THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILATION

2 Corinthians 5:1-21

Key Verse: 5:18

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”

Thank God for the hope of being clothed with our heavenly dwelling. Thank God for encouraging us to live by faith and please the Lord while in the body with the expectation for Christ’s reward in the awareness of the judgment seat of Christ. In today’s passage, Paul leads us to Christ’s compelling love and to the ministry of reconciliation. In this passage, the word “reconciled” or reconciliation” is written 4 times. God is the God of reconciliation. May we know this God of reconciliation deeply.

**First, Christ’s compelling love (11-15).** Paul says in verse 11, “Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.” It is natural that after talking about the judgment seat of Christ, now Paul mentions fearing the Lord. The fear of the Lord can be one big theme of the Bible. We can think of several words of God in Proverbs. Proverbs 14:27 says, “The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life…”, 15:16 says, “The fear of the Lord is better than treasure,” and 19:23 says, “The fear of the LORD leads to life…” We can see that the fear of the Lord was undergirding Paul’s heart. Certainly, here fear is the reverent fear related to worship and devotion. Knowing what the fear of the Lord is, Paul tried to persuade men as he preached Christ or taught the word of God. By persuading he wanted to lead them to the salvation of their souls and the true life. We can say that persuading men was his mission as his calling from God. His whole life was persuading men.

Then Paul says in verse 12, “What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience.” Here “plain” is “clear” or “made manifest” in other translations. In persuading men he did this before God. God knew his heart and sincerity. He had said in 1:12, “…we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God.” He also had said in 4:2, “…we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” In this way, Paul wanted to show his integrity as a gospel servant and a persuader of men.

Paul continues in verse 12, “We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart.” Paul was very clear that he was not trying to beg their commendation. Not at all. Rather he was giving them an opportunity as a sort of blessing. What kind of opportunity is Paul giving them? Paul wanted them to defend the gospel truth along with him against those who boast in appearance than in heart. False teachers always try to persuade people through external things, such as circumcision, ritual ceremonies, or human achievements, while true teachers persuade people appealing to their hearts with the truth of God to repent and believe in Christ Jesus. In other words, Paul was giving the Corinthians an opportunity to grow as gospel coworkers who can defend the gospel together against all the pretension and falsity of the gospel truth.

Paul says in verse 13, “If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.” Here “out of our mind” is “crazy.” In Acts 26:20-23, Paul defended himself before King Agrippa, saying, “…I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds…that Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.” Then the governor Festus interrupted Paul’s defence and shouted, “You are out of your mind, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane.” Paul replied, “What I am saying is true and reasonable.” Paul testified to Jesus in his defence to the point of being regarded as out of mind or insane by the people of the world, surely, for the sake of God. Paul was crazy for God and Christ Jesus. He was also in his right mind to help God’s flock of sheep most effectively not putting any unnecessary troubles on them, being gentle and modest and reasonable in all possible ways. In this defence, Paul wanted the Corinthians to know his integrity before God.

Paul then says in verse 14, “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.” What is Christ’ love? Christ’s love is best manifested when he died for us. Through his death he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. He was willing to be the propitiation in obedience to God’s will. Paul expressed Christ’ love this way in Romans 5:6, “…while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Because of our sins we were God’s enemies (Ro 5:10). What can be a worse human condition than being God’s enemies? Christ Jesus had to die so that we might not perish as God’s enemies. He died the most painful and cruel and shameful death by crucifixion at the hands of Romans condemned by the Jews, taking all our sins upon himself. An old prophet Isaiah said, “He was pierced for our transgressions and he was crushed for our iniquities” (53:5) and “the LORD laid on him the iniquity of all” (53:6). According to Matthew and Mark, Jesus cried out on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34). On the cross, Christ Jesus could bear all the physical pain, but he could not bear the pain of being separated and forsaken by God, even momentarily, so he made such a cry. As for us, it is really hard to bear being forsaken/abandoned by beloved ones, spouses or parents. How about then being forsaken by God? Unthinkable! Jesus died on the cross with such a cry so that we mighty not be forsaken eternally into the fiery lake of burning sulfur, completely cast out from God’s presence.

Jesus’ love was a saving love through death. But Jesus died also for his friends. Jesus said in John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” In this way, he showed his greatest love for his friends, so that both may keep this life-sacrificing love relationship between the two. Jesus sad in John 15:15,16, “I no longer call you servants…Instead, I have called you friends…I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit-fruit that will last.” Song of Songs 8:6 says, “…love is as strong as death.” Jesus is our true friend and he wants us to bear fruit – fruit that will last through this friendship. He is indeed our true friend at the time of favour and at the time of adversity as well.

Paul said in verse 14, “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.” Christ’s love is that he died for us and also we died in him when he died. What a compelling powerful love! We wished that we ourselves, our sinful selves, would die. However, we could not. But we died when he died for us. We can understand it this way. In Genesis 14, when Abraham returned with victory from a war, he gave a tenth of everything to Melchizedek, priest of God Most High (Ge 14:20). According to the author of Hebrews, in that event Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor (Heb 7:10). In a similar way, we can say that when Christ died, his people whom God had chosen before the creation of the world were in him and so they also died. What a wisdom of God! It is true. That’s why Paul said in Galatians 2:10, “I have been crucified with Christ and I longer live…” According to Romans 6, “We died to sin” and “our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with” and “The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” According to Galatians 2:10, after saying, “I have been crucified with Christ and I longer live”, Paul continues, “The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Here in 2 Corinthians, Paul says in verse 15, “And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” Our lives are not ours but his, because he purchased each of the lives paying its price, its full price of his own life (1 Cor 7:23). This love of Christ compelled Paul, controlled him, dominated him, motivated him and ruled him. May it also work in each of us in the same way.

**Second, the ministry of reconciliation (16-21).** Paul says in verse 16, “So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.” A worldly point of view of Christ was that his followers were called the Nazarene sect to be rooted out. He was a blasphemer. He was a fraud. He was a false messiah. He was a problem to Judaism. He deserved to be crucified and his preachers deserved to be killed. Paul also regarded Christ as such a person and devoted himself fully to eradicating any sect of Jesus of Nazareth. Acts 9:1-2 describes it this way at the time of fierce persecution of Christians, “Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.” His view of Christ produced such a violent, murderous act. But after meeting Christ on the way to Damascus, Paul’s view of Christ was completely changed. Indeed, Christ is the Messiah, the Saviour and Lord. He became a servant of Christ Jesus, a bondslave to Christ. Wherever he went, he proved from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah, the one promised to come, and he was crucified and died for the sins of mankind and was raised from the dead and he would come again as the Judge. His life was in a great danger each day because of Christ whom he carried and preached. He was a Christ-man. He confessed in Philippians 1:21, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” His life goal was to please Christ the Lord, that always Christ be exalted in his body, whether by life or by death.” (2 Cor 5:9; Phil 1:20). When his view of Christ was changed, his whole view of the world and history and people was changed, as history is divided from BC (Before Christ) to AD (Anno Domini). Such a view of Christ is the view of every true Christian. In such a view, the world and the people living in it are not the object of love or envy but the object to be saved from miserable sin and dreadful eternal destruction. Apostle John also had the same viewpoint of the world and said in 1 John 2:15-16, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.” John continues in 4:1, “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world, and in 4:5, “They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to him, and 5:19, “the whole world is under the control of the evil one.” We can say that life is determined according to one’s view of the world and men.

Christ is the hinge on which the world moves and so the dividing factor of the world and all those living in it. So at the time of Jesus’s birth Simeon a prophet said to Mary in Luke 2:34-35, “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.” According to Jesus’ parable of the tenants he is a cornerstone, a saving stone for those who trust in him or a crushing stone for those who reject him (Mt 21:42-44; 1 Peter 2:6, 8). The only difference in people is whether a person is in Christ or not. Galatians 3:28 says, “There is neither Jews nor Greek, salve nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” And in Colossians 3:11, “Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.” No one can get out of Christ, for he is the Saviour and at the same time the Judge of the living and the dead (2 Tim 4:1). Here in 2 Corinthians Paul says continually, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” Although a person in Christ may have many human weaknesses and shortcomings with no honourable status in the society, he or she is a new creation when clothed with Christ, being in him. Those who are in Christ will be more and more Christlike in the matter of time. One hymn song says, “This child can face uncertain days because He lives.” (Hymn 256 – Because He Lives.)

Then Paul says in verse 18, “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” All this, Christ’s compelling love, change of the viewpoint of the world and anyone, and new creation in Christ, is from God. God took the initiative. God has been stretching out his hand of salvation, as the LORD God said to the Israelites, the slaves in Egypt, “I will redeem you with an outstretched arm” (Ex 6:6). This hand or arm outstretched is for salvation, redemption or reconciliation; all these go together. The reconciliation shows that the two, God and man, were in a serious condition in the relationship. They were in hostility and enmity because of man’s sin. It had to be resolved through reconciliation. From man’s side there was no way to reach out to God because of the unbreakable sky-high barricade erected between the total sinfulness of mankind and the absolute holiness of God. Not compromising his holiness and righteousness, that is, not contradicting himself God reached out his hand toward sinners, by sacrificing his own Son on the cross thoroughly and completely punishing him to the point of death on the cross. That was the price of man’s sin. Those who hold to this hand of salvation through repentance and faith in Christ Jesus are amazingly reconciled to God. This is the reconciliation through Christ. This has been the marvelous God’s way of working throughout history until now, and it will be so till Jesus’ comes again.

And Paul said in Colossians 1:19-20, “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether thing on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” Paul continued, “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death...” We really thank God for his reconciliation for us through his Son’s blood. The blood of his Son shed on the cross cannot be in vain for you and me and for all those whom we pray for.

Paul continues, “gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.” How precious is the ministry of reconciliation! God wants to use the ministry of reconciliation while he was reconciling the world to himself in Christ. What a grace it is that God is not counting men’s sins against them, for he had already counted men’s sins against his own Son as we thought of. Those who have been reconciled to God have peace with God. They become peace-makers as they carry the ministry of reconciliation. Jesus said in Matthew 5:9, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.” Yet, many people misunderstand concerning peace-makers. Peacemakers are those who do the ministry of reconciliation, helping people to be reconciled to God first. Only in thatpeacemaking between people is possible and true.

Paul says continually in verse 19, “And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.” Here “message” is “word”, *logos* in Greek. He has committed to us the word of reconciliation, literally placed in us the *logos* as opposed to the *mythos*.  *Logos* is the word that is true, *mythos*is the word that is not truth. And certainly the message of reconciliation is in line with the message of the cross, that is the gospel. And the gospel is called the gospel of peace (Eph 6:15).

And verse 20 says, “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.” As each nation has ambassadors representing the nation, Christ’s ambassadors are from Christ’s kingdom, presenting the kingdom. It is as though God were making his appeal to all nations of the world through Christ’s ambassadors from.

Then Paul says, “We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.” What a pointed message! As we know, “implore” means “beg earnestly or desperately.” Paul’s imploration for Corinthians is not “Be reconciled to Paul” but “Be reconciled to God.” It is through our repentance to God and faith in Christ Jesus. 1 John 1:6-9 says, “If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” When we are reconciled to God, reconciliation among people will be achieved in the matter of time.

Finally Paul says in verse 21, “God made him who had no sin to be sin (offering) for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” We are to understand the power of the righteousness of God. The righteousness of God has no part with sin. When we become the righteousness of God, God regards us as those who have not sinned at all. Wow! It is remembering our sins no more (Jer. 31:34; Heb 8:12; 10:17). It is through Christ becoming a sin offering for us. For the blood of Christ cleanses our consciences (Heb. 9:14). This is the core message of reconciliation. Praise God!

We thank and praise God for Christ’s compelling love. Thank God for reconciling us to himself through Christ and giving us the ministry of reconciliation. May we know that God is reconciling the world to himself in Christ through the ministry of reconciliation. Being aware of this grand enterprise of God, may we live as Christ’s ambassadors for one soul after another with the clear message of reconciliation, “Be reconciled to God.”