

**“Reconciliation with God  
and one another”  
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**2 Corinthians 5:16-21**

Paul`s letters to the church in Corinth give me hope for us as a church, and for me personally.

Paul himself was in conflict with the church. The church he planted was filled with people dear to his heart, and though the Corinthians were a feisty group loaded with potential problems, Paul loved them and, even after leaving Corinth, prayed for them every day.

So, in this second letter to the Corinthians Paul, with gritted teeth sometimes and through tears at other times, has to defend himself. At the conclusion of this fifth chapter, Paul`s desire to clear his name combines with his effort to repeat the true gospel, resulting in this passage of great power.

**The centerpiece of the passage is reconciliation.**

By grace alone and because of Jesus, God has reconciled us to himself. The image or description that Paul uses is that we are in Christ – we are made one with Jesus.

We, sinful, broken, self-absorbed, self-centered, God-rebelling people, are by faith, by reaching out to Jesus, through prayer, through baptism, through Communion, are brought into Jesus` relationship with His Father God.

The deep friendship that Jesus has with his Father, the love and trust that he had, *hearing the words of blessing that rested on Jesus by God the Father, this is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased* -this relationship is now ours because we are in Jesus.

And this new relationship is not just for us few- but for the whole of creation.  
***So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!***

These Greek verbs are in the perfect tense – this is an ongoing thing – the world has changed and is changing. The result of this cosmic reconciliation is that we now look at everything differently. We look at everything and every **one** through the lens of reconciliation.

How do we see the people we meet? Sometimes we see people as an inconvenience, or a means to an end, or as an “other” – different from us. People can be viewed as a threat, or as someone who will help me to advance myself, someone to use for my own advantage.

But if we see them through the lens of reconciliation, then he or she is someone loved of God, who is invited to be reconciled as we are. Paul describes us as **ambassadors of reconciliation** as we call others to believe in Jesus and so find themselves in a right relationship with God.

But it’s not just about the vertical dimension between God and us. In some ways that’s the easier part. Being caught up in God’s salvation changes everything on this human, horizontal plane, too.

“Once upon a time,” Paul writes, “we regarded Jesus only from a human point of view and when we did, we didn’t think much of him. But now we see Jesus and everyone in a divine perspective and it changes everything.” In Greek, Paul talks about regarding Jesus and each other *kata sarx*, which literally means “according to the flesh.”

If we look at Jesus as no more than just another flesh-and-blood human being among the billions of other flesh-and-blood people who populate this globe, then there’s nothing remarkable about Jesus.

If Jesus is only human, then to worship him is idolatry. But Jesus is also the Son of God, so we are right to worship him. You cannot look at Jesus only according to his human side.

But Paul makes a parallel between looking at Jesus in a complete way and looking at *each other* in a complete way. But none of us is divine, so what is the parallel here? Well, the parallel, according to Paul, is that because we are all “in Christ,” we are more than just human, too—there is more to us than meets the eye!

You have never met an ordinary person, each one of us bears the resemblance of the God who loves and saves us. That means we do not ever think that broken relationships are no big deal.

No! We are caught up in the grip of God's cosmic reconciliation in Christ. Jesus died so that fractured relationships, dysfunctional families, lost friendships, and ruptured social circles could be restored.

Paul knew that in his own lifetime he had gone from being God's number one enemy to God's beloved apostle. There was a time in his life when if someone mentioned the name "Jesus" in Paul's presence, Paul (who was then called Saul) turned purple and began to sputter profane vindictives about that name Jesus – a name he was intent on wiping from the face of the earth. Paul knew from his own experience that reconciling former enemies is the main reason Jesus died. He was a living example of that!

A contemporary theologian who has done a tremendous amount of thinking about reconciliation is Miroslav Volf. He once wrote that in God's heavenly kingdom, it cannot be just impersonal forces of evil that are done away with. It cannot be just the entire creation, broadly conceived, which gets reconciled with its God. No, Volf says, it has to get more specific than that.

Before we can all dwell happily together in the shalom of God's kingdom there needs to be real reconciliation between earthly enemies. Those who have lived in conflict need to have that conflict put away if there is to be shalom.

It's not just the lion and the lamb that need to learn to curl up next to one another but all of us who have lived as the human equivalents of lambs and lions in how we have treated each other.

It happens only as we surrender in Christ, as we are in Christ. "Jesus died for all so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them." (5:15).

Our stories emerge from Christ's story, and our calling is to live not only in celebration of what this means for us (though that is certainly worth celebrating).

Our calling leads us along the path of death as Christ died, and resurrection, as Christ was raised, for our sakes and the sake of others. Transformation born out of death and resurrection has the power to bring reconciliation to our world.

But reconciliation isn't easy. There is hurt and anger and my rights, and my truth, and all of that has to be set aside and given over to Jesus. It's not easy. Reconciliation doesn't mean letting go of the truth, especially the truth of the gospel, it doesn't mean letting go of justice, especially justice for others.

"Love your enemies", was Jesus' command. Love means willing their good, willing an end to evil, willing an end to what hurts and destroys. Reconciliation does mean I will not use evil means to bring about the right.

I am not free in Christ to live any way, except the way of Christ. Reconciliation calls for a humble spirit, a deep awareness that we are flawed and broken, hurting and hurtful, but also that we are deeply loved, and we are of great value to God.

New life in Jesus, resurrection life, and being clothed in Christ invites me to no longer live for myself, and my ambitions, but to live for Christ Jesus, to serve His mission of healing and reconciliation in this world.

Then Paul goes one step further: *For our sake, Christ died and was raised, so that in Christ "we might become the righteousness of God" (5:21).*

Here's an even more radical thing than new creation -- actually becoming the righteousness of God. The righteousness of God is righteousness and justice combined. Being the righteous of God means others experience the nature and reality of the transforming power of God.

It takes a new creation to become people and communities whose reach outside of ourselves begins to match the reach of the God's love and justice. That is our aim. It is who we are becoming in Christ, as his ambassadors of reconciliation in this world.

**Thanks be to God.**