

Church as Ambassadors of Reconciliation
2 Corinthians 5:17-21
Week 3

Opening

Ask if anyone would like to open in prayer. They can pray on their own or use the prayer printed below. It also might be a good idea to reach out to a group member prior to your meeting and ask them ahead of time if they'd be willing to open in prayer. That's a great way to encourage participation without putting anyone on the spot.

Holy God, as we study Your Word and reflect on Your Church, we pray that the power of the Spirit would be at work to connect and renew us. Give us wisdom and insight and strengthen our bonds with one another and You. In the name of our risen Lord we pray, Amen.

Depending on time constraints you may want to take a bit of extra time to check in with folks and see how they're doing. You could also wait and do this at the end of the session before closing in prayer.

Check-in question

Archbishop William Temple said the Church, "Is the only society in the world which exists for the benefit of those who are not its members."

- **Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?**

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

**The Message translation is printed below or you can read from your own Bible

The old life is gone; a new life emerges! Look at it! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you.

²¹How? you ask. In Christ. God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God.

BACKGROUND

Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church was written only about a year after 1 Corinthians. It seems that false teachers had infiltrated the group of young believers and some were questioning

the authority of Paul's teaching. Commentaries agree that this is an autobiographical letter in which Paul provides proof of his calling as a disciple of Christ and teaches believers the importance of serving God with a sincere heart. This letter was sent to defend against the claims made against him and to show believers the truth of the Gospel.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 Paul teaches that being "in Christ" results in a person becoming a "new creation"! God has provided salvation and reconciliation for us through the sacrifice of His Son. We now have a new identity as a son or daughter of God. We also have a new responsibility to present to others that same offer of reconciliation with God. We are now representatives of God... **ambassadors**.

When I served as a youth pastor, and still today when I serve as a chaperone, I make it a point to remind the kids that when we're away on mission trips or camps, we are representing not only ourselves, but our church, and Jesus Christ everywhere we go. This didn't just apply to the work sites and "official places", but also when we'd just make a quick stop for lunch at Chick-fil-a. People see how we act and hear what we say and that reflects on our God.

In 2 Corinthians 5:20, Paul reminds the Corinthian church that they were "ambassadors for Christ." An ambassador can be described as someone who represents his/her government while living in a foreign country. The writer of Hebrews reveals that, even though our physical lives are spent here, "...this world is not our permanent home..." (Hebrews 13:14 NLT). As ambassadors, Paul continues, believers are to be agents of reconciliation. Our task is to show others by the way that we live that Jesus has changed our lives and to let them know that same reconciliation is available to them.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN AMBASSADOR

The word "ambassador" implies a *role* in the kingdom...a critical purpose. Though we are citizens, we are not *merely* citizens. Under a good monarchy, a citizen's job is merely to work the land, give money for the good of the kingdom, follow the laws, and perhaps help stand against invasion in extreme circumstances. If this were merely our role in the Kingdom of God, our job here on earth would be merely to persist as believers until we die, attending church and Bible studies regularly, tithing to the church's work, being "good Christians", and perhaps taking a quiet stand against cultural values which violate our faith.

Yet, we are not *merely* citizens. We are ambassadors. Ambassadors do not *just* live off the fat of the land. They know the desires and mind of the king *intimately* and thoroughly. They have the best interests of the kingdom at heart. Their every action no longer represents them personally, it represents the kingdom, and in particular, the *king* who has sent them. When they speak, it is their king's words. When they act, it is their king's will.¹

¹<https://peacelutheran.net/2-corinthians-516-20-ambassador/>

- **How do you feel seeing yourself as an ambassador, not just a citizen, of God's kingdom? What does that mean to you?**

MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

The ministry of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5:18 refers to the work believers have been given to do and the message they declare: you can have a restored relationship with God through Jesus. The verse says this: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation."

The ministry of reconciliation involves the proclamation of the gospel and its assurance that forgiveness of sin is available in Christ. Sin prevents us from having a relationship with God, but Jesus' perfect sacrifice on the cross made atonement for sin (Hebrews 2:17) and brought harmony to mankind's relationship with Him. Jesus reconciled us to God. Now we can proclaim that people can repent of their sin and be right with God again through faith in Jesus (Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:20–21).

We need reconciliation with God because our relationship with Him was broken. God is holy and righteous, and our sin separates us from Him (Isaiah 59:2). Sin made us His enemies (Romans 5:10). On the cross, Jesus took our sin upon Himself, satisfying God's justice. Jesus' death made it possible for us to have peace with God, as 2 Corinthians 5:19 says, "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them." Now we can be called God's "friends" (John 15:15) and Jesus' "brothers and sisters" (Hebrews 2:11). Those who have been justified through faith (Romans 5:1) by Jesus' blood (Romans 5:9) no longer have their sins counted against them. They are reconciled with God.

- **Above are several different ways of talking about the "gospel". Each of these scriptures gives us an idea of what Jesus' death and resurrection means for us and our ministry of reconciliation. How would you sum this up? How would you define the gospel to someone who has not heard it before?**

God has given believers the ministry of reconciliation; that is, He uses us to tell the world that they can be reconciled to God through Christ. In this way, we become "Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Verse 19 describes this ministry of reconciliation as proclaiming "the *message* of reconciliation." The message we are to share with the world is this: "Be reconciled to God" (verse 20). We are to tell people of the wonderful opportunity they have to be made right with God through Jesus. We implore them to believe in Christ. Sins do not count against those who are reconciled to God through Christ, because "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (verse 21).

This ministry of reconciliation is a big responsibility. God is "making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). The ministry we've been given to turn hearts toward God is urgent and it is vital—it's truly a matter of life and death. Jesus paid the price for our reconciliation because God loves us (John 3:16), so we must share this message of reconciliation in love, and our lives need

to reflect our message (Ephesians 4:1). Jesus is the One who saves, and the Holy Spirit is the One who convicts the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:8), yet we have been given the privilege of being ambassadors for Christ.

Every believer plays a part in this ministry of reconciliation. One plants; one waters, and God brings growth (1 Corinthians 3:7). As we proclaim the gospel, we act as peacemakers, and God blesses such (Matthew 5:9). We tell and live out His message of reconciliation, lives are changed, and God gets the glory.²

- **How have you seen the Church embody this ministry of reconciliation?**
- ***“The ministry we’ve been given to turn hearts toward God is urgent and it is vital – it’s truly a matter of life and death.” Do you feel this urgency? How might FPC be even more intentional about spreading the Good News of the Gospel? How might YOU be more intentional in your own life?***

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What from this passage confuses, inspires, or resonates with you? Perhaps hearing it read from a different translation caused you to notice a new word or phrase.
2. What does this passage tell us about God? What does it tell us about humanity?
3. Were there stories or images you took away from Ryan’s sermon on Sunday that helped you better understand this part of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians?
4. If your primary vocation is to be an ambassador, a minister of reconciliation, how should this change the way you live? John Stott said that every Christian is a missionary cleverly disguised as mechanic, teacher, or project manager. How does this quote change the way you see your vocation?
5. Do you realize you, right where you’re serving, you are a citizen of a heavenly kingdom and you are a representative of a heavenly King? He has sent you to that city where you live. He sent you to that community. He sent you to that neighborhood. He has sent you to that office, to that job. He has sent you to this or that place today where you find yourself right now and He has sent you there for a reason. How does that truth affect the way you live and interact with people every day?
6. After reading (and re-reading) this text, listening to the sermon, and discussing it with your COB, how might God be calling you to act or think differently (this can be as broad or narrow as you’d like)?

Closing

²<https://www.gotquestions.org/ministry-of-reconciliation.html>

Check in if you haven't already done so and ask for any prayer requests. Encourage group members to write down these requests and follow up as necessary.

As your group prays, take time to try to name gifts in other members of the group or those you recognize in yourself and thank God for those.