

RECONCILED TO GOD
2 Corinthians 5:20, 21

Intro: When we think of the frequency with which some observe the Lord's Supper, we might think, at the first, that there would run out of Scriptures to use in preparing to come to the Lord's Table. But the more we think of what is involved in remembering Christ, the more we realize that we will never run out of Scriptures--and that we can come back to the same Scriptures over and over, drawing from them fresh and deeper and richer nourishment for our needy souls. What Christ accomplished on the Cross was so far-reaching and extensive that it would be easier for us to solve the mysteries of the universe than to exhaust, to understand fully, the truths concerning Christ.

Tonight as we prepare to remember our Lord again, I want you to think with me about the doctrine of reconciliation.

The fact that there needed to be a reconciliation suggests that there was trouble between God and man, and such a great trouble that man himself could not resolve it. The Scriptures teach us further that man had no desire to settle the trouble. The need for reconciliation suggests that there was enmity between God and man: God was angry with man; man was at enmity with God. The enmity was due to man's sin. Man is under the wrath of God, and the only thing that could satisfy God would be the eternal judgment of sinful man.

But this is where we can be thankful for the grace of God, and for the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us look at v. 21 first, and then we will come back to v. 20.

Perhaps it would help if we were to re-arrange the words of the verse, and identify the one to whom the Apostle Paul was referring with each pronoun.

The verse would be clearer if we read it this way:
For he hath made him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us,
that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

If we were to follow the original language literally, the verse would read like this:

He who did not know sin, for us was made sin,
in order that we might become righteousness of God
in him.

Now let us clear up the meaning of each pronoun:
For he (God) hath made him (Christ), who knew no sin,
to be sin for us,
that we might be made the righteousness of God in him,
that is, in Christ.

Let me clarify another point.

There is the idea in this verse that Jesus Christ became something that He had not been before in order that those whom He has reconciled might become what they had not been before. And, in the case of the Lord Jesus, this meant becoming sin; in the case of man, it meant becoming righteous before God.

V. 20 makes it clear that all of this was necessary before any sinner could be reconciled to God.

One other thing: For whom was this reconciliation made? Who is reconciled to God by Christ?

Paul began speaking of reconciliation in v. 18, and there he used the word, "us." But the problem arises because in v. 19 where he spoke of "the world."

If God has reconciled "the world" meaning every single person who has ever lived, it would have to mean one of two things:

- 1) That He only potentially reconciled them; He rendered them reconcilable. That might seem like the meaning in v. 20 where Paul spoke of the message of the ambassadors, beseeching sinners to be reconciled to God. But that does not satisfy the language of vv. 18, 19 which indicates that He did not attempt a reconciliation, but that He actually reconciled those whom He intended to reconcile. If it does not mean that the Lord potentially reconciled all men (and it cannot mean that because of the strength of the language), then there is only one other choice.
- 2) All people have been reconciled, and therefore all will eventually be saved. And so we are left with a doctrine of universalism. But we know that all men are not being saved.

So what is the answer? The answer is that Christ by His death actually accomplished all that was necessary "for us," those who are saved. And thus we see that He actually accomplished what He came to do.

But now to the verse--thinking about reconciliation. Note what Paul wrote here about . . .

I. GOD.

Here was a hopeless situation. Man was beyond hope. He was at enmity with God and both unable and unwilling to do anything about it. But God has taken action. You can see this in vv. 18, 19, 21.

He had to do it in grace because we did not deserve it, but the wonderful truth is that He determined to do some-

thing about the sins of sinners.

Secondly, let us look at . . .

II. CHRIST AND SIN.

Two things are stated in our verse.

- A. He did not know sin. That is, He was not a sinner. He had never sinned. This is what Peter wrote in 1 Pet. 2:22, "Who did no sin." John wrote in 1 John 3:5, "and in him is no sin."

But what did God do?

- B. God made Him sin. That is, God so identified Christ with the sins of those for whom He died that He became their sin offering. Their sins became His for which He was made accountable to God.

This defies explanation. Isaiah states it this way. (Quote Isa. 53:6).

This is what God did for us, and Christ willingly submitted Himself to the Father's will.

Where did this happen? At the Cross. This is where God was accomplishing the work of reconciliation for "the world," that is, for people throughout the world in every generation. He did it, and the reconciliation was accomplished.

What was the result?

III. THE SINNER AND RIGHTEOUSNESS.

"That we (not all men) might become the righteousness of God in him," in Christ.

He took our sin, and we have the righteousness of God in place of that which made us the enemies of God. One writer has said that in Christ we become the embodiment of righteousness in the sight of God.

This is why Edward Mote, back in or about 1834 could write those words which we know so well,

When He shall come with trumpet sound,
(I change the words a little)
O I shall then in him be found;
Dressed in his righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before His throne.

That is hard to believe, isn't it? But it is true.

But is that all? Are those for whom Christ died reconciled to God just because He died for us. No. He accomplished it for us, but that is where the preaching of the Gospel enters in.

And so let us conclude with . . .

IV. THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION.

What is it? It is the preaching of the Gospel. We beseech all men to come, knowing that some are going to come, that those for whom Christ died will come, and they will trust Christ as their Saviour, and thus they lay claim to their reconciliation.

And when God speaks to the heart of any man, those to whom He chooses to speak, that sinner comes to Christ.

Concl: This is one thing that we need to remember as we come to the Lord's Table. We did not reconcile ourselves; Christ reconciled us. I like the way dear Dr. Sutcliffe of the Multnomah School of the Bible used to express it. He said, "We did not even seek God; He was seeking us. We did not want Him; He wanted us." And so when the message of reconciliation is proclaimed, the message of reconciliation through Christ, we can be sure that we are proclaiming the one message that a gracious God will use to draw His people to Himself. He did it with us. He will do it with others until all who have been appointed for salvation, all for whom the Lord died, have come to Christ and been saved.

This ought to fill our hearts with great thanksgiving as we come tonight to remember our Lord through whom we now have the righteousness of God upon us.