

2 Corinthians 5 (Part 3): 18-21 - Reconciled to God

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2 Corinthians chapter 5. This is our last installment of this chapter. We're taking the last 4 verses. Yeah, 4 verses, 18, 19, 20, and 21. And I'm doing this, this way because I knew that we were going to be having communion today, and I thought that this, these verses would lend themselves so much to that. I'm going to go ahead and read, you read along or follow along rather, as I do, it says,

¹⁸ "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (ESV)

Stop there. Let's pray.

Holy Spirit, teach us today from Your Word. Speak to us, Lord, and give light and insight and understanding to what we're looking at here this morning in these verses. Teach us today, for You are the Teacher, and incline our ear to the word of wisdom. We pray it in Jesus name, amen.

If there's one word that you had to pick out as you read through these last 4 verses of chapter 5, it has to be the word, reconciliation. It just kind of jumps off the page to you. And reconciliation is a personal term. We can talk about a lot of different terms when it comes to our salvation, and those terms have different meanings. Some of them come from the marketplace when we talk about redemption, some of them come from the courtroom, when we talk about justification, this one comes from the home, this one comes from the heart.

Reconciliation is a very personal word because it speaks of relationship, right? It specifically speaks of a repaired relationship. All right? You see, whenever we use the word reconciliation, we're presupposing that something needs to be reconciled. In other words, when we talk about reconciliation, we're talking

about, or assuming that some relationship, somewhere along the line, got broken. It needs to be restored. It needs to be repaired.

I mean, if a relationship is good, you don't need to be reconciled, right? If I have a wonderful relationship with my wife, we don't even talk about the word reconciliation. That word doesn't even come up because there's no need. So, the fact that this passage is focusing on reconciliation reveals to us that there is a relational problem between us and God that needs solving, and that problem, of course, is the introduction of sin, and what it does to the relationship between God and man and sin, the kind of stuff that you and I commit every day, strangely enough, presents a huge problem to God.

I'm using anthropomorphic terms here to describe this because honestly, God doesn't really have problems in the sense that you and I look at something and go, oh, what am I going to do? God never wrings his hands thinking, what am I going to do? But I'm sharing this in a way that I think will give some maybe greater depth of understanding.

It presents a problem for God in, the sense that sin is this almost insurmountable problem, and you might say, well, what's the big deal? We sin, God forgives. Sounds like a great deal to me. I mean, we're in the sinning business, and He seems to be in the forgiving business. So, it seems like we have this relationship that goes really well together.

But you see, when we, when somebody says something that's rather flippant or rather casual about God's forgiveness, we're forgetting so much. Forgiveness may or may not seem simple to you and I, and actually it is, comparatively speaking. It is simple for you and I. But it is a huge problem for God. I found an interesting quote by a guy that I had never actually heard of before. Let me put this on the screen for you.



“...forgiveness is to man
the plainest of duties;
to God it is the
profoundest of
problems.”

— P. Carnegie Simpson

His name is P. Carnegie Simpson. I think P stands for Patrick. Old Presbyterian theologian, he writes, “Forgiveness is to man the plainest of duties; to God it is the profoundest of problems.”

Just to let you, I didn't even know profoundest was a word before I got that quote, but now I do. Basically, what he's saying is that even though to you and I, forgiveness is really no big deal. To God it is a big deal. It is a huge deal, and the reason it's such a big deal is because God is so utterly holy, and that's what we keep forgetting.

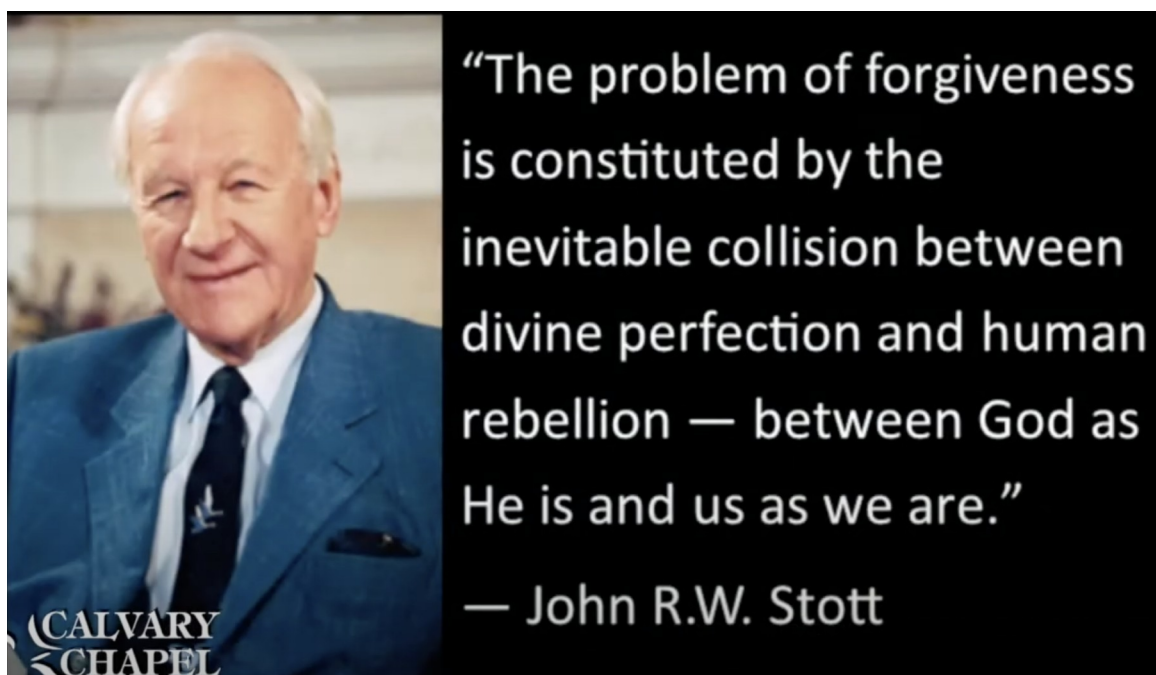
We don't, we're not constantly witnessing God's utter holiness and therefore, when we talk about sin and we talk about forgiveness and God forgiving sin, we just go, well, what's the big deal? God forgives sin. Of course. It's what His job is. You know? What we forget is that He is utterly pure, and in God there is no shadow of darkness.

There's no hint of darkness. Therefore, sin is a complete and total offense to His sinless nature. Sin is offensive to God in ways that you and I can't even begin to understand. And therefore, the natural response of God towards sin, I mean, the response of a holy God towards sin is only ever one thing. Wrath, at least when it refers to His holiness. God's holiness expresses only one thing toward sin, and that is wrath.

Notice I said His holiness expresses only one thing. I want you to think of it this way. God's wrath is His response towards sin, from the perspective of His holiness. It's not something that He simply unleashes because He's had a bad day or you really got under His skin, or He blew His top. You know, because

He was becoming impatient with you. It's like, I've been waiting around for you to get your act together and then finally I'm just going to blow up.

We do that, and we tend to sometimes try to ascribe those same attributes or whatever to God. That's not what's going on. Wrath is the expression of His holiness when it is assaulted by man's rebellion and sin, in other words, God cannot respond otherwise, from the perspective of his holiness. God's, let me say it this way, God's holiness cannot respond in a way other than wrath towards sin. His holiness demands it, okay? And the reason, again, is because He is perfectly Holy. Let me put up one of my favorite authors. John Stott says this,



“The problem of forgiveness is constituted by the inevitable collision between divine perfection (on the one hand from God) and human rebellion — (on the other hand from us) between God as He is and us as we are.”

It's like two things that are heading irreparably toward one another, and they will collide. There's just no two ways around it. God is utterly pure and you and I are utterly sinful. And even though God desires to reconcile himself to man, there seemed to be this immovable obstacle in the way, and the issue was punishing sin, because you see, because of who God is, God has to punish sin. That's, like I said, from His Holiness, wrath is the only response that He can have towards sin.

He cannot do otherwise; He cannot not punish sin. I know I used a double negative there, but it serves me. He, it's impossible for God not to not punish

sin. You and I can do that. We can see something that was horrible and we can just say, well, whatever. Whatever. I mean, somebody can sin against you and me and we can just say whatever. God can't say whatever.

That word isn't in His vocabulary as it relates to sin, and His response to it, right? But you see, there's another aspect of God's character that also demands to be satisfied where, whereas his holiness demands to be satisfied as it relates to sin, there's another aspect of God's character that is no less real and that is His love, and that is His mercy.

And it also demands to be satisfied, and it cannot not be satisfied. Here I am going into more double negatives. You understand, His love must also be satisfied. He's got this colossal problem, right? Holiness must be satisfied. Love must be satisfied. So, the question facing God is how can He express His Holy love and forgive sinners without compromising His utter purity?

In other words, how can He satisfy His holiness in judging sin. without frustrating His love toward the sinner? That is the problem, and again, I talk about it as a problem from our perspective, for us to understand the reality of the thing, but for God, of course, He has no problems. And 700 years, 700 years, before He sent His Son to be born of a virgin, God spoke of Himself as paradoxically being able to satisfy both of these demands. I want to show you this from Isaiah. This is a fascinating passage from Isaiah chapter 45. It says,

Isaiah 45:21 (ESV)

Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the Lord? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me._

Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the Lord? (and look what he says here) And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me.

Now, that's a fascinating passage, leave it up to for just a moment if we could. You and I look at that verse and we see no problem in God calling Himself both a righteous God on the one hand and a Savior on the other hand in the same sentence, and that's because we don't really sit and think about the implications of what those things actually mean.

But, you have to understand that when God refers to Himself with the title of Righteous God, He is declaring that He cannot abide sin. That would be

somebody, that would be like a judge, who sat on the court, who said, I am entirely fair and just, and what that means is, I don't let anything slide. Okay, when God calls himself the Righteous God, that's what He's saying to you and I. I don't let anything slide. You with me? You ever been around somebody who never lets anything slide?

But I want you to notice He also refers to Him with another name. He refers to Himself as Savior. Wow! I am the Righteous Judge who doesn't let anything slide, but I'm also the Savior. He declares Him, and this is, this, again, this is paradoxical speech. To you and I, we read it and just go, yeah, whatever. But you really look into the meaning of those titles and you go, wait, that doesn't work. That doesn't work. You cannot be, at the same time, the God who says, guilty, and on the other hand says, acquitted.

How can you be those two things? Right? In other words, how can God satisfy both His wrath towards sin. and at the same time His love toward us? I want you to look with me again here in your Bible at verse 18 and 19. Look what it says. *"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation."*

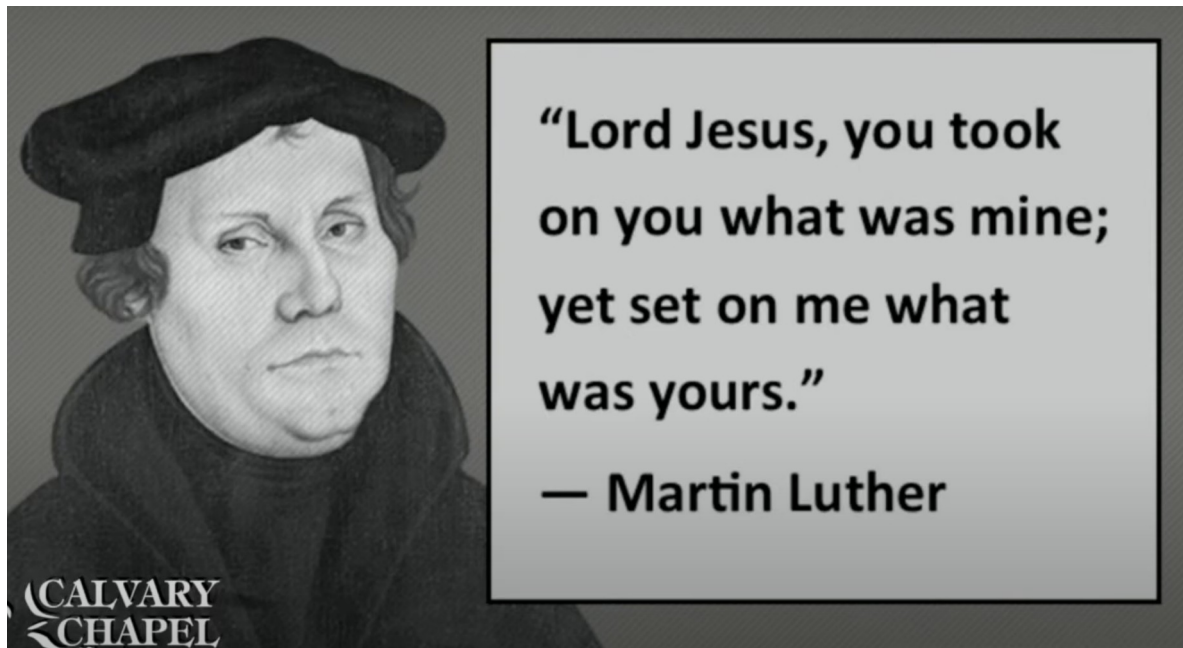
And then in verse 19 I want you to notice he really zeros in on it here. He says ¹⁹*"that is in Christ. God was reconciling the world to Himself not counting their trespasses against them."* Stop there.

I want you to see just how amazing these verses are because here in the Scripture it reveals to you and I, and it becomes clear that because of sin, we are enemies. We are enemies of God. That's the first thing. We learn that when we read the Word of God. I am an enemy, because of my sin, right? And that means that I was born into my humanity with a hostility toward God. We're all born hostile, toward God, and frankly, everything He stands for.

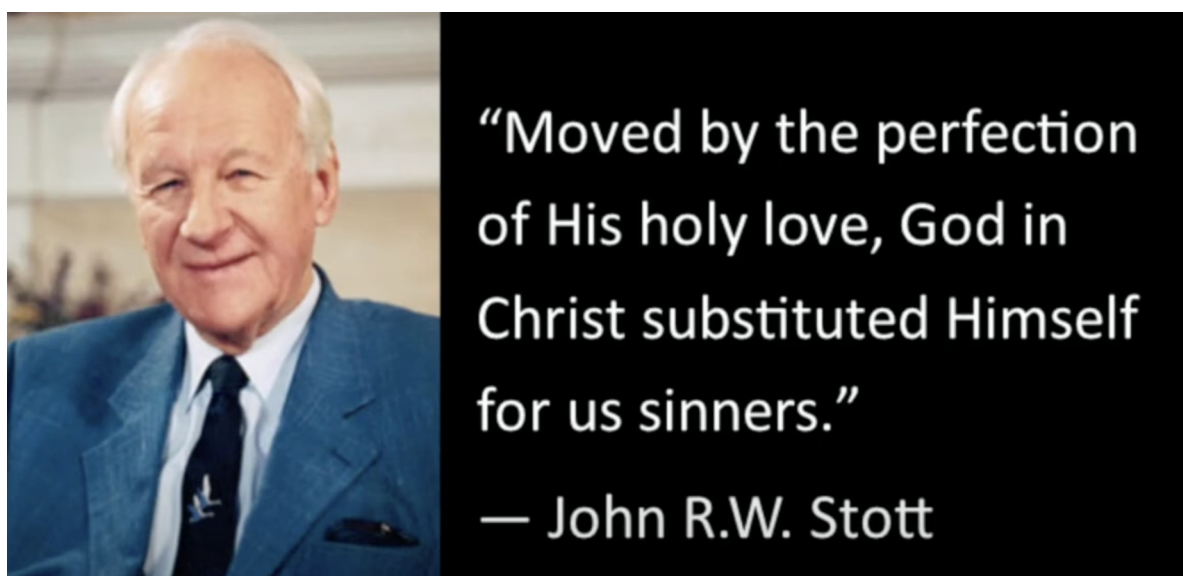
On the other hand, God is offended by our sin, right? We are the offenders, He is the offended and yet in this verse that we're looking at here, particularly in verse 19, it says that, *"in Christ, God reconciled the world to Himself."* And you have to understand what that means. It means that, and it even sounds weird to say it, but it means that the One who was offended by sin, became the offender by taking upon himself our sin.

Now skip down to verse 21. Let me show you this. Verse 21, very important. *"For our sake, he,"* (talking about God the Father) *"made him, (Jesus Christ) to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in Him we, (sinners) might become the righteousness of God."*

Guys, we could sit and meditate on that verse for the rest of our lives and probably not plumb the depths of it. It is absolutely flat out amazing. Jesus, right, the representative of the Father in human flesh, who is the offended, became the offender. He became the offender by becoming our sin. You know, back in the 1500s, a man by the name of Martin Luther sat and pondered this idea. Let me tell you, let me show you what he came up with. Here's his quote.



“Lord Jesus (he said) you took on you what was mine; (meaning sin) yet set on me what was yours.” Meaning righteousness. And Martin Luther thought about that for a while, and it absolutely blew his mind, as far as understanding the reality of what God accomplished through Jesus Christ by becoming the offender. And then, back to John Stott, one of my favorite quotes of all time,



“Moved by the perfection of His holy love, God in Christ substituted Himself for us sinners.”

I mean, this is the essence of what we're saying, that what Paul is saying, what we're reading here in 2 Corinthians at the end here of chapter 5. This is the amazing reality that God is conveying to us here, and it's something that you and I often will just forget about or take for granted.

So, what is the result? What's the result of all this incredible stuff where God is the offended and then became the offender on our behalf? Well, remember what the initial word was in this, these four verses that we looked at? Reconciliation. What's the result? Reconciliation. We get to be reconciled whenever again, again, again, whenever you use the word reconciliation, whether I'm talking about it in the context of marriage or whether I'm talking about it just in the context of other human relationships, we are speaking of two parties that were previously separated, but now because of reconciliation, they are back together.

And the implications of that are enormous as well, because whenever two people are separated, estranged, we say, and we bring them together in reconciliation, the result is peace. They go from conflict to peace. When Sue and I have had our differences, or when we have our differences, I don't want to make it sound like it's all past tense. There's always a need for reconciliation and before that reconciliation takes place there's separation.

Even if it's just emotional separation sometimes it's even physical separation. You say to your spouse you know what I got to go for a walk so just don't follow me right? I'm going to go for a walk, otherwise I might throw something across the house and regret it later. Which, by the way, I recommend going for walks. Sometimes it's even a physical separation. But then we come back together after we've had a moment to cool down and let the emotions chill just a little bit.

And it's usually my fault, I'll just freely admit that, and so that means I go to Sue and I say, I'm so sorry. I apologize for what I did or what I said, would you forgive me? And from that point on, we begin the process of reconciliation, and once reconciliation is achieved, the separation that was there is now gone. There is now oneness, there is now togetherness, and there is now peace, right? Closeness, connection.

Now, there's one other thing that I want you to look at here before we take communion. On the other hand, or I should say on the one hand, I want you to notice here in verse 18, that reconciliation is seen as something that is done. Look at verse 18 with me again, please, in your Bible, it says, "*all this is from God.*" And that's an important statement too. You and I, what did we do to provide the reconciliation?

What did we do to provide the reconciliation? You know what all I provided? My sin. That's all I provided. God did it all. All this, he says, is from God. "*Who, through Christ, (look at this) reconciled us.*" I want you to notice that it's given in past tense. He reconciled. Okay? Done. Finished. The work is done, yet, at the end of verse 20, look with me again in your Bible, look what Paul says at the end of the verse 20.

He says, "*We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*" And those words "*be reconciled,*" remind us that there is yet an action that is required on our part to activate that reconciliation that Christ has made possible. You get what I'm saying? It's one thing to say, God reconciled man to Himself, but you see, if I take that to its furthest extreme, and I don't understand the implications of my role and what's required of me, I'm going to end up with a doctrine called, we call, Universalism, and that is the idea that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the whole world, and it really doesn't matter whether they accepted Him or not.

It doesn't matter if they accept or even know about the cross, they're saved, everybody's just saved. Jesus came and saved everybody. That's a very popular doctrine among some people, and I can understand why. It's really convenient, but it's just not true. There is this other element that goes along with it, and that is Paul's exhortation at the end of verse 20. "*Be reconciled,*" he says, "*We implore you... be reconciled.*"

And again, so we're saying here that God finished the work of reconciliation, and yet it is still necessary that each and every one of us activate that reconciliation, right? Which, how do we do that? By receiving and believing. You guys know this stuff, but it's important to bring up this reminder.

Reconciliation is activated as I receive what Christ did on the cross. As I believe and put my faith, I trust that my sins are not going to be held against me because they were already held against Him. He took my sin upon Himself. He was made sin, as Paul says, right? So that I might be made the righteousness of God. Activation through faith, through receiving.