

**“The Mission of Reconciliation”**  
**2 Corinthians 5:17-21**  
**Mercy Hill Church | March 17, 2024**

**Big Idea: As God has reconciled us to Him through Christ Jesus, He has also commissioned us to be His ambassadors in His mission of reconciliation.**

**Background & Overview to 2 Corinthians**

- 2 Corinthians written by the Apostle Paul to the Corinthian Church around 55 A.D from Macedonia.
- 2 Corinthians was not the 2<sup>nd</sup> letter written by Paul to the Corinthian church but rather the 4<sup>th</sup> letter
  - 1<sup>st</sup> letter mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9, 2<sup>nd</sup> letter: 1 Corinthians, 3<sup>rd</sup> letter mentioned in 2 Corinthians 2:3-4, and 4<sup>th</sup> letter: 2 Corinthians.
- Apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to defend the integrity of his ministry and call them to turn from false teaching and return and live according to the Gospel.
- This morning’s passage the Apostle Paul is reminding the Corinthian church of God’s work in them and God’s work through them – God’s mission of reconciliation.

**1. God’s Work In Us: What God Has Done & Is Doing (vv.17, 18a, 19a, 21)**

- Indicative (What God has done) => Imperative (What God calls & commands us to do)
- **We are a New Creation in Christ (v.17)**
  - New life, new way of thinking, seeing, living, new values and priorities – “was blind, now I see,” dead to sin, alive in Christ (relation to Christ, union in Christ)!
  - George Guthrie Quote: “The love of Christ constrains [cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14]; those alive in Christ live for Christ by Christ’s principles and mandates. The old, worldly ways of evaluating others have passed away, with the old system of self-centeredness...”
    - Scripture talks about the “old self” and “new self” (cf. Ephesians 4:22-24)
- **We are Reconciled to God Through Jesus (vv.18a, 19a, 21)**
  - “All this is from God” – not our work, our plan or our initiative, but God’s!
  - The following verses then unpack God’s work in us, what God has done:
  - V.18a “...who through Christ reconciled us to himself...”
    - Why do we need to be reconciled? Because of our “trespasses”...
      - V.19a “that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them...”
      - How does God not hold our trespasses (or “transgression”, synonymous with “sin”) us?
        - V.20 “For our sake He (God) made him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him (Jesus) we might become the righteousness of God
        - The “Great Exchange”
  - The Gospel message: the grand Biblical narrative of Creation, Fall, Redemption, New Creation.
  - “Reconciliation” – key word in this passage (5x)
  - Reconciliation defined: “reestablishment of an interrupted or broken relationship” or the “exchange of hostility for a friendly relationship.”
    - Romans 5:10-11 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his

life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation

- Illustration: Library Fines/Speeding Ticket
- The Mission of God: Reconciliation
  - God takes the initiative to reconcile humanity, us, to Himself (cf. John 3:16)
  - To seek and save, to reconcile all
    - Colossians 1:19-20 For in him [Jesus] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.
- Mercy Hill Church Mission Statement:
  - Mercy Hill Church exists to help restore us to God, neighbor and city through the good news of Jesus Christ
- The Missional (Sending) God:
  - God the Father sent Jesus:
    - John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and *Jesus Christ whom you have sent*.
    - 1 John 4:9-10 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, *that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him*. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
  - Jesus sent the Holy Spirit:
    - John 14:26 But the Helper, *the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name*, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.
    - John 15:26 "But when *the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father*, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.
    - John 16:7 Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, *the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.*

## 2. **God's Work Through Us: What God Calls Us To Be & Do (vv.18b, 19b, 20)**

- Jeff Vanderstelt Quote: "Think of it this way: What God has done *to us*, He now wants to do *through us to the world*. Our new *being* in Christ leads us to our new *doing* for Christ by His power."
- **We are Saved to be Sent**, Rescued to Rescue, Reconciled to Reconcile, Blessed to be a Blessing, Shown the Way to Show the Way, etc. (**vv.18b, 19b**)
  - Genesis 12:1-3 – Abraham called, sent – blessed to be a blessing
  - Jesus & The Disciples: Mark 1:17, 5:19, 6:7, Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8
  - John 17:18 As you [God the Father] sent [Jesus] me into the world, so I have sent them [disciples] into the world
  - John 20:21 Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."
  - Funnel (vs. Bottle) Illustration
- Christopher Wright Quote: "It is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world but that God has a church for His mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission – God's mission" – to spread the glory of God, for all people to worship Him!
- **Our Identity as Christ's Ambassadors (v.20)**
  - We live according to how we see (and what we believe about) ourselves

- As Christians, disciples of Jesus, people saved by grace, reconciled back to God through Jesus, one of the “identities” we have is an “ambassador” (or “diplomat”)
  - Ambassadors are sent by the leaders (government)
- Only other occurrence used by Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:20 “for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”
- **1) Representatives (Actions): Gospel Demonstration (Show)**
  - An ambassador represents his/her respective country – their behavior, their conduct, their actions, their lives – in a foreign country.
  - They are present and live among with other people
- **2) Messengers (Words): Gospel Proclamation (Say)**
  - An ambassador also speaks on behalf of the country he/she represents. Does not convey their own opinions, but the interests, concerns, opinions of the country (and/or its leaders).
    - What good is an ambassador if she/he never speaks? What good is an ambassador who never leaves their own country and/or just stays at home while in the foreign country?
  - Primary purpose of an ambassador is for peace – prevent wars, work on relationships between their respective countries...the work of bridge-building – reconciliation!
  - As ambassadors, the message we proclaim, the message we share is the Gospel, the word of God.
  - Sound familiar? Last week’s sermon on Acts 6 by Nick on what is a healthy church:
    - Implication #1: A Healthy Church Unapologetically Prioritizes the Ministry of the Word
    - Implication #2: A Healthy Church Passionately Promotes the Ministry of Gospel Deed
- Some terms:
  - Outreach – broad term which involves the church reaching out to (engaging) with non-Christians – can be through actions (gospel demonstration) and/or words (gospel proclamation).
  - Evangelism – “Sharing or proclaiming the gospel”
  - Missions – is what carries the Gospel to all nations
    - “Narrower term usually used for the work of the church in reaching across cultural, ethnic or geographic barriers to advance the work of making disciples of all nations.”
    - Missions is part of the mission of God
  - Missional – “Living as one sent out by God”
    - “Used to distinguish the ministry of the church that happens beyond its four walls, as opposed to caring for its own.”
- As ambassadors for Christ, we have been entrusted by God with the mission (ministry) of reconciliation.
  - 1) Responsibility – a duty, a task...perhaps may even feel like a burden at times?
  - 2) Privilege (Honor) – God has chosen and entrusted and given us this privilege and honor of representing Him!
    - Ambassadors in the U.S are nominated by the President, as the highest ranking diplomat.
- “Us” “We” “Our” Identity as Ambassadors: The Church (All Christians – every Christian, everywhere)
  - Not just pastors, elders, deacons, missionaries – but all Christians – the church!
    - John Piper Quote: “The Church is a Battleship, not a cruise ship. We are to be engaging the world with the Gospel not making ourselves comfortable.”
    - J.D. Grear’s Gaining by Losing: Church as a battleship: church made for mission and its success should be seen in how loudly and dramatically it fights the

mission...however it implies that it is the church institution that does most of the fighting...they see the programs, services and ministries of the church as the primary instruments of mission

- 3<sup>rd</sup> metaphor: Church as an Aircraft Carrier. Like battleships, aircraft carriers engage in battle but not in the same way. Aircraft carriers equip planes to carry the battle elsewhere...
- Not just western Christians or us churches here in the U.S. – but churches and Christians everywhere!
  - *Polycentric Missiology* by Allen Yeh
    - Missions used to be: “From the West to the Rest”
      - Now, 21<sup>st</sup> century mission: “From Everyone to Everywhere”
    - “Christianity the only religion in the world where the Scriptures are not written in the language of its founder – Jesus spoke Aramaic, writers like Luke, Paul, etc. wrote in koine Greek – Christianity is the only religion without one majority racial/ethnic group and without a geographical center (re: Mecca, Jerusalem or Salt Lake City) since the people are the temple of God...”
  - *Christian Mission: A Concise Global History* by Edward L. Smither (2019)
    - Mission from Africa: By 2005, > 5,000 Nigerians connected to 90 different organizations were ministering in 65 countries around the world including China, Brazil and Bolivia
    - Mission from Latin America: By 2009, >10,000 Latin Americans have been sent in mission serving with 462 international or Latin American organizations. While many are serving cross-culturally within their own countries, ~10% are serving among the unreached peoples in Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim contexts
  - Examples of other countries sending missionaries to the U.S. – in fact here to the Bay Area!
- Again, what God has called and commanded us to do, He has first done for us. God’s work through us is because of God’s work in us – when we have grasped the Gospel, we will be compelled and motivated to share the Gospel! When we understand God’s love for us, His love will overflow in love for others. (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:14-15)
  - Penn Jillete (Atheist Magician/Performer) Video Quote: “I’ve always said that I don’t respect people who don’t proselytize (evangelize). I don’t respect that at all. If you believe that there’s a heaven and a hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life, and you think that it’s not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward—and atheists who think people shouldn’t proselytize and who say just leave me along and keep your religion to yourself—how much do you have to hate somebody to *not* proselytize (share the gospel)? How much do you have to hate somebody to believe everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?...I mean, if I believed, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that a truck was coming at you, and you didn’t believe that truck was bearing down on you, there is a certain point where I tackle you. And this is *more* important than that.”...he cared enough about me to give me a Bible.
  - Reflection: in what ways have our hearts grown cold (or perhaps even
- Example of St. Patrick:

- “There is a broad consensus, however, on the basic outline of his life. Patrick—who lived his adult life in the 400s—was actually British, not Irish. He was born into a Christian family with priests and deacons for relatives, but by his own admission, he did not grow up a good Christian. As a teenager he was carried by Irish raiders into slavery in Ireland. His faith deepened during this six-year ordeal. Upon escaping Ireland, he went back home to Britain. While with his family, he received a dream in which God called him to return to Ireland to convert the pagans there to Christianity.
- Over decades, Patrick is reported to have made “many thousands of converts.” He evangelized in cities and in the countryside. He encouraged the monastic way of life, ordained priests, and planted churches. Patrick was also, to use Fletcher’s phrase, “soaked in the Bible.” To be steeped in the Scriptures was not unheard of. What was new was Patrick’s understanding of the Bible’s missionary mandate. Patrick understood that God wanted the church to win the nations of the world for Christ. Fletcher argues that no one within western Christendom had been possessed by such convictions. As far as our evidence goes, Patrick was the first person in Christian history to take the scriptural injunctions literally; to grasp that teaching all nations meant teaching even barbarians who lived beyond the border of the frontiers of the Roman Empire. This is Patrick’s legacy: a pious and zealous desire to see the Great Commission fulfilled, even (or especially) the very same Irish who had once made him their slave.”

**Big Idea: As God has reconciled us to Him through Christ Jesus, He has also commissioned us to be His ambassadors in His mission of reconciliation.**

**Reflection Questions:**

- Why is it important to get the order correct (what God has done and what God calls us to do) in understanding and applying this passage? What happens when we get it backwards?
- How is reconciliation at the heart of the Gospel & God's mission? What does it look like for you to live out your identity and calling as an ambassador (of Christ)?
- In what ways has your heart been closed off (or perhaps even hardened) to those others (esp. those who don't know Jesus)? Why?
- What next step(s) (or areas of growth) is God perhaps calling you to in the area of outreach (re: evangelism, making disciples, serving, volunteering and/or missions)?
- Parent Corner: What does it look like to for you to see and raise your child(ren) not just as your child(ren) but as "Christ's ambassadors"? What are some ways you can cultivate a heart of reconciliation and outreach in your child(ren)?