

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

Title: Reconciled!

Truth: God reconciles the Christian to Himself through Jesus and tells us to share the word of reconciliation with others.

Date/Location: Sunday March 15, 2026 at FBC

Introduction

We break once again into a lengthy discussion by God's emissary, Paul, regarding the consequences of the death of Jesus Christ both as to how we view other people, how we view Jesus, and how Christians have become a new creation.

The subject matter in verses 18-21 is *reconciliation*. Count how many times the word is used in the text. Paul does not give us a definition but assumes that his readers will grasp the word's relational implications because they know the language. We will start with that background to make sure our minds are in the right space to talk about it.

I. Background: What is Christian Reconciliation?

A. Reconciliation is word that has to do with personal relationships. It has been a concept as long as sin has been in the world. Once Adam and Eve sinned, they needed their relationship with God to be mended. They also needed their relationship with one another to be mended on a frequent basis. This "mending" is the heart of the idea of reconciliation, in which a broken relationship is fixed so that people who were enemies become allies. People who were hostile to one another become friendly. People who were cold to one another, or indifferent, become interested and warm-hearted. The underlying idea of the verb is to exchange—like to exchange one currency for another. In metaphorical use, it means to exchange friendship for enmity or love for anger, peace for war.¹

¹ Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGC, p. 436. He writes that reconciliation "denotes a transformation of relations, not in the sense that original friendly relations are restored (humans are by nature at enmity with God, Rom. 5:10; Eph. 2:1-3) but in the sense that friendly relations now replace former hostility."

We can illustrate it from Scripture in Matthew 5:24 about a worshipper who needs to stop and be reconciled to his brother before he continues to worship God. Another common illustration is found in 1 Cor. 7:11 where a wife who is in the process of divorcing her husband or who has divorced him can reconcile with him. Siblings, parents, cousins, co-workers, and unfortunately even *church members* often need to be reconciled to one another.

Is there person with whom you need to be reconciled right now?

A childhood accident caused poet Elizabeth Barrett to lead a life of semi-invalidism before she married Robert Browning in 1846...In her youth, Elizabeth had been watched over by her tyrannical father. When she and Robert [Browning] were married, their wedding was held in secret because of her father's disapproval. After the wedding the Brownings sailed for Italy, where they lived for the rest of their lives. But even though her parents had disowned her, Elizabeth never gave up on the relationship. Almost weekly she wrote them letters. Not once did they reply. After 10 years, she received a large box in the mail. Inside, Elizabeth found all of her letters; not one had been opened! ...Had her parents only read a few of them, their relationship with Elizabeth might have been restored.²

Even more importantly, do you need to be reconciled with God? From this point, we will focus on reconciliation with God.

B. Why is reconciliation needed? The word of God declares that before we come to God in faith, we are in enemy status with Him:

Romans 5:10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

We might ask the question as to who is the enemy of whom—is God at enmity against man, or is man have enmity toward God? The lack of reconciliation has to do with the *relationship* between

² "Bible" in *6,000 Plus Illustrations for Communicating Biblical Truths* (Christianity Today, 2000).

the two parties. Something is broken between them. Indeed, man feels enmity against God. But also, God feels that enmity. He is opposed to all that is sinful, and righteously so (Psalm 5:5). God has done nothing wrong nor changed in some way that is unfavorable and calls into question His immutability. *People* have done wrong in violating God's law, so the enmity is "on us" and it is our fault. God's holy standing does not allow Him to simply overlook our sin. He cannot just ignore the offense and draw near to his sinful creatures in a kind of pseudo-reconciliation. Pretending to be reconciled is not the same thing as actual reconciliation.

Someone listening might find it hard to believe that God can look at us as his enemies because either God is so loving and kind, or it is unkind of God to consider people that way. But the evidence is all in favor of the conclusion that our relationship is broken, not because of anything *God* has done. Eve sinned, Adam sinned, everyone sinned, Noah sinned. But God stayed the same. He gave sunshine and rain and food and pleasant seasons, and love and children and grandchildren and blessings. And we made war and rebelled against his order of things. Yes, God did allow us to suffer some of the consequences of our sins, and has judged the world at various times, but those do not make Him unkind in the least, just like a good judge is not unkind for sentencing a murderer to prison or a good parent for disciplining her children.

Another way to say it is that people are born in a state where God is displeased with them (John 3:36)—thus the need for reconciling. By nature, we are alienated from God. Yet at the same time He demonstrates a deep concern and love for them (John 3:16, Romans 5:8). God's love while we are enemies may seem impossible for us, but I can assure you it is not, if for no other reason than God is infinitely different from us. But we can also argue for love and enmity at the same time from our own personal experience. Many of us have experienced a personal relationship, say with a child or parent or friend where we genuinely care for that person, but they have pushed us away. They feel at odds with us, and we know we are at odds, but not because on our side we *want* to be. We take no pleasure in it. That is like God.

C. How is reconciliation accomplished? It is accomplished through the **death** of Jesus Christ.³ 2 Cor. 5:21 explains in part, and Romans 5:10 does also. A third portion of the Bible explains as well:

Col 1:19-22 ¹⁹ For it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell, ²⁰ and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. ²¹And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled ²² in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.

Reconciliation comes about because of Jesus's substitutionary work on the cross, which permits God to *not* impute our sins to us (instead He imputed them to Jesus), and then to restore the broken relationship by drawing us near to Himself. This is done through Christ's work and not through a change in God's nature.

D. Who is affected by this reconciliation? The best answer to this question is that mankind is the focal point of change in this work of God because God does not change. Rather, God does a work to reconcile us and reconcile the world to Himself. And, according to v. 20, we are commanded to "be reconciled" to God, which is a passive voice verb in a command form. It is quite carefully worded to teach us that we do not effect the reconciling, but receive it, and that by trust in Christ. We were reconciled [by someone else] to God through the death of Jesus.

II. Connection Between Verses 18 and 19

- A. Notice verse 18 says all things are of God, and then has two parts:
1. God reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ.
 2. God has given us the ministry of reconciliation.
- B. Then notice verse 19 says, "that is," which indicates an explanation with, once again, two parts.

³ The phrase "God was in Christ" might sound like the incarnation, but the reconciling work is centered in the death of Christ, not the incarnation.

1. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.
 2. God has entrusted to us the word of reconciliation.
- C. If you noticed the parallels there, that $A1=B1$, and $A2=B2$, you understand the structure of Paul's thought. Verse 19 restates verse 18 as an explanation. The two verses are saying largely the same thing.

III. Explanation of Verses 18-19

- A. **All things are of God.** Whatever Paul had talked about before about the death of Christ, being in Christ, being a new creation, having old things pass away—God does it all. Referring to the outline of the previous section, God does A1, A2, B1, and B2. He is the subject of the verb in each sentence. I do not make myself right with God or get myself right with God. He runs the entire process. That means that He provides forgiveness, and gives life, and inclines our spirits toward Himself, and sent Jesus, and has a forgiving mindset toward us. Salvation is *entirely* from the Lord. God planned it, Christ died for it, the Spirit convicts us about it.
- B. Of course we participate, by His grace, in two ways: we receive it by faith, and we then do the ministry of pleading with others to be reconciled to God.
- C. **Who has reconciled us to Himself.** God initiated the reconciliation. He was the *wronged* party, not the offending party. This is remarkable because reconciliation would normally focus on the offender fixing the problem. We should have started the process, but by nature of the offense and its consequence, we were unable to do that. So, God initiated the fix for the problem Himself. As a result, God desires that we draw close to **Himself**. God is never said to be reconciled, nor do others reconcile God. God does the reconciling.
- D. **Through Jesus Christ.** Ephesians 2:16 tells us that Christ reconciled both Jews and Gentiles to God in one body through His work on the cross. Instead of just two parties being involved—God and you—there are three: God, you, and Jesus as intermediary to bring the two together. He is a perfect “man in the middle” to bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18).

E. **Reconciling the world.** Earlier I said that verse 19 explains further verse 18. One of the things it does is to expand the applicability of what Paul is saying. In verse 18, God reconciled “us” and gave “us” the ministry of reconciliation. Those pronouns could refer to Paul or the apostles or also to the church in Corinth. But verse 19 adds that God reconciled “the world” and therefore includes a far broader group of people as objects of reconciliation.

But this cannot refer to universal salvation because it is obvious that not all want to be or will be reconciled to God. The point is that salvation comes to more than the “us” of verse 18. The work God has done through Christ is universally applicable and has world-wide implications, though not to the saving of every soul who ever lived.

Some suggest that “reconciling the world” means that God does this for the entire world, saved and unsaved, putting them into a savable condition or situation. I appreciate the attempt to be faithful to the text—and there is warrant for understanding the work of God in Christ to encompass more than just the saved. Col. 1:20 says that God in Christ reconciled “all things to Himself.” God has worked things so that eventually the world will be restored to a right relationship with Him. It is also true that there is *nothing* that remains to be done from God’s side for reconciliation to happen. He stands ready with open arms for you to come. It is accomplished and readily available, but its benefits have to be applied to us, accepted, received, embraced, believed. You have to trust the Lord about this. You cannot reconcile yourself to God, but you need to be reconciled, and what Jesus did provided for it.

To suggest that all human beings are now reconciled to God misses two key points. First, “reconciled” means that enmity is removed, and that is not the case right now, nor ever will be the case with *every* person in the world. Second, since reconciling is tightly linked to “not imputing their trespasses to them,” it would create a problem if we were to understand that unbelieving people do not have any sins imputed to themselves right now. Here is why...

F. **Not imputing their trespasses to them.** This is another new piece of information in verse 19 not found in 18. This is **forgiveness**. It

means God does not “reckon” your sin against you. He does not forget, as if His omniscience falters. Instead, forgetting is a metaphor that means that He will not hold sin against you anymore. He wipes it off your record so that you can join King David in saying:

Psalm 32:1-2a Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ² Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity...

The meaning of reconciliation is largely explained by forgiveness—but not entirely! There is more to full reconciliation than that, and we will see what it is in verse 21.

To the point of my earlier comments about the world being reconciled, it does not pass the smell test that “all humans are forgiven their trespasses.” Otherwise, they would all be right with God, and that is obviously not the case.

G. And has given us the ministry of reconciliation and committed to us the word of reconciliation. The ministry of reconciliation is the privilege and responsibility to proclaim reconciliation with God and to urge people to receive it. Paul was a minister of reconciliation and was the immediate recipient of this ministry.

But we know from other Scriptures that “us” is broader than Paul. All Christians are to be involved somehow in proclaiming and urging people to be saved. I am not saying we all become vocational missionaries or pastors, but we all can participate in supporting the work of the church, getting behind pastors and missionaries, and keeping the church’s focus on the Great Commission instead of ancillary things. Like a professional sports team, this church is a team. Some are quarterbacks and coaches and front office and back office and public relations and advertising and maintenance and finances. But all participate in the team effort, the goal of which is to bring the message of reconciliation to others.

Why am I here? Why are you here? To glorify God by loving Him more than anything else and loving my neighbor as myself. I can do

that by being reconciled to God and sharing the blessing of reconciliation with others.

Conclusion

Paul is talking about reconciliation, specifically (1) that God through Christ accomplishes reconciliation, and (2) that God assigned Paul and his audience to minister the reconciling message to others.

Bridging the gap between Paul's day and our own is not difficult. These two truths are directly connected to us. God has provided reconciliation for us and gives us the responsibility and privilege to minister that same message to others. He calls for us to be reconciled through forgiveness of sin, and to tell others how to be reconciled. It is not complicated.

God has a tremendous thing in sending Jesus to be the reconciling mediator between us. And He wrote a whole bunch of letters to you about being reconciled. Are you storing those letters, unopened, in a box to send back to Him someday? Or are you reading those letters and heeding His call to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ?

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