

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 – “Ambassadors for Christ”

5:17 - *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

We read that if anyone is in Christ, ***he is a new creation...***

We talked about this new life last week for our Resurrection Service theme. We went through this verse in more detail then, but I want to look at it briefly again this morning.

For thousands of years people lived under the weight of sin and the consequences of it. People were cut off from close and intimate fellowship with God. But now in and through Jesus we've become a new creation. This is not speaking about 'new' in time, but rather 'new' as to form or quality. There is a new nature now about us.

And who is this experienced by? Anyone who is ***in Christ***. This is an offer for anyone, but the stipulation is you need to be in Christ. It's not being in yourself, or being in some religion, it's about being ***in Christ!***

How is one in Christ?

- One is in Christ by putting your faith and trust in who Jesus is – that He is the Son of God who came to this world in divinity, yet in sinless humanity. That He died on a cross to pay the penalty for your sin and take the judgment of God so that you could be forgiven and declared righteous in Him.
- Being in Christ is not just about attaching your name to His and saying you believe in the existence of God. Rather it's to say that you are a lost sinner, doomed on your own, but you've found refuge and redemption in Jesus and in the knowledge that Jesus died and rose again for your salvation.

“The phrase “in Christ” is used 77 times in the NT, 74 in the writings of Paul; the phrase “in Him” is found another 70 times in the NT.

PROMISES to those who are “in Christ”

1. Redemption – Rom. 3:24
2. No condemnation – Rom. 8:1
3. No separation – Rom. 8:39
4. Sanctification – I Cor. 1:2
5. Victory – II Cor. 2:14
6. Liberty – Gal. 2:4

7. Unity – Gal. 3:28
8. Spiritual blessings – Eph. 1:3
9. Seated in heavenlies – Eph. 2:6
10. Created for good works – Eph. 2:10
11. Brought near – Eph. 2:13
12. Encouragement – Phil. 2:1
13. Resurrection – I Thess. 4:16
14. Salvation – II Tim. 2:10”

(D. Hocking)

I’m so thankful that God makes us new creations and that all things have become new. All of us who are in Christ have been made new. Oh, we know that God is not done with us, but praise God we’re not what we once were.

Now the key to being made new is to be in Christ. It’s not about being near Him or around Him. We’re to be in Him! Meaning that He is the one we are taking refuge in and trusting to sanctify us and transform us into His image.

- As a new creation we also understand there is a new nature at work within us. We’re no longer to be ruled by the things of the flesh (the old nature), but we are to be governed by the Spirit now.
- The story is told of Augustine who in his younger years indulged in great sins. After his conversion he became a new person. One day he had to attend to some business in his old haunts in Rome. As he walked along, a former companion saw him and began calling, “Augustine, Augustine!” He took one look at the poor, disreputable woman whose company he had formerly enjoyed, and he shuddered. Reminding himself of his new position in Christ, he quickly turned and ran away from her. She called after him again “Augustine, it is I.” As he ran off he shouted back, “But it is not I, it’s not I!”¹

He knew the old Augustine is dead, and he is now a new creation in Christ Jesus. There is a new nature that is driving him now.

I pray you know the blessings of what it means to be in Christ and a new creation. You know the expression: ‘out with the old, in with the new’. Well, a lot of people haven’t applied that to their new life in Christ. They’ve either held on to the old, or they’ve allowed the old to weigh them down and bring them guilt. But

¹ Galaxie Software. (2002). *10,000 Sermon Illustrations*. Biblical Studies Press.

we read that ***old things have passed away***. Whatever was a part of your old life is no longer held against you.

- **Romans 8:1**, *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."*

There is newness of life, newness of position, newness of perspective, and newness of hope as we place our lives in Christ and in His life.

All things have become new!

5:18-19 - *Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*

All things are of God... This work of making us new creations is not something we do for ourselves. We can't! It's not about putting on a new wardrobe and looking differently outwardly. A caterpillar cannot staple some wings on itself to become a butterfly. There must be a metamorphosis; a complete change from the inside out. This is what God has done for us. ***All things are of God.***

And this is all the more amazing when we think of where we were. Notice it says that God ***has reconciled us to Himself***... This implies that we were separated from Him. Ephesians 2:13 says that we were once far off... We were far from God; separated from Him because of our sin. The fact that we've become a new creation is all the more amazing when we consider where and what we were when God rescued us. And how did He rescue us? Through the reconciling work of Jesus Christ.

This is an amazing fundamental and theological truth we need to understand. What does it mean to be reconciled? The word Paul uses (*katallasso*) is an old word for exchanging coins. It basically means to change.

- "It is hard to discuss this great theme without apparent contradiction. God's love (John 3:16) provided the means and basis for man's reconciliation to God against whom he had sinned. It is all God's plan because of His love, but God's own sense of justice had to be satisfied (Rom. 3:26) and so God gave His Son as a propitiation for our sins (Rom. 3:25; Col. 1:20; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). The point made by Paul here is that God needs no reconciliation,

but is engaged in the great business of reconciling us to Himself. This has to be done on God's terms and is made possible through (διὰ [dia]) Christ. ²

Make sure you understand this. God reconciled us **to** Himself (this is repeated in vs. 18 and 19).

And this reconciliation has been provided for us through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

- **Colossians 1:21–22**, *"And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled ²² in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—"*
- **Romans 5:10**, *"For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."*

Essentially, Jesus took all of our sin upon Himself, and exchanged it for His righteousness. There was an amazing exchange that took place that brought about an effectual change in our lives.

Keep in mind that this reconciliation removes this middle wall of separation that was between us and the Lord. We were enemies of God. But His reconciling us to Himself simply paves the way, it does not bring justification. We need to repent of sin and turn to Him in faith to be justified and fully reconciled to the Father. "It may be helpful to think of reconciliation as objectively provided by God in the past but needing subjective appropriation by the unsaved in the present." ³

And now for us who are in Christ and have been reconciled to God, we have been given this **ministry of reconciliation**. What a privilege it is to be able to share with others this amazing work God has provided for us through His Son. To think that we actually get to enjoy fellowship and a relationship with God and minister that to others?? It's an incredible gift and blessing.

- People today are without hope, they're hurting, riddled with guilt and shame. People have been at a distance from God wondering if they have any chance of a right standing before Him. And now we get to share with them this new reality that He has reconciled us to Himself.

² Robertson, A. T. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (2 Co 5:18). Broadman Press.

³ Constable, Dr. Thomas L. <https://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/2corinthians.pdf>

“And gave unto us the ministry of reconciliation (και δοντος ἡμιν την διακονιαν της καταλλαγης [*kai dontos hēmin tēn diakonian tēs katallagēs*]). It is a ministry marked by reconciliation, that consists in reconciliation. God has made possible through Christ our reconciliation to Him, but in each case it has to be made effective by the attitude of each individual. The task of winning the unreconciled to God is committed to us. It is a high and holy one, but supremely difficult, because the offending party (the guilty) is the hardest to win over. We must be loyal to God and yet win sinful men to Him.”⁴

... **not imputing their trespasses to them**. As ministers of reconciliation, we can tell people that their sins have been forgiven. Again, not in some universal salvation way. But we can share that the means for their forgiveness has been provided. We get to share with others that their sin doesn't need to be held to their account. That's what this word **imputing** means. It means to keep a record; to count. Now that we're in Christ and recipients of His great grace, God's not sitting there counting out our sins and seeing how far He can hold off before He needs to take us out. Our sins aren't held against us. He's provided forgiveness and cleansing.

We've seen we have the ministry of reconciliation, but now we read He's committed to us the **word of reconciliation**. In other words, we don't just live out some life as an example and think that's enough. We need to share the word of reconciliation. Some people think it's just about being a good witness.

- One famous quote that gets repeated often is: “Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words.”
- Well, it's quite necessary to use words. Without words people don't know they're alienated from God. They don't know that God has reconciled them through Jesus Christ. Salvation and forgiveness of sins is now available.

And we have the answer. So speak the word of reconciliation!

Romans 10:14, "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"

Romans 10:17, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

⁴ Robertson, A. T. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (2 Co 5:18). Broadman Press.

To many people think that God just wants to judge them. That He's a harsh God. They need to hear that He wants to reconcile them and He's already made the way possible.

5:20 - *Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.*

I love this title – ***ambassadors for Christ***. That's a pretty big deal! This is really an honor.

Now in this day of course Rome was the world power. And they attempted to take over as much real estate as they could. Defeated cities would become provinces. And there were two kinds of provinces. Senatorial and imperial provinces.

- Senatorial provinces were pretty peaceful places. The people were just happy to be alive and they submitted to Rome's rule.
- But the imperial provinces were made up of people that were hostile to Rome. They could rebel at any time. So Rome sent ambassadors to these provinces where they would keep the peace and apply Roman law.
- They were representatives of Rome and Rome's leader, and would speak what they've been told to speak. That's what an ambassador essentially does today. They represent their country and leader in a foreign place.

Some facts about Ambassadors:

An Ambassador spends their lives on foreign soil.

An Ambassador is chosen to represent someone.

Ambassadors are protected (a nation provides its ambassadors with every need and stands ready to protect him).

Ambassadors are held accountable (they must say what they are told to say).

Ambassadors are called home before war is declared (God has yet to declare war on this world but before He does, He will pull out His Ambassadors).

Doesn't that quite accurately describe us? This is not our home guys. Our citizenship is in heaven. But presently we are living here. And we are living here with a mission – to be ambassadors for Christ. To share with people God's plan of salvation.

We've been saved to show. Redeemed to reveal. Delivered so we can deliver!

God is wanting to work through us to be His vessels by which He can call out to a world that has been separated from Him and implore them to receive His reconciliation.

5:21 - *For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*"

Jesus was never a sinner, but He became sin in the sense that He became the object of God's wrath for sin. This was the extreme act of love. He became our substitute and paid our fine so that we may be made righteous through Him.

"Commenting on Barabbas, Donald Grey Barnhouse wrote, "He was the only man in the world who could say that Jesus Christ took his physical place. But I can say that Jesus Christ took my spiritual place. For it was I who deserved to die. It was I who deserved that the wrath of God should be poured on me. I deserved the eternal punishment of the lake of fire. He was delivered up for my offenses. He was handed over to judgment because of my sins. Christ was my substitute. He was satisfying the debt of divine justice and holiness. That is why I say that Christianity can be expressed in the three phrases: I deserved hell; Jesus took my hell; there is nothing left for me but His heaven." - D.C.E. Our Daily Bread, Wednesday, March 30"⁵

"Christ became what we are in order that we might become what He is. – Irenaeus"⁶

"God treats Christ like He lived our life, and He treats us as if we lived His life."

⁵ Galaxie Software. (2002). *10,000 Sermon Illustrations*. Biblical Studies Press.

⁶ Galaxie Software. (2002). *10,000 Sermon Illustrations*. Biblical Studies Press.