

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (14-6-1998 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

2 Corinthians 5:18-6:2  
Additional Reading: Romans 5:1-11

### Introduction

The blessing of being made a new creation is all possible because of what Christ has done for us. Something needed to be done, and we could not do it for ourselves. Christ has done it for us, and it does not need to be done again. Many blessings flow from the death of Christ.

Various pictures help us understand these blessings. We go to the law courts and see a picture of justification, being acquitted and pronounced not guilty. We go to the slave market and see a picture of redemption, being set free from the power of sin. And we go to a broken and disunited home and see a picture of reconciliation. Reconciliation is the most meaningful of these pictures, for it is very personal, and we have all experienced it often. A broken relationship has been restored, a friendship renewed. "Alienation" is ended by "reconciliation".

When we speak of being reconciled with God, it is something which we cannot do for ourselves. It is something which God has done for us and now offers as a gift. So the Gospel is good news and not just good advice. We are going to consider God's initiative, achievement and message in reconciliation.

### The initiative which God has taken

Reconciliation presupposes that something has gone wrong – badly wrong. The relationship and fellowship with God has broken down. We hear of people being reconciled after being at loggerheads, in dispute, having sharp differences and not on friendly terms. Reconciliation between God and man is needed because the relationship between us is not what it ought to be or what God intended it to be.

When man is "lost", the Gospel is veiled to him and he is perishing, his eyes are blinded and he is on the road to eternal ruin (2 Corinthians 4:3,4). Elsewhere in the Bible lost man is spoken of as being enemies, aliens, without hope, without God, children of wrath. To forget these truths is disastrous. The Gospel will mean nothing. Reconciliation will be an empty term unless we begin with our predicament, sin and rebellion. Every doctrine of Christian faith – new birth, atonement, the Holy Spirit's work, Second Coming – is meaningless unless we understand the doctrine of sin.

Not just that we are in the wrong, but the problem viewed from God's side. He cannot ignore and wink at it. He cannot just say, "Forget it". His holy nature recoils at sin, and brings condemnation, displeasure and wrath. Sin banishes us from His presence. We are objects not only of God's love (we always remember that), but also objects of His wrath (often forgotten and denied). The glory of the Gospel is that this offended, outraged God who condemns sin has done something about it. He has taken the first step. He does not ask us to do anything – we could not, even if He told us. "The only thing of my very own which I contribute to my redemption is the sin from which I need to be redeemed" [the author is not referenced].

The first step was with God. **All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ** (2 Corinthians 5:18). He made the first move through the agent of Jesus Christ. Not only through Christ but He is in Christ. God came in Jesus Christ and took humanity. Jesus was the God-man. **God so loved the world that He gave** (John 3:16). **The Father sent the Son to be the Saviour** (1 John 4:14).

The gulf was bridged by God at work in His Son. He took the burden, sin and punishment on Himself in His Son. God voluntarily took the cost all on Himself. God has provided the solution to the problem, and God has made the way back to Himself. We are everything to God. If God had not acted, we would be condemned to hell forever.

All talk about our achievements and good living, what God owes us, wondering why God has let this or that happen to us when we have done nothing wrong – is totally irrelevant and offensively self-righteous talk. We are rebels. We depend on mercy alone. And for some astonishing reason, this God has had mercy on us.

Words like “rebels”, “unworthiness” and “mercy” are objectionable to human pride – but that is the fact of the matter. Because God has acted and sent His Son, we can have reconciliation, peace with God, be brought home and adopted into His family, and have access into the holiest place of all. **Not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation** (1 John 4:10) – our one and only hope!

#### The work which he undertook

God took His sinless Son. He was a stranger to sin. **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us** (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Lord Jesus was absolutely perfect. C.f. **Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?** (John 8:46). **I always do what pleases Him** (John 8:29). He was sinless, pure and therefore had no reason to die. God loaded our vile and filthy sins against God and man, in thought and deed, open and secret, sins of commission and omission, sins of past, present and future, on to His pure and lovely Son. He became the sin-bearer, taking the burden and responsibility. He took the shame, curse, consequences of judgement and punishment on Himself. Suffered death – not only in body but also in soul – which was the wages of sin. He suffered the death penalty in our place. The judgement we deserved and the condemnation which was ours was taken by Him.

Justice was done. The law was honoured. The penalty was borne. So God does not count our sins against us. And we can be the righteousness of God in Him. We can have a right relationship and acceptance with God, with all blessing this brings – peace, new life, the Holy Spirit, and abundant life.

The Cross did not change God’s attitude towards us, but His treatment of us. Hence there is a sense in which God has to be reconciled to us (though not actually say so but clearly implied) before we can be reconciled to Him.

God demonstrated His justice and love. Penalty of law was carried out. Death was meted out on sin. But love provided a substitute. Wonderful exchange. Christ was

treated as a sinner that we might be treated as Christ. Christ was punished as a sinner that we might be accepted as Christ. He bore our sins and we wear His righteousness. He wore a crown of thorns, that we might wear a crown of gold. Christ took our shame that we may have His honour. Christ took our nakedness that we could wear His royal robes. Taken our place, assumed our debts, suffered in our stead. All this was done 2000 years ago. Once for all. A finished work. God has always loved us but not always been reconciled to us. That depended on the cross. But we are now accepted. The record against us was wiped clean. There is no fear now.

All depended on this wonderful exchange. Luther writing to a monk in distress about his sins, "Learn to know Christ and him crucified. Learn to sing to Him 'Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, I am your sin. You took on you what was mine; yet you set on me what was yours. You became what you were not, that I might become what I am not'."

*"My sin, o the bliss of this glorious thought,  
My sin, not in part but the whole  
Is nailed to His Cross and I bear it no more.  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord O my soul."*

So God took the initiative. He sent His Son, laid on Him our sins. And now He brings us into that right relationship with Himself. Because God is in Christ, God has taken his own wrath on Himself, and substituted Himself for a sinner. He has reconciled Himself. That Christ bore our sins is the key to the whole New Testament. It is the foundation truth of Christianity.

#### The message God has given us to proclaim

On the God-ward side of reconciliation, God has removed the barrier from His side. Now He calls on us to remove the barrier from our side and end the dispute. He has removed the condemnation, and we must get rid of our enmity and hatred of God, and grasp His outstretched hand. Reconciled to God, we have a message to faithfully proclaim.

**We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us** (2 Corinthians 5:20). Whether we are preachers, Sunday School teachers, door-to-door workers or personal witnesses, we are God's ambassadors and representatives. We have a message from the King. We are commissioned by the court of Heaven. We are Christ's mouthpieces, ambassadors who speak for Christ. We do not speak in our own name or on our own authority. We do not pass our own opinions, but faithfully declare the message from our King.

First of all Paul begins with a proclamation. He tells what Christ has done. Then he makes his appeal. He speaks of the Cross and atonement. Then he applies it to those who hear. It is not enough to have orthodox doctrine of reconciliation. We must urge people to accept it. Must not appeal without explaining the Gospel.

So as an ambassador he "pleads" and "implores" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Earlier Paul used the word "persuade" (2 Corinthians 5:11). He does not antagonise or argue or bludgeon, instead he pleads, implores and persuades. God loves you. Condemnation

has been removed. Christ has died for your sins. Now nothing stops you from returning to Him. Lay aside your hatred. Accept His friendship. **Now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation** (2 Corinthians 6:2). Do not lose the opportunity. Don't let God's appeal go for nothing. You need not perish nor be lost.

This is an urgent message, to be earnestly preached. People are in great danger, under condemnation. It is a fearful thing to fall into God's hands. **The Lord you God is a consuming fire** (Deuteronomy 4:24). But you need not perish. God has sent His Son and atonement has been made. Free pardon is on offer. God loves you and he wants you to be saved. Only one hope and only one Saviour. No one else has made atonement. Accept it today - free, immediate, complete salvation and pardon for sin.