

"Union with Christ: Sinners and Saints with Him"
2 Corinthians 5:21 (NASB)

Have you ever thought about the fact that Election Day and Veteran's Day always occur about a week apart? I'll bet those that run for office think about it. When a long campaign is over, you probably feel like you are a veteran of a war.

When Election Day is over, there is a need for reconciliation. When the campaigns are over, moving on from that point needs to involve a willingness to find what common ground can be found, and work together in the areas where there is agreement, for the common good of all.

The same is true in the case of a war that is fought. After the conflict is over, the warring parties need to work to build what peace can be achieved for the common good of all people.

One thing that is common to both a war and a political campaign is that the actual conflict between ideas or goals is carried out by certain ones who represent the opposing sides.

In an election, candidates represent those with one parties' goals or another, and in a war, the sides are represented by governmental leaders, like ambassadors, but, on the ground, by soldiers.

This morning, we especially thank you who represented us in the various conflicts by fighting or serving to preserve the values we believe in, and the freedoms we enjoy.

War is an awful thing. Then why do we fight them? The American ideal is that we fight wars because we love peace, and sometimes it is the only way to have peace.

This morning I'd like you to think for a few minutes about the spiritual war that all of us fight all the time.

It's the war within yourself for your own self-image, your own peace of mind and contentment.

It's the war that tears relationships apart in families, organizations and communities.

It's the cosmic war we fight with spiritual powers and, ultimately, with God.

We call the peace we seek in such conflicts reconciliation. The Bible tells us what we need to know about reconciliation in 2 Cor. 5.

It was written to a church that had people in it that were in conflict. They had formed parties around their loyalties to Paul, Peter, Apollos, or Christ.

One of the results of this was that some questioned the legitimacy of Paul's ministry. The argument was that Paul suffered too much to be a genuine spiritual leader, the assumption being that God's approval would be indicated by success, prosperity and other blessings.

ESVSB: "Paul argues that his weakness as an apostle is the very means by which believers are comforted and God in Christ is made known in the world. Paul's sufferings embody the cross of Christ, while his endurance amid adversity, with thanksgiving and contentment, demonstrates the resurrection power of the Spirit. Paul's suffering as an apostle is thus the very means God uses to reveal his glory"

In writing to Corinth, then, Paul speaks of his ministry as one of reconciliation, reconciling people to God by sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, we see that Reconciliation is Needed because of sin, Reconciliation with God cannot be achieved; it must be given, and Reconciliation is given by becoming one with Christ.

1. Reconciliation is Needed because of Sin.

In this church, people were relating to one another in a purely human way, failing to treat each other as people created to treat each other as God's children:

2 Corinthians 5:16 (HCSB) "From now on, then, we do not know anyone in a purely human way. Even if we have known Christ in a purely human way, yet now we no longer know [Him in this way]."

This is treating people according to sin, rather than according to love and grace.

In *Reason for God*, Tim Keller corrects the mistaken ideas people have about the nature of Sin.

Many of us have the impression that the Christian doctrine of sin is bleak and pessimistic about human nature. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

The legal model of explaining sin is keeping or breaking the rules of a moral code.

The medical model of explaining sin is that sin is sickness, illness, or dysfunction.

Both of these are broken models because they offer no hope of a remedy, no forgiveness.

Keller explains that the essence of sin is a wrecked relationship with God, one another and the whole created order.

Sins are attempts to fill voids. We fill the void of a right relationship with God with other things.

Because sin is a broken relationship, the solution is a reconciliation.

Paul describes the root of this in Romans 5:12-14 (ESV) “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.”

Adam was created as representative head of all humanity, responsible to maintain our relationship with God, the Creator. When he broke the relationship by deciding to distrust God’s love, and challenge God’s right to be God, he broke the love relationship with God for all of us.

So for all time, we all fail to give God His rightful place, and the result is brokenness all around us.

We all get an identity from somewhere or something. So sin is not just breaking rules but making good things into ultimate things.

Our need for worth is so powerful that whatever we base our identify and value on, we essentially “deify.” We worship it in the same way and passion that we worship God, even if you are non religious.

Trans: Reconciliation is Needed because of sin.

2. Reconciliation with God cannot be achieved; it must be given.

As Keller points out, sin destroys us personally. If we put our value in anything but God, that is a fundamentally unstable position.

What happens if you are a bad parent, or you lose your job? An identity not based on God leads to deep forms of addiction. We become slaves to what we use as god. They control our hearts and actions.

We are in denial to the degree which we are controlled by our god—substitutes.

One has only the choice between God and idolatry. A life not centered on God leads to emptiness.

What happens if you do get the desires of your heart? You climb the mountain and realize there is nothing there. You are still unfulfilled and flawed.

But the gospel offers a solution: forgiveness and a new life: 2 Corinthians 5:17-19 (ESV) “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 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.”

Nothing you or I can do can fix the broken relationship with God. Because God is a holy God, justice must be done, the penalty of death must be paid.

But because God is a merciful and loving God, He offers to pay the penalty for sinners, repairing the relationship. We have been looking at how He did this through Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Before the foundation of the world, He chose that in Christ, people would be Accepted and Adopted as His children. Then He created us in Christ.

After the relationship was broken by sin, the Son of God became human in order to rescue sinners from being slaves to the fear of death. Because the Son of God shared fully in our humanity, He is able to deliver us from the fear of death and of dying.

Last week we saw that beginning at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came to live in Christians, uniting them to Christ, and the Holy Spirit unites Christians to Christ and the Father by grace through faith.

This is what Paul calls in 2 Cor. 5 “the ministry of reconciliation: That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself”.

Paul explains it this way in Rom. 5:15-17 (ESV) “But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

The good news is that just as Adam represented us when he broke the relationship with God, Jesus Christ represents “those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness”, and became our substitute, our “Lamb of God”.

Trans: Reconciliation is Needed because of sin, Reconciliation with God cannot be achieved; it must be given, and

3. Reconciliation is given by becoming one with Christ.

How can this transaction take place? Doesn’t our conscience and even the Old Testament tell us that it would be wrong for God to punish an innocent person for the sins of another?

And doesn't that same sense of righteousness tell us that it would be wrong to transfer the perfect righteousness of an innocent person to one who is a guilty person?

This is where the mystery of oneness with blows me away! Listen to what the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5:20-21 (NASB) "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal 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, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Jesus the incarnate Son of God became a representative, a substitute for sinners, and this was possible because he became even more.

Letham: "As both substitute and representative, Christ is seen as distinct from those who benefit from what he did. ... The concept of union takes us a step further than either of these two metaphors. In this case, all that Christ did and does we do, since we are one with him. ... because of the union sustained between Christ and ourselves, his actions are ours."

It is because of this that we can be seen by the righteous God as innocent, for we own Christ's innocence by virtue of our Union with Christ !

And then Letham points out that "Once our Union with Christ is brought to bear on the matter, the scenario changes. It is no longer a case of God punishing the innocent and letting the guilty off scot-free. Because of the union established between Christ and his chosen people, the wrongs done by the guilty parties become Christ's as well. In turn, the righteousness of the One who bears the punishment actually belongs to the other, since both are regarded as one."!

This is powerfully expressed in Romans 5:18-21 in these words: (ESV) "Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Far from giving people a green light to sin as much as I like, this Union with Christ motivates me to live a holier life. When I go my own way, away from my relationship with God, the guilt of that wandering is attached to Jesus Christ, not just to myself. It calls me to ask, "Do you really want the merciful Son of God to have this act of independence from God laid to His account, for Him to pay?"

Letham: "Since Christ shares our nature, and since the Holy Spirit unites us to him, all that he did and does is in union with us. He took our place under the wrath of God, while we take his place as sons of the Father."

Action: Confess your daily need for reconciliation in healing your broken relationship with God.

Ask the triune God for the gift of reconciliation and/or thank Him for it.

Be an "ambassador of reconciliation" to someone this week.