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“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God,” II Corinthians 5:20.

Reconciled to God

Lesson Aim: To encourage believers to become soul-winners.

L141. Date: May 1975. **Text:** II Corinthians 5:11-21. **Topic:** Reconciliation

Have you ever heard news which was just too good to keep? Such is the Christian gospel. Listen to it: “. . . **God . . . hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation,**” II Corinthians 5:18. What news! No wonder it is called “gospel”—good news from God. Such news is, indeed, too good to keep.

Christians are not to keep secret the news of God's redemptive deed in Christ. They are under orders to preach the gospel to every creature in all the world (Mark 16:15). They are ambassadors for Christ, beseeching men in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God (II Corinthians 5:20). Today's lesson will investigate the meaning and application of reconciliation in an effort to encourage believers to become soul-winners.

Always keep in mind that the Christian religion is intended to be a universal religion. It is not limited to an ethnic group, but is extended to both Jews and Gentiles. It is not limited to a geographical area, but is to be spread over the entire earth. It is not limited to a certain period in time, but is to be preached in all generations until the end of the age. It is not limited to a certain segment of society, but is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe. It is impossible to share the gospel with the wrong person, for God is “**not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance,**” II Peter 3:9.

Please make a prayerful approach to today's study that God might instruct, inspire, and send you forth as a witness of His work of reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

I. MEANING OF RECONCILIATION

What does it mean to be reconciled? Simply stated, it means to cause to conform to a standard; to be adjusted to a specified standard.

Suppose you forgot to wind your watch, and it stopped running. The time it showed on its dial would be incorrect. You might wind it and then go to a jewelry store to set it by the correct time according to a chronometer. In doing so, you would be (in a secular sense) “reconciling” your watch to a specified standard.

Once each month you sit with your checkbook and bank records and “reconcile” your account. That is to say, you check your records against those of the bank. If there is a difference in the figures, you make your account conform to the statement provided by your bank.

In each instance, you are bringing your affairs to conform to an authorized standard. Reconciliation means that and nothing more. Spiritually, a sinner is reconciled to God when he is brought to conform to the standard of righteousness which God has set forth. To be reconciled simply means “to be adjusted so as to fit the specified standard.”

II. NEED OF RECONCILIATION

The fact that man needs to be reconciled to God indicates that he does not conform to the standard God has set. Man is a sinner. God is holy. Man must be reconciled to God's holiness, before there can be fellowship.

Romans 5:6-10 sets forth five truths which establish the need for man to be reconciled to God. (1) Man is weak and suffering complete inability to conform to God's standard or make himself acceptable to God. He is “yet without strength,” verse 6. (2) Man is apart from God and so cannot conform to God's standard. He is “ungodly,” verse 6. (3) Man is outside the way God designated, having missed the mark so as to become a “sinner,” verses 7, 8. His weak and separated nature produces impure deeds. (4) Man is subject to God's wrath because of his sins. Salvation makes it possible for him to be “saved from wrath” through Jesus (verse 9). (5) Man is an “enemy” of God, being in open rebellion against Him (verse 10).

“This emphasizes the fact that our ungodliness, and our ignorance, and our weakness, and our sin were translated into overt acts of warfare and rebellion against God. We were not placid in our ignorance and weakness; we were not passive in our sin and ungodliness; but we were virulently active, so that Paul says, ‘We were enemies,’”—J. Dwight Pentecost, **Things**

Which Become Sound Doctrine (Revell).

Man is what he is by nature. That nature, being depraved as a consequence of man's original sin, he must be reconciled in order to meet God's standard of right.

The need for reconciliation is made the more emphatic in that God Himself is the standard by which men are tested. He does not require that one measure himself by another man, but that all men be measured by Himself. No wonder the Bible declares, **“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,”** Romans 3:23.

III. URGENCY OF RECONCILIATION

Two powerful motivations thrust believers into the ministry of reconciliation. They are the fact of judgment and the love of Christ.

The terror of God's judgment upon sin urges believers to be witnesses of reconciliation (verse 11). Read the solemn words: **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men . . .”** verses 10, 11. Christians must account for the quality of their service to Christ. Unbelievers must account for their rejection of Christ. It will be a solemn day for each. Do not look lightly upon judgment. Paul spoke of “the terror of the Lord” when he wrote of the day of accounting. No wonder he persuaded sinners to be reconciled to God as he persuaded saints to be true to Christ.

Be busy about witnessing and soul-winning. You will account to Christ in judgment regarding your diligence, and you may be used of God to reach a sinner to prepare him for the day of reckoning.

The love of Christ urges believers to be witnesses of reconciliation (verse 14). One has correctly caught the spirit of the apostle in translating his words, “The love of Christ leaves us no choice.” It masters believers, drives them, constrains them, and works through them. It is not that they serve because they love Christ. It is rather that they serve because of His great love for them and for all men. His love was so great that He died for all. How tragic then, if the saved do not get the word of His redemptive provision to all for whom He died. So great is His love that Christians no longer live by their own purposes in determining the course of their lives; they commit themselves to live for Him who died for them and rose again. Constrained by such love, they must be witnesses.

IV. BASIS OF RECONCILIATION

Remember that the reconciliation of sinners is God's work. He is the standard to which men must adjust. He alone can provide the basis upon which men are adjusted to Himself. Reconciliation is not man's deed, but God's. It is all of God. Reconciliation is by Jesus Christ. **“ . . . All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ,”**

II Corinthians 5:18. The agent who effects reconciliation of sinners to God is Jesus, God's Son. **“And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement”** (literally, “. . . we have received the reconciliation”), Romans 5:11. Apart from Jesus Christ no person will enter into peaceful relations with God.

Reconciliation is through the death of Jesus Christ. **“ . . . When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son . . . ”** Romans 5.10. More specifically, it was through Jesus' death upon the cross that reconciliation was effected: **“ . . . that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby,”** Ephesians 2:16. Whether Jew or Gentile, men meet God through what Jesus did for them upon the cross. Reconciliation is secured by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Reconciliation is because of Christ's identification with sinners. It is not enough that Jesus died. The more important thing is that He died FOR sinners. Paul's plea to sinners is tersely stated in the words, **“ . . . We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God,”** verse 20. He then explained how such reconciliation is possible: **“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him,”** verse 21. When Jesus Christ identified Himself with sinners, by taking upon Himself their sins and going to the cross to suffer in their stead, He made reconciliation possible.

One can be adjusted to God's spiritual standard through Christ, by His blood shed in dying upon the cross, and by His identification with believers. That is good news which everyone needs to hear. **“Be ye reconciled to God.”**

IV. CONSEQUENCES OF RECONCILIATION

There is a change in life-center for one who is justified (verse 15). Whereas he had formerly been the center of the world for himself, with all life interests revolving around him, suddenly Christ becomes the center of life. **“ . . . He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again,”**

verse 15. The life of the once crucified but now living Christ is lived through the reconciled believer. “Not I but Christ,” becomes the theme of his life.

There is a change of perspective for one who is justified (verse 16). He no longer judges solely upon the terms of the flesh. Fleshly standards are replaced by spiritual standards. People are not viewed strictly as young or old, male or female, rich or poor, cultured or unlettered. The man who is reconciled to God looks upon people with spiritual interest. The Christian looks at people through the eyes of the Christ who has reconciled him to God.

There is a change in life's motive power for one who is justified (verse 17). What a change reconciliation made. So far was man from God that he became “a new creation” in Christ. Being new in character, the “old things” of his unreconciled state passes away once and for all. His attitude toward all things became new and different because he himself is a new and different person. He has entered into a fixed condition of seeing all things differently. His changed relationship with God created a changed evaluation of all. From henceforth “all things are become new.”

There is a change in the life-work of one who is justified (verse 18). Having been reconciled, the believer becomes a reconciler. God reconciled him to Himself and then committed to him “the ministry of reconciliation.” The result is that each believer becomes an “ambassador for Christ,” verse 20. An ambassador is one who represents another who is not personally present. God is not visibly present to present the gospel to sinners, so each believer becomes an ambassador of God to tell men that they can be conformed to God's standard through Jesus Christ. The believer's work is not to tell sinners they need to be reconciled to God, but to announce to them that they can be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. The pressing question you should face is, “What kind of an ambassador of Jesus Christ am I?”

V. WORD OF RECONCILIATION

To each Christian, God has given the ministry (service, work) of reconciliation. It is not that He gives that work to a few chosen preachers, evangelists, or missionaries. “The one who occupies the pulpit does not have one bit more responsibility in the ministry of reconciliation than the child of God who sits in the pew”—Pentecost. A life lived in obedience to God will share in getting out the gospel that men may be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

The “word of reconciliation” is simply the message of what God has

done in Jesus. What was that? **“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them . . .”** verse 19. That is the gospel. It is the offer of grace expressed in forgiveness of sins upon the basis of a vicarious sacrifice. You know the “word of reconciliation.” With whom will you share it today?

A solemn obligation rests upon reconciled men to become reconcilers. Verse 20 declares that they are “ambassadors” (personal representatives) of God. It indicates that they are speaking in behalf of God, the very words of God, **“ . . . as though God did beseech you by us . . .”** It expresses the purpose and result of their ministry—men are “reconciled to God.” What a sin, if one fails in that place of service. What a solemn obligation Christians have before men and God.

The “word of reconciliation” is expressed with urgent pleadings. Observe the terms, “beseech” and “pray,” in verse 20. They indicate intensity of concern. Christian witnessing is no careless matter. It is serious business, deserving deepest concern.

Tell it! The news is too good to keep. Tell it like it is! The news is absolute truth which needs no change. Tell it to every person! There is not one outside the offer of God's reconciling provision in Jesus. Tell it every day! There is no time when the gospel is invalid or ineffective. You tell it! Do not leave the privilege of introducing others to Jesus to your fellow Christians.

Here is your commission in a paraphrase of II Corinthians 5:20, 21: “As Christ's ambassadors, God is using us to speak to sinners and to urge them, as though God Himself were speaking through us, to be reconciled to God. For He made the sinless Christ a sin offering for us, that we might receive the righteousness of God by faith in Him.”

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us . . .” II Corinthians 5:20.

Questions

1. What is reconciliation?
2. Why do men need to be reconciled to God?
3. Why is man reconciled to God and not God reconciled to man?
4. What urges Christians to be soul-winners?
5. What does the death of Jesus have to do with reconciliation?
6. How was Jesus in His death identified with sinners?
7. What does II Corinthians 5:15 mean?
8. What is the “word of reconciliation”?

9. How do you share in the “ministry of reconciliation”?
10. How can you put the lesson truths into practice this week?