

The death and resurrection of Jesus were central to the preaching of the apostles, which Paul refers to as the ministry of reconciliation. At the heart of God's reconciling work is the death of Christ. The love of Christ, which was revealed in his dying for us, is a compelling reason for service. We should no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who died for us and was raised again. Hence Paul draws certain conclusions.

I. The death of Christ results in radical change in the believer.

1. *Paul recognized this change in himself, in that he no longer viewed anyone from a worldly perspective, that is, superficially (5:16).*

Before his conversion Paul certainly knew about Jesus, i.e., of His death and reports of His resurrection, but he gave no credence to the latter and knew nothing of the significance of the former. Paul judged Jesus like many of the scribes and Pharisees had done, accepting none of His claims. To Paul the followers of Jesus would have been like blasphemers and he treated them accordingly. He persecuted them, thinking that he was serving God.

Once Paul encountered Jesus personally, all this changed, and he acknowledged Jesus as his Lord and Savior. He viewed others differently as well. He saw them as those for whom Christ died and those whom he could serve.

2. *The death of Christ brought a radical change for every person who is in Christ, which is likened to being created new (5:17).*

Every human being is born spiritually lost, separated from God, enemies of God, dead in sin, slaves of sin, blind, hating the light, etc. It is a condition from which we cannot of ourselves in any way get out.

But God in His grace provided a way in Jesus Christ, who paid the penalty for our sin that separated us from God. Whoever calls on Jesus to be rescued from sin with its penalty, and believes that God has raised Him from the dead, will be saved. Such a person is forgiven and placed by God in Jesus Christ. God totally changes that person, in what is sometimes called a new birth and here is called a new creation. The bondage to sin and the old perspective is gone. Whereas we once lived selfishly, now anyone who is in Christ can live to serve Him.

It is impossible to become a true Christian without coming through Jesus Christ. We neither choose to be Christian nor are born Christian. We come to Jesus seeking rescue from our sin and He makes us into something new, a new creation. Apart from Him a Christianity we take upon ourselves is fake.

II. The death of Christ is the basis for a changed relation to God.

The change in people's relation to God is expressed in the word "reconciliation". (For the meaning and significance of this, see the sermon from April 2 on 2 Corinthians 5:21.)

1. *Anyone who is in Christ has been reconciled to God and they has become the righteousness of God (5:18).*

That person has been changed completely in their relationship to God and they themselves. Because that person is in Christ, when God looks at that person, He sees the righteousness of the Son of God.

2. *In a sense God was reconciling the world to Himself (5:19; cf. Col. 1:19-22).*

I personally believe that God's gracious delay in judgment of all men is based upon the death of Christ. Because a payment for sin was made available, the world was made savable. From Revelation it appears also that the sacrifice of Christ particularly qualifies Him, as the Lamb that was slain, to judge the world and take possession of the earth as His own. That does not mean that all the world will be saved, but rather appears to increase the seriousness of being lost. Our rebellion is enough to condemn to eternal punishment, but rejection of God's grace adds condemnation.

III. The death of Christ implies an urgency to respond to the message of reconciliation.

1. *The lost are implored to be reconciled to God (5:20-21).*

Paul considered himself and his associates to be ambassadors of God, speaking on behalf of God. They did not pronounce, "you have been reconciled", but pled, "be reconciled!" Even though God was reconciling the world through Christ, the world is not reconciled. It is urgent that people respond in faith to the gospel. Paul and others begged people to get right with God. God Himself through Paul was urging people to get right with Him. Without Christ a person is eternally separated from God.

2. *Professing believers are implored not to receive God's grace in vain (6:1-2).*

There are two possible acceptable meanings of this exhortation. Paul may be addressing true believers, who were failing to live up to the full potential of God's grace in their lives, and might then have their efforts burned up at the judgment seat of Christ. (Cf. James 1:21.) He might also be addressing those who have professed belief, but whose profession is only superficial. The word has not taken root in their hearts. For such a person it is extremely urgent to check if he or she is truly in the faith. The consequence is eternal loss of life.

Paul quotes Isaiah 49:8 in which God promised to help His servant, the Messiah, in the ministry of saving His people. Drawing out two phrases, Paul told the Corinthians that the "acceptable time" and that "day of salvation" is now. Now is the time which God has set to offer grace in Jesus Christ. Now is the time of opportunity for man to respond.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, a proclamation of victory over death and sin, is only a victory to those who have been reconciled with God. Anyone who does not believe in Jesus Christ is condemned (John 3:17-18). Those who believe are placed in Christ and experience a radical change. They are made new creations. All others are urged, "be reconciled with God."