as righteous. This on the basis of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ so I can know justification is complete.

G. Not that justification *makes* your behavior automatically sinless, for that is another thing altogether which happens over a period of

time. It happens by means of what we call *sanctification*. In justification God declares the person righteous, based on the fact that God has imputed the righteousness of God to him or her. This is immediate and complete at the moment one comes to Christ. It is “judicial” or “forensic.” It is not a fiction, but a legal reality in the divine legal courtroom. If you have this, you have been pre-judged as righteous before the final judgment and sentencing come and this is why you can be certain of salvation and certain of the outcome of final judgment.

It is because of this that we can assert that no person needs to *ever* say, “I hope I am saved.” You can *know*.

- H. Mixing justification and sanctification is a serious error that some people and churches make. The effect is to make justification before God dependent on works, thus never completed or assured. But Christian justification marks our new, finished legal status before God and thus grants to us 100% confidence.

Rom 4:5 But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,

Gal 2:16 knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

- I. Four other thoughts on this notion of imputation before we finish this theological section of these notes.
1. First, clothing. We can view all of what I said above with the metaphor of clothing. I am clothed in Christ or Christ’s righteousness. God sees me looking like Jesus that way.
 2. Second, substitution. Since sinners could not create perfect righteousness, we needed someone else to stand in our place. This is the doctrine of substitution. Christ paid the penalty of sin in our place and lived rightly which we could not do. This is why understanding your Old Testament, including the sacrificial system, is helpful. It gives you a background to understand this doctrine of substitution.

3. Third, trust. You are not required to be able to write out a definition of justification or imputation to be saved. You are required to repent of your sin and trust in Jesus and in that faith set out to follow Jesus in a permanent way. “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” is all that is required. When *that* happens in your life, then God takes care of the imputing and justifying and forgiving and regenerating and all the other big words that describe Christian salvation. You do not have to worry about it. But it is helpful to understand the concepts and that is why I have gone over them with you again today.
4. Fourth, what is imputed? What exactly is imputed to the believer? There is some debate here—is it Christ’s perfect obedience to the law of Moses? Some would say so. I would say that Christ’s righteousness was *evidenced* in His perfect obedience to the Law of Moses, to *all* of the moral law of God in letter and spirit. But I am not required to obey all of the Law of Moses in this age to be righteous. I am required to obey the Law of Christ today, and I am required to have a righteous standing before I can enjoy anything of the presence of God or be right with God. It is that righteous standing that Jesus has before the Father, demonstrated as true in His righteous life, which is imputed to us. It is not ours; it is His. The text says it very clearly: “that we might become *the righteousness of God* in Him.”

Whatever that righteousness is, it is valid to express it as *the righteousness of God*. It is imputed to us from God, in other words comes from God, and it is a thing that only God has, and Christ brought it down to mankind by becoming a human and living it out.

III. The Plea of Reconciliation, 6:1-2

- A. We have already seen that we are ambassadors and it is like God is pleading through us to the unsaved. Paul reiterates that here.
- B. He adds a new thought at the end of verse 1: Do not receive the grace of God in vain, that is, to no effect. To “receive” I think means something like “hear” because you cannot truly receive it

and it have no effect. So, it seems like the message is conveyed, and you hear it, but you stop short of actually embracing it. This is possible for a professing Christian person—to believe in Jesus but persist in some idea that Christ saves but I have to also work to earn favor, or not have assurance that you are justified before God. Then again, receiving God’s grace in vain is possible for the unbeliever too, when he or she rejects the truth of God’s wonderful gracious provision and insists he or she will “go it alone.” The smart money is not there, my friends. That is like saying, “I do not need a lawyer” in a capital case. You do need an advocate!

- C. In verse 2, Paul quotes Isaiah 49:8. This is not a super-easy quotation of the Old Testament. But the structure of what Paul is doing *is* easy:
1. Paul quotes an OT text.
 2. He applies it.
- D. If you want to know more details about the quotation, here they are. Yahweh, God the Father, is speaking to the Messiah in Isaiah 49:8. In the context first Messiah speaks on behalf of the nation, representing the nation in Himself as the Servant. God says He will be glorified in His Servant, and the Servant will be glorious in the eyes of Yahweh. The Servant’s role is to bring the all tribes of Jacob back to God, and to restore the remnant of Israel. But that is not enough. God has assigned His Servant to be “a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.” Indeed, salvation comes from the Jews, from the Israelite nation, *in the person of Jesus the Messiah*.
- Remember that the Messiah was a person, a man. Isaiah 49:7 says that people despise this Redeemer. Later, kings will see Him and princes will worship this chosen one of God. In the face of the opposition, He will cry out to the Lord, and Yahweh will hear His cry and will help him. (Can you think of any times Jesus prayed to the Father or cried out to Him?)
- E. It is at *that* time, when Christ provides redemption for the world, that the Father will hear and help Him. And that predicted time,

future to Isaiah, came to be during the first century. What Jesus did then is what instituted the present age in which we live, the age of the church, the age of reconciliation, the age of gospel proclamation. So, Paul can apply Isaiah this way: the time is now.

- F. There is another little fact here that is powerful. Paul is saying that He is (and we can be) a worker with God, working together on this Old Testament promise for salvation. In other words, we are ambassadors of the Messiah, giving out the message of the despised Saviour that God is calling the tribes of Jacob and the Gentiles of the world to Himself to be reconciled. We are privileged to enter into the plan of salvation promised in millennia past to the Messiah. The ambassador role allows Christians to join in the prophesied work of God in restoring Israel and being a light to the Gentiles and raising up Israel. *That* is amazing.
- G. By the way, God is our help in this task. God will preserve His servants to carry His message.

Conclusion

What we have seen in this passage is this: Christ's ambassadors urge people to be reconciled to God on the basis of the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ.

Imputation of sin to Christ and righteousness to us is the engine that drives reconciliation and makes it possible. It is the meaning of the cross. It explains how someone can be reconciled to God.

We must pass on this truth because *now* is the time when salvation is available. What God promised back *then* is *now*. God will hear your penitent prayer and save you whether you can explain it all or not. That time is today. That time will close at some point in your future. I am not into high pressure sales, like "this offer is only available today. When I walk out of this neighborhood, this deal will not be available again." I do not think God is into that either. He is OK with you thinking about it before "buying." But the fact is that we are in the age today when salvation is globally proclaimed and freely offered. After we die, the offer is closed. Who can tell when will that be? Today is the day, dear ones.