

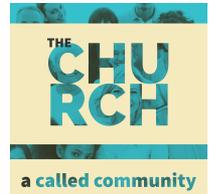
The Church: Called Out as a Reconciling Community

Passage: Various, 2 Cor. 5:17-21

Calvary Baptist Church of Holland

Sunday July 30th, 2017

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Key Goals: (Know) To understand the importance of reconciliation. (Feel) To appreciate reconciliation. (Do) become a force for reconciliation.

Introduction: This morning we are continuing our series on the church. We began with the very core of the church, Jesus Christ. He is what “church” is all about. He is The Pearl of Great Price that we sell everything to attain. He is the treasure hidden in the field; our love for Him surpasses our love for anything or anyone else in this world! It’s so surpassing, that our love for family looks like hate. The church is a Christ-centered community. Last week we looked at the church being a “new creation” community. We are a people of newness, new life, new hearts, new minds. And because “in Christ” all things have become new, we are no longer enslaved to sin or this world. We have been set free in Christ!

I would like to read our passage together this morning, and every time we read any form of the word “reconciled” I want you to put a finger up. We are going to count the number of times this word shows up in these five verses.

2 Corinthians 5:17–21 (ESV) ¹⁷ *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* ¹⁸ *All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;* ¹⁹ *that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.* ²⁰ *Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.* ²¹ *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

καταλλάγῃναι (kata-ang–GAY-nai) is the Greek word for “reconcile” used in this passage. It communicates the idea of a “restoration of a proper interpersonal relationship after it had been disrupted or broken.”¹ Enemies turned to friends, hurt feelings turned to forgiveness, hate turned to love.

It worked like this in Biblical times: Two parties in a bargain settled their differences, or were ‘reconciled,’ by one paying the exchange or balance to the other. Or two parties at enmity settle their differences, or were ‘reconciled,’ by one making a satisfaction to the other. In each instance the transaction was called in Greek καταλλαγή.² Jesus paid our “exchange” or “satisfaction” price on the cross thus “reconciling” us to God.

Interestingly, this Greek word is only ever used of man – never of God. God reconciles us, or the world, to Himself through Jesus. God Himself is never in need of being reconciled. Nowhere in Scripture do we ever see God reconciling Himself to the world. Whenever reconciliation comes up, we are always the ones being reconciled. (R. 5:10, 2 C. 5:20).

¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 501.

² Walvoord, John F. Reconciliation. <https://bible.org/seriespage/12-reconciliation>



We were the enemies of God who needed to be changed. The apostle Paul said that before reconciliation we were “powerless, ungodly, sinners, and enemies; we were under God's wrath” (Rom 5:9). But because of Christ and the reconciliation He brings, we become new creatures, once enemies but now friends.³

This 2 Corinthians passage can be boiled down to two key messages for the church.

1. Foundationally, church is a community of people reconciled to God through Christ.

All of the newness that we talked about last week comes through our reconciled relationship with God. This is the “good news” part of the gospel. We are no longer strangers and aliens from God. Through our Lord's death, the justice of God is satisfied; the foundation of the church is this new relationship. Everything else the church is to be and do is built on the foundation of our new and glorious right relationship with God.⁴

2. Functionally, the stated ministry of the church is reconciliation.

Verse 18 is so clear: *“All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...”*

What is the “ministry of reconciliation?” It is a “service” or a ministry that happens on multiple levels. First, the ministry of reconciliation is sharing the gospel (Mark 16:15). God does not want to us to be separated from Him, but rather to experience a renewed relationship through Christ. We, the church, are to be God's ambassadors to get the message of the Gospel to the world. Look at verse 20... *“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.”*

Secondly, the ministry of reconciliation is a pursuit of reconciliation with each other. Last week we saw that one cannot biblically separate being a “new creation” from being actively engaged in the church. Here is something else we cannot separate. You cannot separate being reconciled with God from pursuing reconciliation with men. Matthew 5:23–24 (ESV) ²³ *So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,* ²⁴ *leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

³ Friedrich Büchsel, [“Ἀλλόσσω, Ἀντάλλαγμα, Ἄπ- Δι-, Κατάλλασσω, Καταλλαγή, Ἀποκατ-, Μεταλλάσσω.”](#) ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 255.

⁴ The difficulty of helping people reconcile with God is so few of us feel like the need it. So many think, “I may not completely live for God, but, I am certainly not his enemy.” Except, when you do things that you know displeases God, and you do it without any guilt, and you do the same thing again and again, secretly savoring your sin. What does that prove? Doesn't it prove that in your heart you are secretly rebel against God? Doesn't prove that you are at best disloyal? “By their fruits you shall know them,” is our Lord's own test (Matt 7:16-20). Look, at the fruits of your life, what do they tell you? Are you a converted, committed, reconciled Christ follower or no?

Would I be mistaken if I said, you think the Bible is boring? Isn't it true you would rather do almost anything than spend Sunday mornings in church? Put this to your conscience... Don't you really think that being a committed Christ follower is boring? When you think of “pleasure” aren't you really thinking of sin? Come on, wouldn't you really be happier if there were no God at all? No commandments, no rules, no judgment, no Jesus... Don't you really want to make your own rules?

If that is you, I'm sorry, but you don't really love God! The truth of it is that you would destroy God, if you could, so that you would be free to do whatever you wanted to do.

Let's be serious. If this is you, you need to be reconciled to God.



My favorite passages in the Bible tend to be the passages that I first learned in Sunday school. Turn with me to Luke Chapter 19. Let's look at one of the best reconciliation stories in the Bible. Luke 19:1-10 (ESV) ¹ [Jesus] entered Jericho and was passing through. ² And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich.

If we were Jewish we would all chuckle every time we read these first two verses. A tax collector with the name Zacchaeus would have been a hilarious joke. You probably know that tax collectors in Israel were viewed as traitorous crooks who worked for Rome. What you may not know is that Zacchaeus means "purity," as in moral purity. Can you hear the sarcastic comments in the town square? "Well, I need to go see "Mr. Purity" about my taxes. Verses 3 & 4: *And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature.* ⁴ *So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.*

He wants to see Jesus, but you get the sense that he is more than just curious because Jesus had a reputation of being Rabbi that *"ate with tax collectors and sinners"* (Mark 2:13-17). In fact, Matthew, one of Jesus' disciples was a former tax collector. Is there hope for Mr. Purity? ⁵ *And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today."* ⁶ *So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully.*

If there was ever a man who needed to be reconciled to God, it would have been Zacchaeus. Instead of waiting for Zacchaeus to make the first move, Jesus takes the initiative. He calls him by name and invited himself into his house. ⁷ *And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."* It is almost impossible for me to communicate the social capital Jesus burned with this one move, and Zacchaeus would have known it. Jesus' bold first move causes Zacchaeus to put his faith in Jesus. But look closely how Luke lets us know this. Verses 8-10: ⁸ *And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold."* ⁹ *And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham."* ¹⁰ *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

Did you catch what happened? Zacchaeus' faith produced an immediate reconciliation with God. Jesus tells us explicitly that "salvation has come to this house." Zacchaeus was a new person, the sarcasm is gone. He has been made right with God through Jesus. But there is more! Without being told, Zacchaeus gives to the poor and makes restitution to those he has swindled. The ministry of reconciliation is believers taking the initiative to build bridges of forgiveness, compassion and unity with God and with each other.

I would like to wrap this morning up with two very specific challenges for this week.

1. I challenge you to take the initiative to reconcile with a fellow believer. Be like Zacchaeus and don't wait. If you know you have caused a rift, make it right today, this week. Don't wait. God has given you the ministry of reconciliation! Swallow your pride, seek forgiveness, pay your debt, say I'm sorry, shake a hand. Pay the price it will take to restore the relationship.

2. I challenge you to initiate three gospel conversations this week. Jesus took the initiative and reached out to Zacchaeus and his response was almost immediate. I guarantee you that there are people you know who are feeling far away from God, who long to know him as intimately as you do. Initiate three conversations! Let me help by giving you . . .



3 Non-Awkward Ways to Begin a Gospel Conversation.

“How was your weekend?” – Mine was great. At church my mind was blown when we started talking about reconciliation...

I’ve been thinking about praying for people. **“When was the last time someone really prayed for you?”** – as you each share a story you can share when you prayed to receive Christ.

“Do you trust religious people?” This question always starts a good conversation! The answers can lead right into a discussion about trusting Jesus verses trusting “religion.”

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