

Be Reconciled to God: 2 Corinthians 5: 11-21

Let me tell you about Stacey and Penelope. Stacey and Penelope went to high school together in country Victoria. Growing up they were inseparable as friends and so when they moved to Melbourne for university they decided to share a house together. It started out well, until Penelope started to get frustrated with how Stacey left the kitchen after cooking meals. And Stacey was getting frustrated with how Penelope spoke with her and tried to parent her all the time. Anger flared between them slowly, further enflamed when a word in a text message chain was apparently misinterpreted and what was once a strong friendship declined into sadness and bitterness towards each other.

Or how about Harry and his dad, Gavin. Harry had been working hard at his job for a few years after finishing uni. He decided to quit to go and travel through Europe. Gavin thought it was irresponsible, but rather than discuss it with Harry, Gavin made sly comments to friends and family in front of Harry about ‘the easy life’ and ‘how good kids have it these days’. Harry still owed his parents money from a previous trip to Vietnam but thought that Gavin should let that go considering how much money he thought Gavin and his mum actually had. When Harry left for Europe Gavin didn’t travel to the airport to say goodbye, and Harry told his mum that he was grateful his dad wasn’t there.

Or Kaliopé and Mason. They had been married for about 3 years things had been going well until one day when Mason started a conversation about starting a family. Mason wanted to start a family quickly while Kaliopé thought that financial stability was more important and a family could wait a few more years. In trying to have another conversation about it, in the heat of the moment, tempers flared, and harsh words were spoken. Ever since, Mason has been sleeping at his parents’ home, both of them anxious about being separated from each other but not seeing a way forward without hurt and anger.

These stories may sound a bit familiar. They may even have elements of truth in your own lives or others that you know.

But I think it would be clear for all, all of these stories – and the ones that are similar - involve the break down of relationship, broken trust, anger and sadness – not just for the people involved – but also for those around them.

Our general want, in these situations – and I hope this would be your want to, is for the restoration of broken relationships, harmony and peace. This involves resolving conflict, healing divisions, and re-establishing trust between parties. – In other words - reconciliation.

These are things we want to be healed and restored. These are things God wants to be restored. And the Bible does talk about reconciliation in these matters.(Col 3:13 “*Bear*

with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”) God wants reconciliation in our relationships.

In today’s passage what Paul is saying is of paramount importance, what should be of the highest priority in the lives of the Corinthians. He is pleading for them to Be Reconciled to God. And, when we are reconciled with God, how does this change our relationships with others.

So tonight, we are going to look at this idea of Being Reconciled to God in 3 parts:

The Message of Reconciliation

The Mission of Reconciliation

The Method of Reconciliation

Let’s start with the Message of Reconciliation.

What is this message of reconciliation.

Let me read again from 2 Corinthians 5, v 17 onwards:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has^[d] come! ¹⁸ Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. ¹⁹ That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed the message of reconciliation to us.

²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ’s behalf, “Be reconciled to God.”

Paul is making a powerful appeal in this passage: **Be reconciled to God.** That’s the heart of his message — and it’s also the heart of the **gospel** itself. Reconciliation to God **is** the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the stories I told at the start, it is clear that both parties need to come to the table, both parties have done wrong, both parties need to offer forgiveness and there is a cost for both.

But reconciliation with God is different. He hasn’t done wrong. He has not broken the relationship. You see, with God, reconciliation is done by Him and He bears the cost.

Look with me at verse 19 again:

“That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them...”

This is the good news. This is the gospel: **God has made a way for sinners to be brought back into relationship with Himself through Jesus Christ.**

Nothing to do with what we have done. Nothing to do with what we deserve. We bring nothing to the table.

Now a fair question would be: Why do we even need reconciliation?

To understand this, we need to go back to the very beginning.

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1)

God created everything — and He created us, not as meaningless beings in a random universe, but as image-bearers of Himself, made for relationship with Him. But something went terribly wrong. That something is called **sin**.

R.C. Sproul once described sin as **“cosmic rebellion.”** He said it’s not just making bad choices or mistakes. ***Sin is having the audacity to oppose the God who made us.***

It’s putting ourselves in the place of God — ignoring Him, rejecting His rule, and living as if we are our own little kings and queens. God is not in the wrong. We are.

And Scripture is clear about what our rebellion leads to:

- **Spiritual separation from God** – Genesis 3:8-10
- **Physical death** – Genesis 3:19
- **Universal guilt and condemnation** – Romans 5:12

¹²Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned

“Your iniquities are separating you from your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not listen.”
(Isaiah 59:2)

*Pretty damning isn’t it. The result of our active opposition to God is that He, the ruler and creator of all, who made us in His image, because of sin, our relationship with God is not merely strained — it is **broken**. We are not “mostly good people who need a little help.” No. The Bible tells us we are spiritually dead, separated, enemies of God. We **need** reconciliation.*

If our greatest need is to be reconciled to God, then we must ask — why did Jesus have to die to make that happen?

Couldn’t God have just forgiven us? Simply moved on?

This is where we begin to see the deep beauty and holy seriousness of the gospel.

As Tim Keller often explained, when someone deeply wrongs you, forgiveness always comes at a cost. If someone wrecks your car and you forgive them, you absorb the cost. The damage doesn’t just disappear — someone pays.

Now take that concept and consider reconciliation with God.

The Bible says our sin is not just breaking a rule — it's rejecting God Himself. And because God is perfectly just, He cannot ignore sin. He cannot ignore the actions and inactions that create that rejection. God is perfect, holy and just.

But, as we already know, there is a cost in reconciliation. Someone pays the price. If God did just ignore sin, He would cease to be holy and righteous. Wrong must be dealt with.

So what does God do?

This is the heart of the gospel:

God Himself, in Christ, bore the cost of our sin.

"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Jesus didn't die just as an example of love or a martyr for a cause. He died as our substitute, he died in our place, he took the cost of our sin — the righteous one taking the place of the unrighteous.

Tim Keller puts it this way:

"Jesus lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died — in our place — so God could accept us, not for what we've done, but because of what Christ has done."

At the cross, God's justice and love meet perfectly:

- His justice is upheld — sin is punished.
- His love is poured out — sinners are forgiven.

There was no other way for us to be reconciled to God. Jesus had to die — and He willingly did so, out of love for us.

This is why the gospel is not advice or inspiration. It's not just "try harder" or "live better."

It's news — the best news:

God has done what we could never do. He has made a way back to Himself — through the blood of His Son, even when we don't deserve it.

And does that change things for us. Look at verse 17:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Because of what God has done for you through Jesus Christ, if you trust in him through faith, you are a new creation.

What you used to be is no more. You are a new creation. And part of being a new creation means the old has gone. How we see ourselves, how we see others changes.

You see, the gospel doesn't just repair our **vertical relationship** with God; it transforms our **horizontal relationships** with one another.

Paul says God "has given us the ministry of reconciliation." That means, if you've been reconciled to God through Christ, and you are a new creation, then your life should reflect that — in how you forgive, how you love, how you pursue peace with others. As noted in verse 15

¹⁵ And he died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the one who died for them and was raised.

As Christians, we affirm that salvation is entirely God's work — but its fruit is seen in how we live in community. How we live matters. We don't pursue reconciliation with others to *earn* God's favour — we pursue it *because we already have it* because of what Christ has done for us.

Now I want to be clear, sometimes reconciliation with others may not be possible. As reconciled people we are called to pursue reconciliation where possible, but not at the cost of truth, wisdom, or personal safety. And if that is the case for you, can I encourage you to discern and think through that pastorally with (for example) one of the ministry team; Helen, Andy, Clint.

Romans 12:18 – "*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*"

But Paul's emphasis in today's passage is this, Be Reconciled to God. It changes you and how you live.

Let me give you some application:

To those who already know Christ:

You might ask, "*If I'm already saved, why is Paul urging me to 'be reconciled to God'?*"

It's a fair question — and the answer lies in the depth of the gospel. Yes, if you are in Christ, you are already reconciled — fully, eternally, and securely. But Paul's words in **2 Corinthians 5:20** remind us that reconciliation is not just about our **past salvation**, but about our **present purpose**.

I once asked a friend, when I was a fairly new Christian how often he thinks I need to hear the gospel? And his answer was helpful. He said 'everyday and always.' His point was this, we should always remind ourselves of the gospel and stand in awe at what

God has done through Jesus. Not because it is deserved, but because of the Grace and Mercy of the living God

Don't treat reconciliation as a past event only. The gospel is a daily calling to walk in restored relationship with God through Christ. And that should change how you live, and how you demonstrate a life of reconciliation with others.

To those who don't yet know Christ:

If you're here today and you've never truly trusted in Jesus Christ, I want to speak to you clearly and compassionately:

Paul is talking directly to you.

"We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." (v.20)

This is not a casual suggestion. This is a **plea**. Paul uses a word that means to **beg** — because he understands the eternal weight of this message.

You are separated from God — not because He moved, not because He went away, not because he is wrong, or changed the goalposts, but because of your sin. The Bible says we've all turned away, and that separation leads to death and judgment. But God — rich in mercy — **did something about it**.

"In Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them..." (v.19)

That's the offer: your sins can be forgiven. Your guilt removed. Your relationship with your Creator restored. But only through faith **in Christ**. No other way. No other name.

You don't earn reconciliation. You **receive** it — by trusting in Jesus alone.

Don't wait. This is not a secondary issue. This is **the** issue. Eternity is at stake.

Today, the invitation is open. **Be reconciled to God.**

To those who have heard this message many times but never truly responded:

You know the message. You've heard the gospel. You might you come to church, you go to growth group, you can quote Scripture or even wear the label "Christian." But deep down, your heart is far from God. You've never truly **repented** or surrendered. You know of Christ, but you don't **know** Him.

Paul's plea is for you too:

"Be reconciled to God."

Not just outwardly. Not just by words. But **in your heart** — fully and truly.

Let me give you an example:

Imagine going to the doctor and being given a prescription for a life-threatening illness. The doctor says, “Take this, and it will heal you.” You go to the pharmacy, fill the prescription — but instead of taking it, you bring it home and **put it in a drawer**. You know it’s there. You could even explain what it does. But you never actually take it. That’s what it’s like to hear the gospel again and again — and never respond. It’s like knowing the cure and never applying it.

The medicine won’t help you in the drawer. And the gospel won’t save you unless you receive it by **faith** and allow it to change you from the inside out.

Don’t be numb to the greatest truth in the universe. Don’t play the part of a Christian while remaining separated from God.

“Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart.” (Hebrews 3:15)

This could be the moment — the day when you stop just **knowing** the message and start **living** it.

No matter where you stand — whether you’re a believer needing to walk out your reconciliation with God and others, a seeker who needs to respond in faith, or someone who’s been spiritually numb for far too long — Paul’s words still ring out:

“We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”

To my second point: What then is our Mission:

God has not only reconciled us to Himself through Christ—He has *entrusted us* with the message of that reconciliation. Every believer is called to be Christ’s **ambassador**, carrying the gospel to a broken world. This is our mission. This is our calling.

Let me read again:

*Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. ¹⁹That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, **and he has committed the message of reconciliation to us.***

²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ’s behalf, “Be reconciled to God.” ²¹He made the one who did not know sin to be sin^[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

God has *given* and *committed* something to us: the mission and message of reconciliation. He now speaks through us. That is not a metaphor—it’s a *commission*.

And if you read carefully, Paul calls us to be something very specific, Ambassadors.

In Paul's time, as now, an **ambassador** was a personal representative of a sovereign or country, sent to speak with the full authority of the one who sent them. They don't speak their own opinions. And even though they live in a different country, their role, their job, is to continually speak on behalf of the country or sovereign that sent them.

And why is that important in the context of today's passage. Well, as one commentator puts it:

An ambassador doesn't speak for himself. He speaks for the one who sent him. Christians are not just saved from something, but for something—to represent Christ in the world.

As believers, our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20), and we are here *on mission*. We don't represent ourselves; we represent Jesus Christ. We are His representatives, His messengers of reconciliation in this world.

This means:

- We do not speak our own opinions—we speak God's truth.
- We do not act on our own agenda—we serve God's purposes.
- We do not operate in our own power—we rely on God's Spirit.

Paul says that as ambassadors, **God is making His appeal through us**. That's a staggering reality. When you share the gospel, it's as if *God Himself is pleading with the world through you*: "Be reconciled to God."

It also means that this mission is not just for pastors or missionaries—it's for *every Christian*. If you are "in Christ," you are also *sent by Christ*.

Imagine a lady living abroad as an ambassador for her homeland. She wears the country's colours, speaks its language, and defends its values—even when those around her live differently. She does not forget why she's there: to represent her king, to maintain the honour of her nation, and to deliver messages on behalf of the ruler who sent her.

Now imagine if she decided to act like a citizen of the foreign land instead—abandoning her purpose, blending in, even distorting the king's message. That would be betrayal.

Too often, Christians forget we are ambassadors. We live more like citizens of the culture than representatives of Christ. But the mission is clear: *God has entrusted the message of reconciliation to us*. We are to live it and declare it with boldness, clarity, grace and love.

So, what does being an ambassador mean for you and me?

- **Take ownership of your calling.** This is not optional. You *are* an ambassador. Maybe the question is: are you being a faithful one?
- **Know the message.** Before you can represent Christ, you must understand the gospel deeply: that God made a way for sinners to be reconciled through Christ's death and resurrection. That is why we preach the gospel here and will continue to do so
- **Live the message.** Ambassadors don't just speak the words of the one who sent them, they must live in a way that reflects their king. Your life should *embody* the message of reconciliation—marked by grace, humility, and the truth of Jesus Christ.
- **Stay loyal to your King.** As Paul challenges the Corinthians to renew their commitment to Christ, so must we. We must continually remind ourselves of the great Gospel that saved us. False messages and false allegiances are everywhere. But our loyalty belongs to the One who reconciled us to God at the cost of His blood.

Can I encourage you, if you are a Christian, if you do know what it is to be a new creation in Christ, can I encourage you to think about it this way.

A few years into starting here at Bundy I was encouraged to attend a 'welcoming' training. Now it wasn't just designed for people who did the welcoming at the door, but it was thinking through how we can all be welcoming for new people, encouraging us to all to chat with new people, engage with others we don't usually engage with and, in general, how to have great conversations.

And a question came up, which was – How can I start or continue a conversation when things start to slow down or there is an uncomfortable silence?

And the answer, or answers, which I think is still are wise answers, was – Maybe just ask the question, "What do you do during the week?" or "what does a normal week look like for you?"

So, with that in mind, I was using (and I still use them too) to ask these questions. They are good things to ask.

A few years later I was in a conversation with a guy who had turned up at Bundy and I asked him 'what do you do during the week.' And his answer still sticks with me. His answer was – I am a Christian. I am always a Christian. That is what I do during the week.

He then went on to talk about other things he does, but his first answer was that of what Paul is talking about here. He is an ambassador for Christ. I can't remember what other things he said he did, but I think the point is clear.

As a Christian, your role, your task is to be an Ambassador for Christ first.

Try to think about your own week and maybe change how you see yourself:

- You are an ambassador for Christ who is studying at Uni or school
- You are an ambassador for Christ who works as an engineer
- You are an ambassador for Christ who loves and serves their family at home
- You are an ambassador for Christ who is unsure of what is happening in your life or what direction you have.

Anyway it is, you are an ambassador for Christ first. That then alters how you see yourself. It then alters how you live and act. It then reflects the love that Christ has for you for all to see.

Which leads me to my last point - the Method of Reconciliation.

How are we — as reconciled new creations, as ambassadors for Christ — to extend this ministry of reconciliation to others?

Paul tells us that our method is persuasion, pleading, imploring. These are not cold, distant acts. These are deeply personal, passionate appeals. We are not passive messengers — we are **active representatives** of the King. We are called to **persuade** with reason, to **compel** through love, and to **implore** with urgency.

Let's look again at the start of today's passage:

"Therefore, since we know the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade people. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your consciences... For the love of Christ compels us, since we have reached this conclusion, that one died for all, and therefore all died." (2 Corinthians 5:11–14)

So, yes — we persuade.

Yes — we proclaim.

Yes — we speak the truth in love.

But it's more than just **talking** about Jesus. It's about living in such a way that the message of reconciliation becomes visible in our relationships, our priorities, and our service.

The Gospel doesn't just get us saved — it shapes how we live every day. As Keller notes, Persuading others is not merely about argumentation or apologetics — **it is about the compelling beauty of lives transformed by grace**. New lives, new creations.

That also leads to how we serve. How we serve others, how we steward our gifts, how we treat people in the church and outside of it — all of that either confirms or contradicts the message we proclaim.

John MacArthur once said: “The greatest testimony to the truth of Scripture is the life of the believer.” If we claim reconciliation but live unchanged, we’ve missed the point. But if we live out reconciliation — if we forgive, serve, sacrifice, and love — then our appeal gains power.

So, let me ask:

- **Do you pray** for those who don’t yet know Christ?
- **Do you support and encourage** those who proclaim the Word faithfully — here, in your family, among missionaries?
- **Do your gifts, your resources, your hospitality** reflect that you’ve been reconciled to God?
- **Do your relationships** display humility and forgiveness?

All of these are persuasive. All of these are part of your ministry of reconciliation.

Notice also the **urgency** of this ministry.

Paul doesn’t say, “*Take your time, if you feel like it.*” No — he says we persuade, compel, implore. These are not neutral words. These are the words of a person who understands what’s at stake. Eternity. The glory of God.

Some of us are more naturally bold than others — and yes, some may feel the cost of speaking or acting more acutely, depending on your context. But as was read earlier, *Peter writes* in 1 Peter 3:15:

“...in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.”

We are to live ready — not perfect, but prepared. Ready to **speak**, but also ready to **serve**. Ready to defend, yes, but also ready to **demonstrate**.

This call is not for a select few — it’s for all believers. Not just the pastors, not just the missionaries, not just the extroverts. *All of us*.

You don’t become a new creation in Christ just to drift through life. You were reconciled in order to **reflect and extend** that reconciliation.

Paul continues in verse 14:

“For the love of Christ compels us...”

Notice what drives all of this. Not guilt. Not legalism. Not obligation. **Love**.

We have been loved so greatly that we cannot help but let that love overflow into how we live. As *Keller once put it*, “The gospel produces a unique kind of humility — and a

unique kind of boldness.” It humbles us because we know we didn’t earn this grace — and it emboldens us because we know we’re secure in Christ.

So yes, we **persuade** with words.

But we also **compel** with our witness.

And we **implore** through our actions — through sacrificial service and gospel-centred love.

And as Paul says in verse 20:

“We plead on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”

This is not dry or lifeless. It’s not mechanical evangelism. It’s **pleading born out of love** — the kind of pleading that understands brokenness and knows what Christ can do with it.

So, as ambassadors for Christ:

- Let’s be ready to speak the truth.
- Let’s be eager to reflect the gospel in how we live, because Christ loved us first.
- And let’s be urgent and joyful in our calling — not because we must, but because **His love compels us.**

Let me finish with this story: Corrie ten Boom was a Dutch Christian who, along with her family, hid Jews during the Nazi occupation in World War II. Eventually, she and her family were arrested. Corrie was imprisoned in Ravensbrück concentration camp, where her sister Betsie died due to the horrific conditions.

Years after the war, Corrie was speaking in a church in Munich, sharing the message of God’s forgiveness. After the service, a man approached her. She immediately recognized him: he had been one of the most cruel guards at Ravensbrück — a man who had mocked her sister and contributed to her suffering and death.

He came forward, smiling, and said:

“Fraulein, how good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea! You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk... I was a guard there. But since that time, I have become a Christian. I know God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did... But I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Will you forgive me?”

She later wrote:

“I who had preached so often to the people the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me... I tried to smile. I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I silently prayed, ‘Jesus, help me!’”

Then she wrote:

“I reached out and took his hand. And then an incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.”

Corrie didn't forgive because she was naturally strong, or emotionally ready. She forgave because Christ had first forgiven her. That's the only power that can make enemies into family — the cross of Jesus Christ.

“We are ambassadors for Christ... we implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”