

The God Who Makes All Things New
2 Corinthians 5:14-21

INTRODUCTION:

1. In the spring of 1999 Adam Campbell sat before a House subcommittee that was looking into ways to prevent school shootings. A high school senior, he had providentially survived the Columbine massacre. Looking straight into the eyes of the most powerful men in the world he simple but accurately said, “If a person has a bad heart, you cannot change it, only God can change a bad heart” (*World*, 5-29-99).
2. Adam Campbell was right. Only God can change a “bad heart”, but unfortunately, “bad hearts” have had their way in what has been rightly described as the “Culture of Death.” Today our world and our nation are fractured and broken. The optimism that launched the 20th century quickly gave way to 2 World Wars, Nazi death camps, Soviet gulags, Chinese extermination programs and the killing fields of Cambodia, and, there appears to be no end in sight. Just take a look at the Sudan.
3. Six million Jews, 2 million Poles, 800,000 gypsies and 6 million soviet P.O.W.’s and civilians killed or starved to death by Nazism. All toll 17 million bodies lay at the feet of Hitler’s Germany. But we cannot stop there. Stalin’s Soviet system of Communism conservatively accounts for 20-25 million deaths. Mao’s madness in China add at least another 25-30 million to the death count. Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawn rightly characterizes the last century as a short century of “mega-death.”
4. America, however, has not escaped unscathed from all of this. Southern Seminary’s R. Albert Mohler puts things in global and national perspective and you and I must hang our heads in shame at what he sets before our eyes.

“In the last half-century, we have seen nothing less than the perfection of death through modern warfare, the exercise of total war, the use of civilians as human shields and pawns, aerial bombardment of civilian communities, chemical warfare, the use of land mines against civilians, and the rise of nuclear weapons with the threat even of the neutron bomb- - the first weapon in human history designed to kill human beings while leaving structures standing. We have seen, in this half-century, life denied and life annihilated. And the culture of death has not just come in the form of warfare, as brutal and costly as that has been. Life has been denied and annihilated, not only on the plains of war, but also in the sanctity of the womb. In the United States, since the *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973, between forty and forty-five million infants have been aborted in the womb. The culture of abortion has unleashed a warfare on the womb unprecedented in its destruction and also in its lack of conscience. There has been a cauterization of the American conscience so that the multitudes do not even understand this issue in moral terms. The unborn child is reduced to nothing

more than a biomass of unwanted tissue in what is euphemistically described as the “product of conception.”

The technologies of abortion are growing ever more sophisticated, and they are now so gruesome (and yet so effective) that abortions can now be reduced to the use of a sufficient dosage of birth control pills. Today we also face the abortion pill RU-486- - the human pesticide- - the taking of which kills the unborn human life with a silent and unseen perfection, unprecedented in human history. Clearly, we have lost all ability to maintain moral discourse. We use terms like “partial birth abortion,” when that “process” is nothing less than the insertion of scissors into the cranial cavity of an unborn infant. The scissor are then opened and a suction tube inserted. The brains are extracted, and the skull is collapsed, and then the unwanted “bio-product” of conception is removed. We know what a transparent lie this is, and yet our moral discourse is so malformed that we cannot speak of such issues in rational terms.”

How did all of this happen? The Soviet Nobel Prize winner Alexander Solzhenitsyn asked the same question and answered it: “Men have forgotten God, that is how all of this happened.”

5. Unfortunately our moral confusion does not stop even here, and heartache and sorrow continue to meet us at every turn in the road. Continuing debates about homosexuality and the place of religion in the public square, and new issues of same sex marriage, civil unions, human cloning, assisted suicide and terrorism reveal even further the loss of our moral compass. Jeremiah 17:9 confronts us once again, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can understand it?” We still think, but we do not think correctly. We still act, but we do not act responsibly. We still live, but we do not live wisely. While some look to Capitol Hill for solutions, I am convinced more than ever our only hope is in Calvary’s Hill. Our hope must be in the Cross not Congress, it must be in a Savior and not a President. It must be the God who has reconciled the world to Himself. It must be in the God who makes all things new, including the human heart.
6. John Adams, America’s 2nd President understood the situation well for he said, “We have no government armed with the power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, greed, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” John Adams is right. Nothing less than a new creature in Christ can rightly govern or be governed.

TRANSITION:

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 is Paul's great treatment on the doctrine of reconciliation and the new creation we become in Christ. 5:14-17 is strongly Christocentric. 5:18-21 is strongly theocentric. In sum Paul says "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." Paul the apostle looked at the world in his day, a world ruled by Rome. Here he saw first hand what some would call the greatest empire ever built by man, experiencing what historians refer to as the *Pax Romana*, the Roman Peace. Yet he knew there will be no lasting peace until there is peace in our hearts, peace between God and man. A reconciling must take place. How can this happen? Is it even a possibility? Paul says yes!

I. In Christ we participate in the miracle of reconciliation. v. 14-17

- Christians are considered by many to be crazy, and with good reason. As A.W. Tozer notes: "A real Christian is an odd number anyway. He feels supreme love for One whom he has never seen, talks familiarly every day to Someone he cannot see, expects to go to heaven on the virtue of Another, empties himself in order to be full, admits he is wrong so he can be declared right, goes down in order to get up, is strongest when he is weakest, richest when he is poorest, and happiest when he feels worst. He dies so he can live, forsakes in order to have, gives away so he can keep... (*The Root of the Righteous* p. 156).
- When a person is reconciled to God and made new in Christ, exactly how is he or she now new?

1. Being reconciled to God gives us a new passion. v. 14

- Here Paul speaks of Christ's love for me. It continually constraints, guides, limits, sets parameters. It holds together, encloses and captures. Christ's love for me, made clear in His death on the cross, holds me fast as "the controlling factor in my life."
Being in Christ gives us a whole new love.
- NEB: "Christ's love leaves us no choice." The love of Christ keeps us from living for ourselves and allows us to live for Christ and others. My egocentricity now yields gladly to Christocentricity.
- Why? "He died for all," He died for me. My response? I died too (to sin, self, and the system of this world).
- Illustration: The constraint the love of Charlotte and the boys is on me.

2. Being reconciled to God gives us a new priority. v. 15

- Christ's death must change the way we live here and now on this earth.
- Jesus is not interested in being anyone's co-pilot, V.P., or runner-up. He takes 2nd to no one, including you & me.
- Those who belong to Jesus Christ do not live for themselves, they live for Him.
- One all encompassing priority now consumes their life: "All that matters in life is that I please Christ."

- Here is a new way of living.
Transition: Here is a new way of thinking.

3. Being reconciled to God gives us a new perspective. v. 16

- Here is where we find out if salvation is real.
- Illustration: “Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world...”
Question: do you?!
- Christians too often have a confused and misdirected way of dividing their activities and thinking into “God’s stuff” and “ordinary stuff.” A biblical worldview results in an undivided life that honors God in everything. We should not rationalize that God is only interested in half (some or a portion) of our lives and pursuits. God is interested in every detail of our being. There is to be no division, no compartmentalizing into that which is sacred and that which is secular.
A holistic Christian worldview translates into a radical, other worldly difference in the way we live and work, think and act. Christians are called to be absolutely faithful and different in ordinary and extraordinary situations. We are called to be like Jesus. Whether we work in a medical lab or perform intricate surgery, operate a factory forklift or act as a chief executive officer, sell merchandise or engage in direct marketing, work in the political arena or school classroom, God is interested in the way we do what we do – all of our living all of the time.
- Now I surrender all thought to the Lordship of Christ and the wisdom of the cross. Christ’s death is the turning point and the decisive point in every facet of my life. Nothing is excluded from His Lordship. Every act, every decision, every judgment, every thing I do is now placed before Him. I do not leave my faith at home or the church. No! It goes with me everywhere influencing and dictating everything I do (Including a restaurant!).

4. Being reconciled to God gives us new possibilities. v. 17

- To be saved is to be changed.
To be saved is to be new.
- No verb in the first part of this verse. Paul excitedly runs past it.
“In Christ a new creation.”
- “Old things have passed away” (W.A.R.)
- New beginning, new status, new standing, new values, new behavior, new life! Here and only here, I enter the land of a new beginning.
Transition: This is the miracle of reconciliation.

II. To men we proclaim the message of reconciliation. vs. 18-19, 21

- Sin, Satan and our sin nature have introduced a wedge, a gulf, a chasm separating God and men. Sin divides, destroys, devours everything good and precious. Eventually it sends death knocking on every door. It is an irresistible assassin, a hit-man who has your number and knows your name.
- However, there is hope.

1. God is the *author* of reconciliation. v. 18

- Everything begins with God. God came on a rescue and search mission for sinners. Sinners did not go out seeking God, God came in Christ looking for them, for you, for me.
- “All things” looks back to vs. 14-17. All these things are of God.
- Reconciling (*katallage, katallassein*)
- Reconciliation understands there is a broken, ruptured relationship, alienation and separation.
- The problem, however, is not with God. It is with us.
- The solution, however, is with God, and not us.
God was in Christ reconciling, mending and healing our estrangement and enmity.

2. Christ is the *agent* of reconciliation. vs. 19,21

- God was in Christ (v. 19), through Christ (v.18).

a) Christ alone *provides* the way of reconciliation. v. 19

- Exclusivity of the salvation it is affirmed (in Christ).
- Universally of the invitation it is affirmed (the world).
- “Imputing” – reckoning, putting to ones account, a bookkeeping term.
- As judge He forgives.
- As friend he reconciles.

b) Christ alone *accomplished the work* of reconciliation. v. 21

- Called by some the greatest verse in the Bible.
- Speaks of the “great transaction.” Jesus took what was ours (our sin) and gave us what was His (His perfect righteousness).
- Affirms His absolute, complete, sinlessness (cf. Heb. 4:15) and his qualification to bear our sins and in our place.
- In a *Newsweek* article entitled, “Why Did Jesus Die?” (April 12, 2004), religious historian Giles Gasper got it right: “The atonement is the centerpiece of Christianity, and its what distinguishes it from all other religions” (p.56).
- **Transition:** This is the message we proclaim.

III. For God we perform the ministry of reconciliation. vs. 19-20

- We are saved to share, saved to serve.
- We who have been reconciled must become active reconcilers ourselves, never forgetting what we were without Christ, what we would be today without Christ.
- Never forget what it was like to be lost in sin.

1. We possess the precious gospel of reconciliation. v. 19

- God has entrusted to us the word; not angels or any other creature. Without the word no one will be saved, made new, reconciled to God.
- No one is saved by your life. They are saved by His death and resurrection.
- We must go. We must speak. We must tell.

2. We represent the pursuing God of reconciliation. v. 20

- **What is an ambassador?** Think about that question for a minute. Ambassadors spend their lives on foreign soil. They speak a different language than the people. They have different traditions, customs, cultures, and lifestyles. They always feel somewhat like a stranger. They speak on behalf of their country, conveying its ideals, its policies, its decisions. And ... the reputation of their country rests in their hands. For good or for bad, their country is judged by their words and by their actions.
Question: are we too comfortable on this foreign soil?!

a) We announce the message with God's authority.

- Ambassador: for Christ!
- **Ambassadors** engaged upon human affairs are chosen especially for their tact, their dignity and their courtesy, and because they are gifted with persuasive powers. The ambassadors for Christ should show the same characteristics. They must never try to bludgeon men and women into the kingdom of God, but must speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), because it is a gospel of divine love that they are commissioned to proclaim.

b) We appeal to men with God's humility.

- We need to fulfill the role of a good ambassador, not to speak on our behalf but on the behalf of Christ, not to act on our own authority but on the authority of Christ, not to further our own little kingdom but the kingdom of Christ.
- Note the words "pleading" and "imploring." Spurgeon grasped quite well the awesome magnitude of what we read here.

Notice how the text puts it: "We are ambassadors for Christ, *as though God did beseech you by us.*" This thought staggers me. As I came along this morning I felt as if I could bury my head in my hands and weep as I thought of God beseeching anybody. He speaks, and it is done; myriads or angels count

themselves happy to fly at his command; and yet man has so become God's enemy that he will not be reconciled to Him. God would make him his friend, and spends the blood of his dear Son to cement that friendship; but man will not have it. See the great God turns to beseeching his obstinate creature! his foolish creature! In this I feel a reverent compassion for God. Must he beseech a rebel to be forgiven? Do you hear it? Angels, do you hear it? He who is the King of kings veils his sovereignty, and stoops to beseeching his creature to be reconciled to him! I wonder not that some of my brethren start back from such an idea, and cannot believe that it could be so: it seems so derogatory to the glorious God. Yet my text saith it, and it must be true - .

Conclusion:

- Alexis de Tocqueville, a French observer of America wrote in his classic *Democracy in America*, "America is great because she is good. If she ever ceases to be good, she will cease to be great."
- A good America is the result of good people living in her land. Good people are the result of good hearts. Good hearts are found in those God has made new through the reconciling work of His Son, Jesus Christ.
- The great preacher of London, Charles Spurgeon again rightly observed: "I have found... by long experience, that nothing touches the heart like the cross of Christ; and when the heart is touched and wounded... nothing heals its wounds like the balm which flows from the pierced heart of Jesus" ("*The Heart of the Gospel*," p. 386).