

Text: 2 Cor 5.18-6.2**A Preliminary Outline of 2 Corinthians:**

Opening (1.1-11)

Addressing Corinthian Perceptions and Paul's Ministry Philosophy (1.12-7.16)

Defending Paul's Conduct (1.12-2.17)

Exposition of Paul's Philosophy (3.1-6.10)

Appeal for Corinthian confidence (6.11-7.16)

Instructions concerning the offering (8.1-9.15)

Assertion of apostolic authority (10.1-13.10)

Conclusion (13.11-14)¹

Chapter 5 addresses the question of our destiny after death and before the resurrection, which motivates Paul in his ministry.

As we studied it, and got into chapter 6 last week, we had a rough stretch in understanding what the passage was saying. I want to go back to this and give you a message on "**The Ministry of Reconciliation.**"

This session will involve less discussion than usual, with more "lecture" than discussion, but I want you to ask questions as we go along. If you will jot down your questions, I will break at points and open things up for discussion.

I. Understanding reconciliation

A. The word "reconciliation"

1. Used only by Paul in the NT

Verb form	Noun form
Rm 5.10 (2)	Rm 5.11
	Rm 11.15
1 Cor 7.11	
2 Cor 5.18	2 Cor 5.18
2 Cor 5.19	2 Cor 5.19
2 Cor 5.20	

¹ Adapted from Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003).

2. A commentary discussion of reconciliation

“Reconciliation assumes ruptured relationships, alienation, and disaffection. The problem, however, is not with God, as if God were some cruel taskmaster from whom humans rebelled. Human sinfulness created the problem, and this sinful condition had to be dealt with before there could be any reconciliation. Sin incurs God’s holy wrath, so it could not be treated lightly or swept under the rug. God can never be reconciled to sin, but God does not turn away from sinners in disgust and leave them to their just desserts. Instead, while humans were still in open revolt, God acted in love (Rom 5:8) to bring the hostility to an end and to bring about peace (see Rom 5:1; see Isa 32:17). This peace is not simply a cessation of hostilities or an uneasy truce. It refers to the mending of the broken relationship that results from God justifying us (making us right) through faith and changing us from enemies to friends (GNB).”² [on handout]

a. Illustrated by rejected Israel and reconciled world (Rm 11.15)

- 1) Israel refused their Messiah, God rejected Israel (though he would have received repentant Israel)
- 2) Rejecting Israel, God reconciled the world (world = Gentiles as a class, not every individual)
- 3) God made it possible for repentant Gentiles to make friends with God

b. Illustrated by marital reconciliation (1 Cor 7.11)

- 1) The verse focuses on the wife, it could be reversed
- 2) Verse 10 tells the wife not to leave her marriage (assumes the leaving is wrong)
- 3) Verse 11 says the leaving woman should remain unmarried, or else be reconciled

² David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 289–90.

- 4) Reconciliation involves confession of wrong and restoration of friendship

Reconciliation cannot happen without relationships.

3. Contrasted with justification in Rm 5.1-11

a. Rm 5.1-9 describes justification

- 1) Legal term
- 2) Declaration of righteousness

“Justification is a judicial term used in the law courts. A judge may acquit an accused person without ever entering into any personal relationship with the him or her. He just announces the verdict, not guilty. The accused hardly expects to be invited over for dinner by the judge, and probably hopes that he will never see him again.”³

b. Rm 5.10-11 describes reconciliation

- 1) We were enemies
- 2) We were reconciled by the death of Christ [here parallels justification]
- 3) We are made friends when we accept God’s reconciliation

“Yet there can be no question that in reconciliation more takes place than a mere removal of the relationship of guilt. ... Through the revelation of the superabounding love of God which did not find the sacrifice of the Son too great, and which does not regard it as too humiliating to plead with men, we are renewed in the total state of our life.”⁴

³ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975) 1:259, cited in Garland, 29:290.

⁴ H. M. Friedrich Büchsel, “Ἀλλάσσω, Ἀντάλλαγμα, Ἄπ-, Δι-, Καταλλάσσω, Καταλλαγή, Ἀποκατ-, Μεταλλάσσω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 255.

“The shift to the reconciliation metaphor takes what God has done through Christ a step further. The judge enters into a personal relationship with the accused. This is necessary because the judge is the one who has been sinned against and is the focus of the personal hostility. God does not simply make a bookkeeping alteration by dropping the charges against us. God gives himself to us in friendship. Because of our extreme hostility toward God, this investment is accomplished at unspeakable cost.”⁵

B. Reconciliation in 2 Cor 5.18ff.

1. God reconciled us to himself (18)

- a. God acted in love while we were hostile
- b. Our reconciliation to him is assumed in this verse (we are now friends)
- c. God then gave us the ministry (διακονία) of reconciliation [bringing others into friendship with God]

2. The ministry of reconciliation defined (19)

- a. God in Christ is reconciling the world to himself
 - 1) World = humankind, not every individual
 - 2) Not counting their trespasses against them
- b. Gives to us the “word of reconciliation” (parallel to ministry)

“God did not deputize Paul to make people feel good about themselves and their relationship to God but to effect a real peace. This task means that he must always point to something beyond himself, not to himself, to what God has done in Christ, not what he is doing for Christ.”⁶

⁵ Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 29:290.

⁶ Garland, 29:294–95.

II. How God uses men as ambassadors to restore a relationship with men (20a)

We should note that our notion of ambassadors as diplomats is similar to the ancient world but misses some key ancient distinctions.

A. Ambassadors in the ancient world were “inviolable”

1. Should never be mistreated
2. Should certainly never be imprisoned
3. If violated, would be severely punished (if from a higher power, like Rome)

But notice how Paul is mistreated (2Co 6.3-10, for example)

B. Ambassadors were sent as a sign of friendship and good will

1. To establish a relationship
2. To renew friendly relations
3. To make an alliance

“God’s purpose in sending Christ and his envoys has the same end—to put an end to hostilities and to bring about a reconciliation.”⁷

C. Ambassadors almost always sent to Rome, not from Rome

1. Roman emperors condescended to receive embassies, not interested in sending them
2. God, on the other hand, sends his ambassadors to his enemies

III. The appeal of Paul to the Corinthians (20b-6.2)

A. “We beg you”: Paul is appealing to the Corinthians (20b)

1. See also, “we also urge you” (6.1)
2. The relationship between Paul and Corinth is broken
3. This is the point of 2 Corinthians

⁷ Garland, 29:296.

B. The basis of the appeal: God's reconciliation of us in Christ (21)

C. The question: Aren't the Corinthians already reconciled?

"Why does Paul implore those who are already Christians to be reconciled to God? They had already accepted the gospel message."⁸

1. Calvin: we sin every day, so need daily reconciliation
2. But the verb is aorist, not present, so not continual action
3. The Corinthian problem is that they are "yet carnal" and not fully reconciled to God

This constitutes their problem with Paul: they are fighting with Paul (God's ambassador) because they are not fully reconciled to God.

If you are still fighting with other Christians, does that mean you are not fully reconciled to God? (Especially with someone who is sent by God as an ambassador to you?)

D. What does reconciliation look like?

1. We must own our enmity: our problem is our self-will, and it sets us at odds with God and others
2. We must recognize our enmities are first with God before they are with other people

"Humans may attempt to reconcile with one another, but if they are not also reconciled to God there will be no real reconciliation."⁹

3. We must abandon all worldly criteria and look at ourself and others from God's viewpoint
4. If we are reconciled to God, we are always reconciling ourselves with others

⁸ Garland, 29:298.

⁹ Garland, 29:299.

Conclusion:

1. Look at 6.11-13: this is the appeal for reconciliation.
2. Look at 6.2: this is the time for reconciliation — NOW