

The Ministry of Reconciliation

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

Code: 47-38

Let's open our Bibles to the Word of God this morning. In our continuing study of 2 Corinthians we find ourselves in chapter 5, looking at verses 18 through 21...2 Corinthians chapter 5 verses 18 through 21. The title of this section, "The Ministry of Reconciliation...The Ministry of Reconciliation."

Many pastors and many preachers seem to be struggling and groping to find or form a clear statement and direction for their ministry. Perhaps we've asked the questions that need not to be asked, such as...what is the preacher's mission?...what is the preacher's priority?...because here it is to abundantly clear what the answer to those questions really is. In spite of the clarity with which Scripture preaches its message to us about the priority for our message, we have an almost endless variety of suggestions about methods and means and strategies and styles and approaches to ministry. And sometimes we can get caught up in that to the degree that we miss the main thing. The main thing is distinctively articulated in this passage.

In fact, it's a very simple passage. It's not a complex one. It's not particularly difficult to interpret, to discern, or to apply. It is definitive in every sense. It lays down for us what the objective and goal and priority of our life and ministry has to be. It delineates for us our responsibility in the world before us, as we represent the Lord Jesus Christ and it does so in no uncertain terms.

Let me read to you this great text, and you follow along. Starting in verse 18. "Now all these things are from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Five times in those brief verses some form of the word "reconciliation" is used. That then defines the theme of these verses, it is all about the ministry of reconciliation. The text and the term itself forms the heart and soul of our responsibility, particularly those of us who are preachers. God has called us to preach the message of reconciliation. It is our duty then to tell people they can be reconciled to God. Our mission, to bring the message of reconciliation to sinners, to preach to them the gospel, the good news, the evangel, that the relationship of hostility, the relationship of hatred, the relationship of animosity, the relationship of enmity, the relationship of alienation between God and sinful man can

be totally changed so that enemies can become forever friends. That is the gospel. That is the good news. It is possible for sinners to be reconciled to God. And it is our calling to preach that reconciliation.

It is then the greatest work in the world, for it deals with the greatest issue in the world. It is the greatest calling, it is the greatest privilege to be given the responsibility to preach the message of reconciliation. That's what we live for. That's what we die for, that's what we preach for, that's what we serve for, that's what we nurture the saints for, in order that in the end the message of reconciliation might effectively reach sinners. And certainly we would all agree that no message equals this one in importance, so that the Apostle says we have been given, the end of verse 18, the ministry of reconciliation, the diakoneon(?), the service of reconciliation. We are waiters, that's what the word often was used to express, and we bring to the table of sinners the meal of reconciliation. We serve them the truth of reconciliation.

Again down in verse 19 at the end of the verse, it says, "He has committed to us the word of reconciliation." Literally, "he has committed to us" means he has placed in us. Once we've been called to preach, once we've been called to proclaim, we have been given the word of reconciliation.

Just a brief note about that. The term "word" here is logos, it really can be a synonym for "message." But it carries even something beyond that. "Logosin ancient times indicated not just a word or a message, but it indicated what is true and trustworthy, as opposed to what was, on the other hand, muthos, not logos, but muthos, muthosmeaning myth. Muthosdescribed what was fictitious, what was spurious, what was not verifiable. Its very opposite was logos, what was true and trustworthy.

Socrates, for example, declares that a particular story is no fictitious muthos, but is a genuine logos, hence the term logos, carries with it like a kind of overtone the implication of genuineness, of truthfulness. It then is peculiarly appropriate as a synonym for the gospel which indeed is truth and not myth. We have then been given in a world of religious myths the truth, the truth about how men can be reconciled to God. And that, of course, is the most needed message because apart from that reconciliation men will spend eternity in burning hell.

If you were to look at Acts 13:26, and we'll not take the time to do that, you would hear the Apostle Paul refer to the logosof salvation, the message of salvation. If you were to look at 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 18 you would hear the Apostle Paul refer to the logosof the cross, or the word of the cross which to those who are perishing is foolishness but to those who believe it is salvation. If you were to look at Philippians 2:16 you would read about the logosof life, the word of life which is what we hold forth.

Our message then is a message of salvation. It is a message of the cross. It is a message of life. It is a message of reconciliation. And opposed to all the myths that exist in the world, it is the truth

about salvation, it is the truth about the cross. It is the truth about life with God. And it is the truth about reconciliation. This was the heart of Paul's preaching. To go back to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 17, Paul says, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech that the cross of Christ should not be made void." To adulterate or to at all alter the simple straight-forward message of reconciliation in the cross is somehow to render that cross null and void. And though the word of the cross may be to those who are perishing foolishness, to us who are being saved, it is indeed the power of God.

And so, Paul was committed to the straightforward, direct proclamation of the word of reconciliation. In the second chapter of 1 Corinthians he says, "I did not come with superiority of speech, or human wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. I determine to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." And, of course, that means that there had to be a death in light of sin and that brings in the whole issue of culpability, guilt, judgment before God. I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling. My message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power that your fate should not rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God.

When writing to the Romans in order to solidify a base from which he could launch a ministry further west when he arrived, he said, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and barbarians, to the wise and the foolish, thus for my part I am eager to preach the gospel. I am not ashamed of the gospel, it is the power of God."

Paul was committed to the proclamation of the gospel, unstintingly, unhesitatingly, and unreservedly. And that is what we are called to do. We announce that God can be reconciled to doomed sinners, the greatest news the world has ever heard.

If you look at just the enmity between God and man, it might appear at first hopeless. A perfect, infinite, holy, flawless, righteous God whose justice must be satisfied by the punishment of all who have violated His laws, and standing under the looming sword of judgment is the helpless sinner who can't please God at all and cannot change his condition. A holy God whose justice must be satisfied, a helpless sinner who can do nothing at all to satisfy it. Man then stands in a doomed position. The relationship seems irreversible. And frankly, from man's side it is. Happily from God's side, it is not.

There is actually a way to satisfy God's justice. to satisfy His wrath and vengeance against sin, and still reconcile sinners. That is the supreme and sublime reality, that is our message, that is what we preach. We can get caught on all kinds of peripheral issues. We can...we can find ourselves messing around with the fringe elements. But sooner or later this is the core of everything we do. God can be reconciled to sinners. And to us is committed that ministry of reconciliation by preaching the word of reconciliation.

A.T. Robertson, many years ago, said, "The pulpit is the Golgotha on which the preacher gives his life for the reconciliation of the world." This is our calling.

Now Paul uses a very graphic term to describe the nature of that calling when he says in verse 20, "Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ...we are ambassadors for Christ." Quite an interesting term, presbeuane(?) from the verb presbeuo. It's a very rich term. It is related to the term, though it's not the exact term, it is related to the term for elders. But in this case it is the word for ambassador. Presbeuo and presbutes are connected to presbus(?) which means old, which, of course, is connected to presbuteros which means elders, which we are familiar with. It is a word that means ambassador, but it has that idea of being old because in ancient times old and experienced men were usually the ones chosen to be ambassadors of emperors and of kings. It's a very noble word.

It still has a nobility about it when we hear about someone being the ambassador to some country, it has the ring of dignity about it. It conveys a great deal. An ambassador represents his government in all of its character and all of its dignity, in all of its philosophy. To scorn then an ambassador or to mistreat him is to scorn and mistreat the government which he represents. To send him away is to break off relations with the government and the ruler whom he represents. An ambassador speaks holy for his ruler, he is his ruler's mouthpiece. He never utters his own thoughts. He never offers promises, demands his own things, but rather those things of his kingdom. And certainly an ambassador's person and character and virtue lend weight to the authenticity and dignity of his kingdom.

So, an ambassador then is a messenger. An ambassador is a representative. His message, his authority are given to him by his king. And in Paul's day such a duty was as highly respected as it is today, if not more so. Generally speaking when the Roman government would conquer a particular country, they would put into that country as many as ten ambassadors who would have responsibility for representing their interest and their presence in that conquered land.

So an ambassador is also in a foreign land. He spends his life with those who are strange to him. He has to speak a different language. He has to interface with a different culture. He has to bear a different life style. He has to endure a different tradition. He lives really in a foreign world. And in that foreign world he represents his own king, his own monarch, his own kingdom and he brings the message of his sovereign. Very graphic terms, aren't they, in which to understand our calling.

Here we are in this alien world and we are ambassadors for the kingdom of God. Our citizenship is not here, it is in heaven. We belong to another dimension and we have been called into this role of ambassador to tell the people of this perishing world that they can be reconciled to the King of our Kingdom who desires to make them subjects of His eternal Kingdom and glory.

Now remember, the Apostle Paul was under major assault in Corinth by those who wanted to discredit him. And here he defends himself and he defends his ministry and defends his calling as an ambassadorship for God on behalf of Jesus Christ. He reminds them that like all truly called preachers, he is given the commission of preaching the word of reconciliation, he is the ambassador of God in behalf of Christ. We are ambassadors, huper, in behalf of Christ. In Ephesians 6:20 he refers to himself as an ambassador in chains for he was in chains at that particular point.

So Paul says the preacher comes with authority from his King, representing the Kingdom. He comes with a word of reconciliation from the court of heaven to plead with people to be reconciled to God who is King of all the earth. And God is still making such appeals to sinners and He's still using preachers to do it. In Romans, you're familiar, aren't you, with chapter 10 verses 13 and following, "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed, and how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" God is still preaching the message of reconciliation through the foolishness of preachers. That's what we do. We then are ambassadors for the ministry of reconciliation, preaching the word of reconciliation for the eternal King on behalf of Jesus Christ.

That then is the core of the text. It is about preaching the ministry of reconciliation. It is about being ambassadors. And isn't it just like the Holy Spirit to have brought us to this text on the Sunday morning of our Shepherds' Conference? We then are called to preach reconciliation.

Now that poses the question that we want to answer out of the text, and it is this. What then is the ministry of reconciliation? What is this word of reconciliation? How did this reconciliation happen? How is it possible and how is it attainable? How is it that God can reconcile sinners and how is it that sinners can be reconciled to God?

In my judgment this is the most theological part of this letter. And Paul gives us the magnificent elements of reconciliation. I'm going to share four of them with you this morning, the four that are outlined in this text. Here is the comprehensive statement of how sinners can be reconciled to God. Sinners who are utterly unholy, a God who is utterly holy, how can such reconciliation take place?

Point one, reconciliation begins by the will of God. Reconciliation begins by the will of God. Notice verse 18, "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ." That couldn't be stated any more clearly. Now "all these things," to what is he referring?

Well all you need to do is go back to verse 14 where it says "The love of Christ controls us, having concluded this that One died for all, therefore all died." We talked about the fact that when Jesus died on the cross all those who would put their faith in Him died in Him. And He died for all, verse 15, that

they who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. We talked about the fact that this tremendous transformation that Paul is talking about in this section involves dying with Christ, rising with Christ to walk in newness of life. Verse 17 summed it up by saying, "Therefore if any man is in Christ, in His death, in His burial and in His resurrection, he is a new creation, new creature, old things passed away, behold new things have come." This tremendous transformation, this tremendous transformation that produces reconciliation is from God.

Verse 18 then, when it says, "Now all these things are from God," is referring to that. The transformation described, conversion, salvation, everything connected with the new nature, new life in Christ, death, burial and resurrection in Christ, all of those realities connected with conversion, with transformation are from God. Sinners cannot decide to be reconciled to God and therefore effect a reconciliation. Sinners have no power to satisfy God's anger, no power to satisfy God's holy justice, no power to satisfy God's standard of righteousness. No power to somehow mitigate God's anger toward sin. They have no power to do that. They can change nothing on their own. Sinners are simply offenders who have broken the law of God, are therefore banished eternally from God's presence. Any change that is going to come about in that relationship, that relationship of hostility and enmity, any reconciliation has to come from God. That is the gospel, that God so loved sinners that He sought a way of reconciliation. He sought a way to reconcile Himself with sinners, to make sinners His friends. And yet without violating His justice.

He had to make the reconciliation. We couldn't. The falsity of all the religions of the world apart from Christianity is based on the premise that somehow man can find a means by which to somehow mitigate the hostility of God. False religions across the world are somehow trying to turn God's anger into acceptance, to appease Him. Man can't do it.

And so, Paul says all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself. And here he states what is the objective aspect of reconciliation, God has provided a reconciliation. God Himself is the reconciler. Reconciliation is a divine provision by which God's holy displeasure against man was appeased. The hostility removed and relations restored. And this is at the very heart of the gospel, this reconciliation.

Listen to Romans 5:10, "For if while we were sinners we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more having been reconciled we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received the reconciliation."

Now listen, God provided it, God accomplished it, all we can do is receive it. It is proffered to us, it is offered to us as a gift. It isn't achieved by us, it is only accepted or rejected. In Colossians chapter 1 and verse 19, speaking of Christ, Paul writes, "It was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness...that is the fullness of deity...to dwell in Him and through Him to reconcile all things to

Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross, through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven and although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach." That is an absolutely monumental passage.

God by His own will and design takes His Son and uses Him as the means to reconcile sinners to Himself. To do that, He has to put His Son on a cross, to pour out His life in order that He may by the fleshly body of Christ through death reconcile alienated and hostile sinners to Himself and make them holy, blameless and beyond reproach. That's the gospel, to reconcile.

The word "reconcile," katallasse means "to change, to exchange, to reconcile." Now mark it. Man never makes reconciliation. It is not what he does, it is what he receives. It is not what he accomplishes, it is what he embraces. To put it another way, this reconciliation with God is not something we accomplish when we decide to stop rejecting God. I'll say that again. This reconciliation with God is not something we accomplish when we decide to stop rejecting God. It is something He accomplishes when He decides to stop rejecting us. That's the issue. He had to put away everything that meant alienation from His side. He had to be willing and somehow able to remove our transgressions as far as the east is from the west, to bury them in the depths of the deepest sea and to remember them no more. God is the one having to be satisfied who therefore had to find the way of reconciliation.

The great plan of reconciliation, of salvation by which we are reconciled to God is due to God Himself. And wherever the language of reconciliation is found in the New Testament, God is always the subject of the reconciling activity. There is no hint ever in the Scripture, and mark this, that Jesus Christ is the gracious one who must somehow overcome unwillingness on God's part to be reconciled with sinful humanity. It isn't that God is reluctant and Jesus is pleading. It is God Himself who initiates and effects the reconciliation through Christ. This is the incredible reality of the gospel.

Now go back to our text. All these things, the Apostle Paul says, are from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ. All was achieved at Christ's expense. Why? Because Christ was the only sacrifice who could satisfy God. Christ is the only mediator who could stand between God and man. Christ is the only way, apart from Him there is no other way. He is the only one in whose name there is salvation. He is the only one who could reconcile God to man, who could break down the animosity, He alone. There is salvation in no other. There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. There is one mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus. He alone offered the one perfect sacrifice to satisfy the justice of God.

And listen. Unless the justice of God was satisfied, unless the holy requirement that divine wrath against sin be meted out was satisfied, unless propitiation was accomplished and God was satisfied, no one could be reconciled. And that is why Christ died. He died to satisfy the justice of God. It was

and will always be the most magnanimous expression of loving affection the universe will ever know, when God infinitely holy extends His love toward sinners to the degree that He gives up His own Son in an ignominious death to bear the punishment those sinners deserve in order that they might become His children and be made righteous.

But once justice has been satisfied, once God's holy wrath has been propitiated, then can come reconciliation and then comes transformation, described in verses 14 through 17. But it all has to come from God. All the glory goes to God who is the source of reconciliation. And the New Testament makes this clear over and over and over again. It is God who calls us. It is God who saves us. It is God who sends His Son. It is God who loves us.

In 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul was writing in chapter 8 to these same people. In verse 6 he says, "Yet for us there is but one God the Father from whom are all things." Every good and perfect gift, James said, comes down from the Father of light. Everything comes from God. We are not running around trying to find some way to make an unhappy deity happy. We are not trying to figure out some way to get Him off our back and to appease him by our works, our efforts, our religion.

In 1 Corinthians 11:12 Paul says, "As the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman, and all things originate from God." Again the same great concept.

To us then, he says in the remainder of verse 18, has been given the ministry of preaching this reconciliation. And the wonder of it all is that we can say to people...God has removed the barriers and made available reconciliation for you if you will receive it. You don't have to do it, you just have to embrace it. You don't have to accomplish it, you just need to receive it. God is the author. God is the source. God is the power behind reconciliation which was initiated and accomplished through the death of Jesus Christ. And apart from that divine initiative, then there would be no way for men to be reconciled. And that is what we preach.

Verse 19, "Namely," or as the Old English says, "to wit," if you want to know what that means, it means "what I want to say is, what I really mean is, further explaining I mean." "That God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." Don't ever forget that. Christ is not appeasing God. God was in Christ reconciling the world. That's a monumental statement, by the way. If ever anybody questioned the deity of Jesus Christ, this would be a good passage to take them to. God was in Christ reconciling the world. That's a profound statement. God was actually the reconciler, doing the reconciliation through the incarnate Son. It was a divine work. His plan, His power to accomplish it.

It leads to a second feature. In understanding the ministry of reconciliation, we must understand that reconciliation is by the will of God, secondly, it is by the act of justification. It is by the act of justification. Verse 19, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself...and how did He do it?...not imputing or counting their trespasses against them." That's really the key. How was this

reconciliation done? Only one way it could be done, right? Only one way, the only way that sinners could ever be reconciled to God would be if sin was no longer an issue, right? Because what is it that separates men from God? Sin. So for reconciliation to take place, sin has to be dealt with. Sin has to be not counted against them.

Now that is a tremendous thing for God to do. That would be a tremendous thing for a human judge to do, to look in the face of an absolutely guilty sinner and say...Well, we just love you so much and we want to be gracious to you and merciful and we want you to be our friend, so even though you're hopelessly guilty, we're just going to forgive it all.

But that is in essence what God did. He looks at our massive culpability, the unpayable debt of the parable of the ruler in Matthew 18, he looks at our unpayable debt and He says He's not going to count their trespasses against them. In fact, how does He do that? By covering them with the righteousness of Christ. It doesn't mean that we're not sinners in reality, we still are, but it means we are covered in the righteousness of Christ, blanketed, robed. And our sins then are made invisible.

And so it is by this means called justification...now remember, justification is a declaration by God in which He declares the sinner righteous because He has covered him with the righteousness of Christ. He doesn't count our trespasses against us, rather robes us in the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. That is what happens when you put your faith in Jesus Christ. At that very moment, you are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. God then imputes to you righteousness and does not count your trespasses against you. It doesn't mean you've reached a place where you're better and so you've achieved righteousness. That's impossible. By your works you cannot become righteous. Salvation is not by works. What it does mean is that you put your faith in God, you've trusted in the person of Jesus Christ to be your sacrifice for sin, and by your faith God covers your sin with the righteousness of Christ, imputing to you that righteousness in a declaration of justification that makes you just before Him permanently.

Now look at verse 19 again because there's something I need to comment on. It says there that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. The fact that it says "the world" does complicate the issue. If it had said "reconciling believers to Himself," we wouldn't have such a difficult time. If it had said "reconciling sinners to Himself," we might have been able to sort that out a little more easily. But when it says "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself," that could pose a problem. This is one of the verses that universalists use. Universalists are people who believe everybody will be saved. And they say the reason we believe everybody will be saved is because that's what it says here, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. If God has reconciled the world, then that must mean that all the world is reconciled. If God has removed the barrier and all the world is reconciled, then all are going to be saved.

So we have to address that issue. And I want to do that just very briefly. There are a number of Scripture passages that indicate that Christ died for the whole world. There's no question about that. "Behold the Lamb of God who takes the sin of the world." In John 3:16, "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son." John 6:51, "The bread which I give for the life of the world is My flesh." First John 2:2, "He is the propitiation for our sins and not ours only but the sins of the whole world." First Timothy 2:6, "He gave Himself a ransom for all." Hebrews 2:9, "So that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone." And there are passages that speak about God's provision for the world.

In fact, you even have a statement in 2 Peter 2:1 about those who secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them. Do these passages then mean that God will not hold the sins of anyone in the whole world against them? Do these passages mean that He is not counting their trespasses against them, that is everybody in the whole world? Did Christ actually pay the penalty for everybody's sins? And if He did pay the penalty for everyone's sins, then the suffering for sin was already accomplished, how in the world could someone then have to suffer eternally for their sins? Right?

But the Bible says most of the world will be eternally condemned to hell to pay for their own sins. So if sinners are sent to hell to pay forever for their sins, their sins could not have been paid for by Christ on the cross. If they are not then paid for by Christ on the cross, what does it mean when he said God was in Christ reconciling the world?

Well the simple answer is that the passages that speak of Christ's dying for the whole world must be understood to refer to mankind in general. World indicates the sphere, the class of beings toward whom God seeks reconciliation...humanity, the world of mankind...people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, the world of mankind. Christ died to reconcile humanity to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them.

Now listen carefully to what I say. Christ's death in itself does have infinite and unlimited value because He is the infinite Son of God, thus His sacrifice is sufficient to pay the penalty for the sins of as many or as few as God saves, okay? The question is not about the intrinsic merit of Christ's death, that is unlimited. So the offer of salvation then is legitimately unlimited as well. You have a Savior of infinite value who provides a sacrifice of infinite worth that is valid for as many or as few as God saves. Therefore the intrinsic merit of His death is unlimited so that the offer is legitimately unlimited as well, and we can call every person in the world to Christ. But the actual atonement, the actual atonement was made only for those who would believe. Only their sins were expiated, otherwise nobody could go to hell if God had in Christ borne the punishment for their sins. There would be no sins for them to be punished for.

Now obviously there is more here than we can comprehend. No sense in going much farther. The Father already knew those people who would believe in Him, they had their names written in the

Lamb's book of life from before the foundation of the world so that when Jesus died, His death was designed to be absolutely personally efficacious to those people. When Christ died He actually paid the penalty for the sins of those whom God had designed to belong to Him. That is why you have other Scriptures which present a narrow perspective of the beneficiaries of Christ's death. For example, John 10:11, "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:15, "I lay down My life for the sheep." Acts 20:28, "The church of God which He obtained or purchased with the blood of His own Son." Romans 8:32, "Who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all." Believers. Romans 8:33, "Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God that has justified them." "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her," Ephesians 5:25. Jesus prays in the high priestly prayer in John 17, "I'm not praying for the world but for those whom You have given Me for they are Yours. I do not pray for these only, but for those who believe in Me through their word."

The focus and attention of the actual atonement of Christ, the actual expiation, the actual sin bearing was in behalf of those who would believe. Christ died then and in His death produced an infinitely valuable sacrifice which could reconcile all who came to God, however few or many. The offer then is extended to all, the actual payment, however, was limited, to those who believed whose names were written in the Lamb's book of life before the foundation of the world. But the reconciliation that is being talked about here is expressed in magnificent terms, "Not counting their trespasses against them." That's it. Romans 4:8, "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account." Psalm 32:2, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity." That's really being blessed. Romans 4:5, "God is the one who justifies the ungodly." Colossians 2:13, "It is God who has forgiven all your transgressions."

Listen when Christ died in your place, dear Christian, when Christ died in your place, He paid the penalty for your sin. He bore the guilt for your sin. He suffered the just punishment for your sin. You then can be fully forgiven. And God does that and covers you with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Romans 3 says we are justified as a gift by His grace. And how? Verse 26, "He is just and the justifier of the one who believes in Jesus."

We don't know who those people are. God knows who they are. We don't know who the elect are. We don't know who those are whose names are in the book of life. We can preach the gospel to every creature because it has intrinsic merit and infinite value as far and wide as God wants it to go, knowing full well that there are those out there whom God has established and for whom Christ died and actually expiated their sins and they can be reconciled to Him. And this is such an unbreakable justification that Paul celebrates it at the end of Romans 8 and says, "Nothing will ever be able to separate us from it." Sin is not then held to our account, righteousness is. All the debts are gone and in their place comes righteousness. This is the good news. And he has committed, it says at the end of verse 19, to us the word of reconciliation.

Thirdly, and don't worry because the fourth point is very brief. The third one will be too, unfortunately. Verse 20, reconciliation then is by the will of God and through the act of justification, thirdly, it is by the obedience of faith...by the obedience of faith. Having said all of that, we must say this, this whole matter of justification comes to the soul of the sinner only when the sinner believes. God authors it. God accomplishes it by the declaration of justification, but never apart from the sinner's faith. And so we can only call the sinner to faith. Verse 20, "Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ and when we come and render our ambassadorial service, it is as though God were entreating or pleading or coming alongside, parakaleo, and calling through us. Calling what? Calling the sinner to faith. So he says we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Now wait a minute, you've just said that reconciliation is God's work, God authored it, God is the source, God is the power. He does it by the declarative act of justification. Now you're asking the sinner, you're begging, you're pleading, you're entreating and saying, "Be reconciled to God." That's right. That's exactly right. And God is begging sinners through us to be reconciled to Him. And how does a sinner do that? Romans 3:26, "By believing in Jesus." God is the just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus. So we're calling for faith, to as many as believed in Him, John 1:12, He gave the right to become the children of God. It's a matter of faith.

What do we do then? We preach the message of reconciliation to sinners and we beg them to be reconciled to God through the means which God Himself has provided. We call them to faith. We call them to believe. There is objective element of faith, you must believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and you must confess Him as Lord. There is a subjective element of saving faith as well that often gets overlooked. I mean, the objective is the content of it, the subjective is the attitude. James 4 where it says in verse 8, "Draw near to God, He'll draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable, mourn and weep, humble yourselves." That's the subjective attitude that goes with the objective content. You come before God, you believe in the work of Jesus Christ. You see your own sin, you're miserable, wretched, poor, naked, blind and you plead for God's mercy. We are ambassadors for Christ and it is God who is parakaleoing, who is calling through us to sinners and begging them...begging them, that word "beg," deomaitha(?) means to ask for a specific thing. And we're saying simply what was said in Acts 16:31 by Paul to the Philippian jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." That's our ministry. That's what we're all about. That's what we do. We call people to be reconciled to God to believe...believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord and to mourn over their sins and seek to be cleansed and purged and purified.

One final point still remains. Reconciliation is by the power of God, it is by the act of justification, it is by the obedience of faith brought to the sinner, but the question still remains, how can a holy God be reconciled, what made it possible? What did Christ do to satisfy God's justice? And that takes us to the fourth point, reconciliation was by the work of substitution...it was by the work of substitution.

God can be just and still the justifier of those who believe in Jesus. God can justly not count our sins against us and impute His righteousness to us because of one immense reality. Verse 21, "He made Him, Christ, who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." There's the key to everything. Christ had to be made sin. He had to die our death. He had to suffer our punishment. As Peter says it in 1 Peter 2:24, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross that we might live to righteousness. It was by His wounds we were healed." This is the most powerful truth in Scripture. This one verse, and believe me, I'm not through with it. When I get back from Cossackstan(?) in two Sundays, I'm going back to verse 21 and only God knows how long we'll be there. But for this morning, it is important to say that the entire basis of the sinner's reconciliation to God is on the substitutionary death of Christ and the fact that He died bearing our sin which then takes the punishment off of us and frees God to grant us righteousness. If justification is the heart of Paul's gospel, then as B.B. Warfield once wrote, "Substitution is the heart of the heart of the gospel."

Well, we're ambassadors then. And the message we preach is reconciliation through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ and we beg sinners to be reconciled to God who has provided a reconciliation and who is pleading with them even through us. Everything we do, particularly you preachers and pastors, missionaries, everything we do is directed toward the faith of sinners who can be reconciled to God. That's our call, the ministry of reconciliation. Let's pray.

Father, these great truths overwhelm us and then to be called as ambassadors and even those of us who are not pastors and preachers who are lay people, Lord, we too are to call sinners to be reconciled to God, we all are ambassadors. Thank You for giving us all the ministry of reconciliation, particularly those who preach. Make us faithful, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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