

Jason Upchurch - 2 Corinthians 5.17-21 - Reconciled - Easter 2026

This morning as we celebrate the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, I want us to meditate on this familiar passage here in 2 Corinthians 5.

I don't think that I've ever actually preached on this passage although I'm sure I've referenced it throughout the years. It's a passage that is often used by Christians to explain the gospel to unbelievers. There are many elements of the gospel message in the passage that are helpful as we seek to explain what the coming of Jesus was all about.

And although it's fine to use the passage to explain the gospel to unbelievers, the passage itself is addressed primarily to believers. With only one small exception in the passage, the whole of it is addressed to believers to remind us what God the Father has done through the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As you know, the the gospels record the facts of the resurrection, but the rest of the NT records the effects and meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus. And I think we need to be reminded of those truths.

So here's what I want to do this morning, I want to answer the question: What Happens When Some Believes in Jesus? That's the question I want to ask and I think Paul gives us 5 answers in this short passage.

1) We are new creations. **Read 17**

It's important to be clear here. Each of these are not things that God promises to do in the future. These are not things that are in some kind of ongoing process. These are things that have been done. These were accomplished by God for the believer.

And the very first is that every believer in Christ is a new creation. Which is really an amazing claim. We know that God created all things - we read that in Genesis 1 and 2.

Throughout the Bible God is called the Creator.

Rom. 1:25: says that we are to give thanks to God as our Creator.

Isa. 40:28: The Creator of the ends of the earth does not faint or grow weary.

1 Pet. 4:19: says Christians who suffer according to God's will are to entrust our souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

God's ability to make us and make everything is one of the primary reasons we worship him. Everything you see and interact with and experience in the world around you has been created by God for his own purpose and glory.

You yourself were knit together in the womb by God.

The problem is that because Adam sinned we are affected with that sin and our nature is completely corrupted. When God made Adam and Eve, he made them good, pure and without sin. But Adam violated God's Law, ate the fruit, and plunged God's good creation into sin and darkness.

And we see that reflected in our desires and actions prior to salvation. No baby ever needs to be taught to sin, they sin naturally. They sin on their own.

That's why Proverbs says the rod of discipline drives folly from the child. There's folly bound up in our kids, and it takes faithful godly discipline to drive it out. And if we're honest there's often still a fair amount of folly left into adulthood. Because even discipline doesn't fully cure the situation, does it?

No, what we actually need is to be made new. Top to bottom restoration.

I think most of you know our missionary Dave Robison does YouTube videos where he basically reviews automatic watches. It's actually part of tent-making to make income while serving in Japan. Well, we watched one a couple years ago and the next video that popped up was a guy restoring fancy watches. This lady had inherited a 1970s Rolex watch from her dad, took it into the ocean and forgot to screw down the crown all the way. Salt water got into the mechanics and killed the watch. And this guy took this watch, pulled it apart piece by piece with magnifying glasses and special tools and completely restored the watch from the ground up. And the moment the restoration was done, he wound the watch pushed the crown in and it began keeping perfect time.

It was a glorious watch, it got completely corrupted and ruined, and he made it brand new.

That's what God has done for us in Christ. **Read 17**

If you're in Christ you are a brand new spiritual creation. All the old corruption of your spirit is gone. All the old guilt and shame has been completely sand blasted away down to the bare elements and recreated.

Now, are there still affects from our former lives? Sure. Some of the sinful decisions we've made have lasting consequences that won't be completely erased until our bodies are raised from the dead and we're walking around on the New Earth. But spiritually speaking we are brand new creations.

In fact, notice how Paul phrases it: The old has passed away. BEHOLD! The new has come.

It's like the great unveiling. TA-DA! Here's the brand new creation.

Whoever you were before salvation, that's not you anymore. It does no good to talk about your past sins, repeat your sins, it does no good to define yourself by your sins.

There are so many times when believers recite their past sins, talk about all the nonsense the Lord has saved them from, dwell on what could have been had they made better decisions. Even when people give their testimony about how the Lord saved them many times it's almost a glorying in their sin, a reveling in it.

The Bible says it's shameful to even speak of those sinful things that we did in the past in darkness and secret (**Eph. 4:12**). It does no good to dwell on those sins repeat those sins or glory in those sins. Why? Because in Christ the old you has passed away. It's no more.

The new has come. When did it come? The moment you were saved. The moment you were saved was just like God saying "Let there be new life in Christ." The moment you were saved was like when Jesus called out "Lazarus, come forth." Or when the Valley of Dry Bones became living humans again.

That's what God has done in you. You're brand new in Christ.

A second thing happens when someone believes in Jesus.

2) We receive God's Mercy. Read 18-19

Now these 2 verses are packed. But what I want us to focus on here is the first phrase in this.

We saw in **Vs. 17** that we're new creations, the old is passed away. How did that happen? Who initiated that change? How did it come about? Paul says all this from who? God.

The salvation that has been brought about, the change that has happened in your life, the old dying, the new creation is all from God. This is his mercy on us.

As Christians we often use mercy and grace as synonyms, and to some extent they are synonyms. They are positive things that God has done for us. But they are also very different and I think the nuance in the words is very important. Grace is a gift. It's a good thing that we get that we don't deserve.

Eph 2:8-9: For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not your own doing it is what? The gift of God.

Grace is a gift. Salvation is a gift. Everything about God sending Jesus, giving us faith, giving us salvation is a pure gift of grace.

But salvation is also a mercy. Mercy is not getting what we do deserve. What do we deserve? We deserve eternal wrath and hell.

When a police officer pulls someone over for violating the law, what the person deserves is a citation. They deserve to pay a fine for their illegal act. But sometimes the officer gives the person a warning. The driver does not get what they deserve. That is an act of mercy.

And both grace and mercy are part of the salvation that God has given us.

Psa. 103:8: The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Luke 1:50: His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

Tit. 3:5: He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.

We need to remember that salvation is just as much an act of mercy as it is an act of grace.

Why do I say we have received mercy? We'll see it here in a second, but Paul says God reconciled us to himself. He made things right between us.

The emphasis is that although we sinned, God took all the initiative. He was the one who was proactive to save us. Salvation wasn't a negotiation where we give a little and he gives a little. We come a little more, then he comes a little more. No, we were dead to rights in sin, deserving of wrath.

Jesus says we were unable to come to him except for the Father's drawing us to him. **John 6:44**

So everything about our salvation was initiated by God, completed by God. It is God who **Ephesians 2:4** says is rich in mercy especially toward us sinners.

So what happens when someone believes in Jesus? God makes us new creations. We receive God's mercy.

3) We are reconciled to God. Read 18-19

Four times in 2 verses this word reconcile is used. What's that about? What is reconciliation? Reconciliation is when you exchange a hostile relationship for a friendly relationship.

Except for Adam, Eve and Jesus, every human who has ever been born has been conceived and born into a hostile relationship to God. We are enemies of God and God is our enemy.

Eph. 2:3: We were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind. Every Christian, before we were saved were the object of God's wrath. His righteous, holy anger was aimed at us because our nature was contrary to his.

1 Pet. 2:10: Once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy.

There was a time before salvation where God's justice was rightly pointed at us. We had not received mercy.

John 3:18: Whoever believes [in Jesus] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

A lot of people think that someone has to hear about Jesus, hear the gospel and then reject the gospel in order to go to hell. But that's not true. Jesus himself says that those who do not believe in Jesus are condemned already because they haven't believed.

You know what a person has to do to be under the wrath of God? Nothing. That's who we are. So part of our job as Christians is to tell people about the reality that God's wrath is upon them. That there is hostility between them and God. Nobody likes this job, but we have to do it.

If you go to the doctor and get a checkup and the doctor tells you that you have heart disease. The doctor didn't put that disease in you - that disease was already there. But their job is to tell you there's a problem and you need to do something about it.

That's what happened with us. Ten minutes before you believed in Jesus the white hot, holy wrath of God was toward you. His anger - completely justified because of our sinfulness and our sin - was toward us. And we lived in rebellion to him.

And the moment we believed in Jesus all that wrath and hostility was completely erased. And it was more than erased. It was replaced with a friendly, loving, kind relationship with God.

I think anytime a country goes to war with another country one of the things we look forward to hearing is that there is a cessation on hostilities. We want to hear that we're no longer at odds. But it's very rare, very unusual, to go from being enemies one moment to being friends the next.

You've heard of the Christmas Truce of 1914? Where British and German soldiers - in the middle of WWI - just stopped fighting and hung out like friend, even played games and singing Christmas carols with each other? The reason that's so odd is because they were trying to kill each other the day before. And now their chatting and playing games. They went from enemies to friends.

But that's what God has done for us in Christ. There has been reconciliation. There's been a transfer from anger and wrath and war, to love and joy and affection.

Believers are called chosen, beloved, objects of mercy, God's personal possessions, we are called sons and daughters of God, he is now our Father whom we can ask anything of. Jesus says we are his friends.

We are filled with the Holy Spirit who is the comforter, encourager.
God becomes our rock, our fortress, our castle that we can run to.
We can go straight to the throne of grace and ask for help in our time of need.

We call out to him: Abba, Father. And his love for us becomes now the model of how we are to love other believers, how husbands are to love wives and the world knows Jesus was sent by God.

That's what's happened. We went from worst possible enemies to best possible friends. We are reconciled.

How did that happen? This is the 4th amazing thing that's happened: We're new creations, we receive God's mercy, we've been reconciled.

4) Our trespasses aren't counted against us. Read 18-19, 21

Two phrases I want to look at here in these 2 verses. First, Paul says that all this happened through Christ. How did God go from our greatest enemy to our greatest ally and friend? Through Christ.

It's the person and work of Jesus that reconciles us to the Father. God reconciled us through Jesus. This is the fundamental gospel message: that the Son of God took on flesh, lived not just a sinless life, but a life of perfect obedience to the Law of God, was crucified as a sacrifice on behalf of all those who would believe in him. And we know that the sacrifice was true and valid because God raised him from the dead vindicating his work.

All those lambs that the saints in the OT sacrificed just looked forward to Jesus. He was a type of those sacrifices. The sacrificial system was a way to transfer guilt from one person to a spotless, perfect animal.

You transfer your guilt to the animal and kill the animal and slaughter the animal. It's as though the animal takes on the burden of sin and guilt and shame and suffers entirely for you. Now, the blood of bulls and goats, did it ever take away sin? No, it was foreshadowing Jesus. Because that's exactly what Jesus did. **Read 19**

God reconciled us through Jesus, by not counting our trespasses against us. The Father placed our sins on Jesus.

That's why when Peter says he'll die with Jesus, Jesus says that he's not able to drink the cup that Jesus is about to drink. What's the cup that Jesus is going to drink? It's bitter, awful cup filled to the brim of the wrath of God.

You ever drank something nasty but you had to take it all the way? If you've ever had a procedure involving your bowels you've had to drink the stuff that flushes out your body. And it's gross stuff. And you have to drink a lot. And by the end you're choking it down - the last drops of the whole gallon - so that it is effective.

Jesus drank down the wrath of God, every last drop for every believer.

That's why he cries out: My God my God, why have you forsaken me? God treated Jesus as though he were cursed and forsaken on the cross. He bore the weight of all the sins of billions of people for all time on his body on the cross. He drank down the wrath of the Father to the full.

Which is why his very last words were: It is what? Finished.

For Christians, Jesus drank down every ounce of wrath for us. That's why the Father can go from wrath to joy toward a repentant believer in a moment. Because the moment a person believes in Jesus, all of the weight of their sin is transferred to Christ. All God's wrath is exhausted. There's no more wrath pour out on the believer.

I remember when I was a kid my buddy had this punching bag we'd put on boxing mitts on and go to town on this punching bag. And actually, it's a pretty hard workout. And at some point we're just pounding as hard as we could on this thing and we were just exhausted. There was nothing left to give.

Well imagine an omnipotent all powerful God, not punching a boxing bag, but exploding all his omnipotent, eternal wrath on his Son for all believers to where his wrath is completely exhausted. There remains no more wrath for those sins.

That's what Jesus took for you and for me.

Rom. 8:1: There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

The reason there's no condemnation is because Jesus took it all. There's nothing left to pay.

We sing: Jesus paid it all.

We sing: The wrath of God was satisfied.

And at the same time the infinite righteousness of Jesus is transferred to our account. Which is why Jesus says in **John 17** that through him the Father loves us just as much as he loves Jesus, the Son of God.

Our trespasses aren't counted against us.

5) We now take part in that reconciliation. Now, before I read this, I want you to notice that **Vss, 18 & 19** are almost identical. They are parallel for emphasis and a little bit of clarification. Watch how they both mention we take part in reconciliation. **Read 18-20**

So a person is reconciled to God through faith alone in Jesus alone. You trust that Jesus took your sins on the cross and that God counts his righteousness to your account. This isn't because of anything you do, it's all because of Jesus.

And then what happens is for everyone who has been reconciled, we now have the ministry of reconciliation. We now go out and tell people that very same message.

Baseball season just started. Opening day was a couple of weeks ago. And usually for opening day the stadium is packed with fans wearing jerseys and hats watching their favorite team play on the field. So you have 30 guys playing being watched by 60,000 fans.

That's great for Major League Baseball, but that's not how the Kingdom of God works. The Kingdom of God is not 30 people doing all the work while everyone else just stands by cheering them on. No, when you become part of the Kingdom of God through faith in Jesus you're now in the game. You're not just putting on a jersey, you're putting on the full uniform playing on the field.

Every Christian, now, is seeking to make more Christians. We're working to reconcile people to God through the message of the gospel.

He says it 3 times, in 3 different ways.

A. He gave us the ministry of reconciliation. **Read 18**

So he gave us this ministry. When he says "us" who is that? Who's the us? It's everyone who is a new creation in Christ. It's every Christian.

Not only did he make us new creations, he graciously gave us a task, a ministry. When you minister something you delegate it out, you give it out. Pastors used to be called ministers because we give out the Word of God. We spread it out to people. So God has given all Christians the ministry of reconciliation. We are all called to spread the good news of the gospel. And he makes that clear in the second way he states it.

B. He entrusted us the message of reconciliation. **Read 19**

So here's the connection. The ministry of reconciliation is the same thing as the message of reconciliation. Our ministry - all of us - is to proclaim the gospel message. The message of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. That message is how people go from being objects of God's wrath to objects of his love.

And it is a message. It's words. You have to actually tell people the message. It's not enough to live a godly life. It's not enough to wear Christian T-shirts or hats. It's not enough just to drive the speed limit and make sure your yard looks nice. Those are all fine. But you have to speak the message. You have to say it.

In fact, here Paul says God has entrusted us with the message. There's a trust that has been passed along. When a teenager is driving their parents car solo, there's a trust that is passed on. The teen is going to be careful to drive exactly the way the parent would want them to drive.

That's what God has done with us. He's entrusted us with the message. He wants us to proclaim the message exactly how he would proclaim it. We can't just talk about the love of God. We also have to talk about the wrath of God. The justice of God. Repentance from sin. A life striving for obedience. That Christ is our only hope, not just one option of many.

This is a trust.

C. He frames this as official language. We are ambassadors. **Read 20**

An ambassador is the official representative for the King. We have ambassadors to countries all over the world. They speak officially for the United States. What they say has real power because it's the official statement of our country.

In the same way, we are official delegates for God. We speak on his behalf. Which means we speak boldly, confidently, graciously, and accurately. We speak the truth, the whole truth and what? Nothing but the truth.

And I love this here. Paul knows that although he's writing to Christians, not everyone in the congregation might be a Christian. So even as he calls us ambassadors who appeal for God - he actually makes this very appeal. **Read 20**

I love this - he's appealing to anyone who is not a Christian: Be reconciled to God. And I would be remiss if I didn't make the same appeal. If you are not a Christian, if you've never repented from your sin and trusted in Christ alone for your salvation, following him as the risen Lord of the universe - you need to. Repent and believe and be reconciled to God.

And it's this great trade that reconciles us. **Read 21**

This is what God has done through Jesus to reconcile us. For us, he made him who knew no sin: that's Jesus. Jesus was perfect, sinless. He made Jesus to be sin. He counted all the sins of every Christian to be put on Jesus.

So that in him - in Jesus - we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus takes our sin. We take his righteousness.
God's wrath is satisfied. His grace and mercy is praised.

That's what we celebrate this Easter as we are reminded that Jesus didn't just die for our sins, but he also rose again. This is amazing work of the Lord Jesus to save us, redeem us, give us new life and hope. That he would get all the praise and glory.

Pray