

2 Cor 5:16-6:2 Consequences of Living for Christ, part 2

You may remember that I mentioned a Patch the Pirate song we used to sing at college —“There’s Been a Great Change Since I’ve Been Born Again”

The Things I Used to Do

The places I used to go...

The words I used to say...

Conversion to Christ brings about a great change, a radical shift in our thoughts, words, and deeds. This change is one of the evidences of genuine conversion. If nothing has changed, then nothing has changed; you are still dead in trespasses and sin. Lack of that great change gives evidence that there has been no change.

The exception to that would be if you were saved as a child and grew up in a Christian home. Then it’s likely that a great change in your behavior has not been necessary. The change would be more in attitudes and commitments than in behavior.

In the previous section of 2 Cor, Paul exhorts us to live for him who died for us. (Read vs. 15).

Note vs. 16a—“therefore, from now on ...” These words introduce several consequences or results of living for Christ. Since Christ loved us, died for us, and rose again, we should live for him and not for ourselves. What would it look like if we did that? What would the consequences be if we lived for Christ “from now on”? That’s what this passage tells us.

In the first part of this message, back in December, we looked at two consequences of living for Christ:

- I. .16 We *regard* no one “according to the flesh.” That is, we don’t judge people on a superficial, external, worldly level. We look at things biblically, not superficially.
- II. .17 We *relate* as new creations in Christ. The old, pre-conversion way of thinking and living is gone; it’s been replaced by a new worldview and lifestyle.

Let’s go on in the text now to see another consequence of living for Christ.

III. .18b -19 We reconcile others to God.

A. .18b God has reconciled us to himself.

Reconciliation happens when a relationship is restored. It happens when former enemies become friends.

Quote: Reconciliation is the divine act by which, on the basis of the death of Christ, God’s holy displeasure against sinful man was appeased, the enmity between God and man was removed, and man was restored to proper relations with God. ... Reconciliation is not some polite ignoring or reduction of hostility but rather its total and objective removal.¹

1. Reconciliation is necessary when some kind of conflict or hostility exists in a relationship. What is the source of hostility between God and man? Sin.

a) “All have sinned... There is not a just man... There is none righteous, no not one.” We are separated from God because of our sin. Isa 59:1-2

b) God is righteous and holy; man is sinful. How can a holy God be in fellowship with a sinful man? There has to be some means of removing human sin and granting holiness to the sinner. These verses explain how God does that.

2. .19a “that is” – here comes the explanation of reconciliation. How does this reconciliation work? What is it based on?

3. “God was in Christ”—Jesus is the God-man, God in the flesh, *Immanuel*—God with us. God reconciles the world to himself through the person and work of Christ.

John 14:10 ... *I am in the Father, and the Father in Me ... the Father who dwells in Me does the works.*

Colossians 2:9 *For in [Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;*

¹ Murray J. Harris, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 353.

4. .19b reconciling “the world” unto himself – Who is he talking about here? Is everyone in the world reconciled to God? No, only a small minority of people experience reconciliation with God. Jesus said that the road is narrow and “few there be that find it.” Most people, sadly, are not reconciled to God.

The “world” in this case refers to people without distinction; all kinds of people; people throughout the world. The atonement of Christ is sufficient for all, but applies only to believers, only to those who accept it (cf. John 1:12). The only people in the world who have been reconciled to God are those who have accepted the free gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

5. .19c “not imputing their trespasses to them.”

a) To “impute” (λογιζόμενος) something is to credit it to your account. It’s a banking/accounting term—“to charge to your account, to credit to you.”

b) “trespasses” or “transgressions” (παράπτωμα) are not mere mistakes committed in ignorance. Trespasses are deliberate sins committed in rebellion against God’s law.

The word means “to step across or beyond a limit or boundary.” Cf. “No Trespassing” signs. You trespass when you step on someone else’s property without permission. A trespass is a sin, a violation of the law; you’ve gone over a limit or violated a boundary.

1 Jn 3:4 *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.*

c) .19c God does not hold these acts of deliberate disobedience against us. How can God be just/righteous if he disregards sin? He can’t be just if he ignores our sin; he must deal with sin righteously and justly. And that requires the punishment of sin. Yet he does not charge our sins against us. How can he do that?

d) Someone has to volunteer to take our place, to be our substitute. God does not impute our sins to us because he imputed/charged them to someone else. A substitute voluntarily pays our debt.

- e) To whom did God impute/charge our trespasses? To Jesus (cf. vs. 21). God charged our sins to Jesus—he died “for our sins” (1 Cor 15). Forgiveness is based on Jesus’ sacrificial death on our behalf.

Col 1:20 And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself...

- 6. .21 Paul goes on to explain more fully how God is able to charge our sins to Jesus.

We’re going to jump to vs. 21 because it describes how reconciliation happens. It’s a summary of the Gospel message and gives us the basis for God’s reconciliation with sinners.

In just a few words, Paul summarizes a very profound message. Every word here is important.

- a) .21a “Him who knew no sin” – Jesus is the sinless substitute, the lamb without blemish and without spot who takes away the sins of the world.

He obviously knew *about* sin, he experienced the consequences of sin, but he did not engage in sin personally. He had never personally sinned.

Jesus had to be sinless in order to take on our sin. He didn’t die for his own sins; he died for our sins.

- b) .21a Next we have one of the most profound and yet mysterious statements in the whole Bible. God made Christ sin for us. It’s virtually impossible to plumb the depths of that weighty assertion. What does it mean?

- c) As Jesus was dying on the cross, God poured out his wrath on him. He “became sin” in the sense that God imputed/charged to him the sins of the world and punished him for those sins. Jesus “became sin” in the sense that he bore our sins on the cross. Jesus died in our place and endured the wrath of God on our behalf.

Isaiah 53:4–5 Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; ... He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

Galatians 3:13 *Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”),*

Quote: In a sense beyond human comprehension, God treated Christ as “sin,” aligning him so totally with sin and its dire consequences that from God’s viewpoint he became indistinguishable from sin itself.²

- d) Note the little phrase “for us.” That means that Jesus died as a substitute—“instead of us, in place of us.” Jesus’ death was substitutionary—on our behalf.
- e) We sometimes refer to this as the Great Exchange—Jesus took our sins on the cross, and we receive the righteousness of Christ when we believe in him.

The sixteenth-century German theologian Zacharius Ursinus put this truth succinctly in these words:

God grants and credits to me
the perfect satisfaction, righteousness,
and holiness of Christ,
as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner,
as if I had been perfectly obedient
as Christ was obedient for me.³

- f) How does that exchange happen?
.21end—“in him.” You have to be in Christ—united with him in his death and resurrection. How is a sinner united with Christ? Through repentance of sin and faith in Jesus.
 - (1) If sin is the cause of the conflict, then we must deal with sin. And the proper way to deal with sin is to admit it and to turn away from it. Without repentance, there can be no reconciliation. 1 Jn 1:9

² Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 454.

³ Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, vol. 19, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 202. Heidelberg Catechism, answer 60.

- (2) We accept the gift of salvation by putting our faith/trust in Jesus Christ. We believe that he is the Son of God who died on the cross and rose again.

Quote: God has confronted us with our transgressions but has taken the initiative in Christ to resolve the problem they have created. ... it remains for us to accept that we have done wrong, to repent of it, and to accept God's offer of friendship.⁴

- g) Results if you do that: "we might become the righteousness of God in him."

Believers are imputed/credited with the righteousness of Christ. God sees us as robed/covered in the righteousness of Christ, not in our own sinfulness. Our sin was imputed to Christ, and his righteousness imputed to us. Thus, we are reconciled to God.

That's what the Bible calls justification. God declares us to be righteous based on Christ's death on our behalf. We have a right standing before God because we are "in Christ" by faith.

This is a status or a position; our standing before God is now righteous because the righteousness of Christ has been credited to our account through our faith in Jesus.

The Bible affirms that Jesus is the one and only means of reconciliation with God (Jn 14:6). If you don't accept Jesus' work on your behalf, then you cannot be saved.

Can you say that you are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ? Has Christ's righteousness been imputed/charged to you? Are you "in Christ"? I hope so.

- B. .18end, .19end God has given to us the ministry of reconciliation/committed to us the word of reconciliation.
1. Believers in Jesus have a task, a great goal or obligation.

⁴ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 293.

- a) .18end He calls it a “ministry” – i.e., a service, a work to do. Ministry is work done for/on behalf of another. Ministry is serving God by serving others.
- b) .19end He also calls it the “word” of reconciliation – i.e., a message to deliver. The text literally says, God has “set (τίθημι) in us the word of the reconciliation.” Probably the sense is that God has entrusted us with this ministry.
- c) So our work/service is to deliver a message—that message is the Gospel, the good news that sinners can be reconciled to a holy God through the person and work of Jesus Christ. We have to proclaim it so that people hear it—it’s a word/message. This is the work that God has entrusted to us.
- d) Note the pronouns here—“given *us*...committed to *us*...*we* are ambassadors.”
 - (1) This applies most specifically to Paul and his colleagues. God had specifically chosen Paul for this great work; he was the apostle to the Gentiles.
 - (2) But the obligation extends beyond Paul and his generation. Every Christian is obligated to participate in the Great Commission. We all should be involved in some way in the ministry and word of reconciliation. This is how we serve God.
 - (3) God’s work of reconciling the world to himself continues today through people like us. We have the ministry of proclaiming the word of reconciliation to our generation.
 - (4) We can’t force anyone to receive it, but we can proclaim it and pray that God will use us and our efforts to draw people to himself.

2. How do people hear about this offer of reconciliation? God’s appointed means is through the preaching of the cross (1 Cor 1:18). “How shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom 10).

Cf. vs. 11 “We persuade men” – that’s our task, our responsibility, our great commission.

3. All believers have the obligation of telling others how they can be reconciled to God. He has given us this message and this ministry. We do that ourselves, and we support others who do it.

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- I. .16 We *regard* no one “according to the flesh.” That is, we don’t judge people on a superficial, external, worldly level.
- II. .17 We *relate* as new creations in Christ. The old, pre-conversion way of thinking and living is gone, and the new worldview and lifestyle has come.
- III. .18b -19 We *reconcile* others to God. God has given to us the ministry of reconciliation; he’s committed unto us the word of reconciliation. The word that we have to give to others is vs. 21

Are you reconciled to God through repentant faith in Christ, and if so, are you involved in reconciling others?