

2 Cor 5:20-21 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God." ²¹ He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Our culture today has certain "buzzwords" that have become part of our public discourse.

Being "**triggered**" conveys the idea of a thin-skinned person who is easily and reflexively offended by dissenting opinion.

To be "**cancelled**" is to have a small but vocal social media mob shut someone down.

The term "**outrage**" has come to describe people's response to any opinion that they do not share.

"**reconciliation**" is another term that is thrown around regularly today.

But this is a biblical term and the idea of reconciliation is a Christian doctrine and part of the Christian value system.

It is vital today that we understand this idea of reconciliation through the lenses and worldview of the cross of Jesus.

Story: In Luke 19 there is a story about a man who defrauded many, was disliked and shunned, and who experienced remarkable grace and repentance.

- Jericho was famous for Joshua's victory due to a holy earthquake shaking down its walls. Over 1,000 years later, rebuilt and populated by wealthy people who retreated there for its tropical climate in the winter.
- Herod's winter palace was there. It was rich in palm trees, balsam groves, expansive Jewish villas—a striking contrast from backwater and Gentile dominated Galilee.
- In this city there is a man named Zacchaeus—a king pin in this Jewish tax cartel. He's the chief tax agent which puts him at the very top of a corrupt economy enabled by an army of tax collectors. Zacchaeus always takes his commission. His wealth is at the expense of his fellow citizens.
- The irony is that his name in Hebrew translates to "Pure, clean, untainted by corruption."
- But to his pious neighbors, he is a soul-less traitor, reviled by everyone who knows him.

But he hears the news about a miracle man but could not see him over the crowds because, well, he was short. So ran ahead and found a little sycamore tree and climbed up and thought to himself, "I'll get to see this celebrity preacher as he walks by." And like baby bird he perched there, waiting for the master to pass by underneath him.

Suddenly, Jesus stops the parade and locks eyes with the little man from Jericho. And he calls out Zacchaeus by name and tells him “I must stay at your house today.” And that day Jesus becomes the houseguest of a notorious sinner.

And while Jesus eats and teaches at his dinner table, this abhorrent little wretch of a man experiences a sudden conversion. His heart swells with belief and his faith immediately takes on a practical expression—he jumps to his feet and declares that he will donate half of his wealth to the poor, and will pay back anyone defrauded four times what he’s earned through corruption. Essentially, the exact opposite response of the Rich Young Ruler.

(1) Reconciliation, which is making peace between two opposing parties—the restoration of fellowship—is only possible if Jesus is at the table. It’s only possible if it happens on God’s terms through God’s son, through His word.

(2) When a man experiences reconciliation in their vertical relationship with God, their instinct and their obligation is to seek reconciliation with their fellow men or women.

Transition: Let’s look at what the NT says about this idea of being reconciled.

1. Reconciliation is made possible by the cross of Christ. Don't miss this. Any scheme, plan, or program that we could contrive to engage in racial, ethnic, social reconciliation is only the attempt to fix a horizontal problem. But fundamentally the problem we have in our horizontal relationships—interpersonal, ethnic, socio-economic etc. is ultimately that all of us, every one of us, are estranged from God and his Kingdom.

Rom 5:10-11 “For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. ¹¹ And not only that, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received this reconciliation.”

In Romans 5 Paul tells us three truths about the state of humanity:

- We were helpless to save ourselves (Rom 5:6)—we had no means of escaping our dilemma.
- We were godless (v. 6b)—whatever virtues characterize God—we didn't have that.
- We were sinners (v. 8)— transgressors.
- We were objects of his wrath (v.9)—if we have to be saved from wrath this means we were under it condemnation.
- We were enemies (v. 10)—sin is not only way undershooting the mark of holiness, it's also rebellion in the realm. And now every person has turned to his/her own way. Thinking that we are arbiters of all that is true; we decided what is moral and immoral; we pass judgment on what is socially acceptable and what isn't.

So, Long Story Short—the news is super bad.

So what is God to do with a world full of sinful, godless, rebels?

Well, he sets a trial date in the future—it is a day when God is going to hold court, judge every single person who has ever lived—and everyone who is found helpless, godless, sinful, rebels in his realm—will be judged.

But, before that day in court, God comes to us and wants to settle matters out of court. In our place he's sent his one and only Son—who came to help the helpless, who came to wash clean the godless, who came to take upon himself the punishment that brings us peace with God—who came to make peace between God and his rogue imagers.

And the good news is we can be reconciled with God before it's too late. Before that future court date—in which all humanity will stand trial for their sin and rebellion and godlessness.

And this act of making peace with us is proof—a demonstration of the extent to which God loves us and is willing to save us from ourselves. *Jesus's death on a cross proves beyond the peradventure of a doubt how sinful we are—just how far we've*

gone—how hopelessly immoral and lost we’ve become. The leaders of the greatest religion in human history (Judaism) saw Jesus show mercy, kindness to lepers, the lame, the blind, the dead—heard his message of forgiveness and how much God loves us and they thought, “We should totally kill that guy.” Handing him over to the Romans after a sham trial with trumped up charges, the Roman governor Pontus Pilate examined Jesus up close, concluded that this man was innocent, no fault was found in him—and said, “Well, if you all really want me to kill him, yeah I’ll do that. We Romans are in the killing business here.” You see, Jesus’s death is not just proof of the extent of God’s love for us—it’s proof beyond the peradventure of a doubt of just how evil men are. To kill this innocent, humble, merciful man.

And so instead of wiping us off the face of the earth with the finger of God—he offers us salvation through this heinous, awful sin.

Isaiah 53:4-6 (NIV)

Surely he took up our pain

and bore our suffering,

yet we considered him punished by God,

stricken by him, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,

he was crushed for our iniquities;

the punishment that brought us peace was on him,

and by his wounds we are healed.

⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,

each of us has turned to our own way;

and the LORD has laid on him

the iniquity of us all.

The cross proves that we are utterly sinful and God is supremely merciful. That we are deserving of judgment, and Jesus voluntarily, willingly, took that judgment upon himself.

2. We are charged with the ministry of reconciliation—calling all men to receive the gift of peace with God. So, who hasn’t been given this ministry? Who? Who doesn’t have the responsibility, the calling to deliver this message to the world?

In 1 Corinthians: This is Paul’s summary in addressing all of the superficial divisions within Corinthian culture:

- racial and ethnic divisions between Jews and Greeks;
- socio-economic divisions between the upper class and the lower classes in Roman culture
- male-female divisions resulting in a horrendously disparity between male and female relationships
- celebrity worship culture of Corinth—which they had imported into the church
- divisions over charismatic gifting—they prized the more sensational/dramatic spiritual gifts, giving the person who had those gifts a higher social status.

Paul’s summary statement...

2 Cor 5:16-17 “From now on, then, we do not know anyone from a worldly perspective. Even if we have known Christ from a worldly perspective, yet now we no longer know him in this way. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!” ¹⁸ Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. ¹⁹ That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed the message of reconciliation to us.”

Who has this message of reconciliation between humanity and God through Christ been given to?

Not Islam or any world religions.

Not government—so if you’re looking for a political solution to a spiritual problem—you’ll be very frustrated.

Not the entertainment industry—not in the movies, shows, none of it.

Not in the halls of academia—that of course would be true for secular universities. But this is also true of Christian universities and biblical seminaries.

This message and ministry of reconciliation has been given to the Church. This is why Paul refers to us as “the pillar and foundation of the truth.”

3. Reconciled relationships are intentionally maintained through great effort.

The ministry of peacemaking is firstly and fore mostly a vertical proposition. But it results in harmonious relationships between people. Peace with God makes it possible to have peace with God's image-bearers.

Rom 12:18 "If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." This passage presupposes that it is not all up to me. Some things are out of my control. If a person has decided they do not want to live in a peaceful reconciled relationship then all I can do is what I'm responsible to do.

Rom 14:19 "So then, let us pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another." So, this is not just **about tolerance**. We hear this word a lot in our culture. We have to be "tolerant." Now, Paul commands us in Romans 2 to tolerate each other's differences, for sure.

Illus. But don't you think "tolerance" is a pretty low bar relationally? Now, when my kids were little I tolerated some excess noise, and mistakes and tantrums—but I don't think any of my kids would characterize my parenting as merely tolerating their existence.

No, dad was fun, he called us up on the couch to sit with him and watch movie and eat popcorn—dad piled snow in the front yard so that we could sleigh ride, dad took us on hikes and bike rides. Awesome. Perfect? No. Awesome? Yes. So of course at the very least we should tolerate each other's differences and idiosyncrasies. But we should aim higher than that.

We should seek peace, pursue reconciled relationships, promote goodwill and build everyone up.

Eph 4:3 "making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of **peace**."

Illus. When is the last time you made every effort—spared no expense—exhausted yourself on a project? Think about how much out of you it took.

Pursuing peace and reconciliation with others in the cross, building others up not tearing them down, takes every effort. It takes the last bit of our strength and reserves to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

4. The ministry of reconciliation includes the announcement/proclamation of new creation.

Illus. Star Trek is one of the only movie and TV franchises that attempt to depict a Utopian future for the world. More common than a utopian vision of the future, is a dystopian vision. Writers and authors create a future world where people, the world, human governments, and technology have all run amok—the arch of human history bending towards nuclear fallout, suffering, and injustice.

The dystopian plot device of a bleak future pervades films, TV, and literature.

Whether it be the miserable worlds of Orwell's *1984*, or H.G. Well's *The Time Machine*;

From Planet of the Apes to Blade Runner; from the Terminator to the Matrix or the Wall-e, authors have a lot of fun imagining the world as bleak, post-nuclear fallout societies where anarchy rules, people struggle for mere survival, Earth's resources are depleted; and our own A.I. technology has turned against to exterminate or enslave us—But ***In a World Where Injustice Reigns, One Man...***

Now, it might be true, that the world is going to get much worse before it gets better. But rest assured it is going to get better.

Colossians 1:19-20 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ **and through him to reconcile everything to himself**, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

You see, God wants to do more than reconcile with the rebels in his realm. That of course, is his priority. But God also intends to reconcile the realm. His created order, which according to Scripture also is need of this work of reconciliation.

Rom 8:19-21 For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God's sons to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility—not willingly, but because of him who subjected it—in the hope ²¹ that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God's children.

Now, the ministry of reconciliation we've been given is the announcement that the King is going to save the rebels in the realm, but he's also going to save the realm. And the good news includes a hopeful prospect for the world.

The Christian worldview avoids the extremes of the escapist view which says, "well heaven is my home and who cares what happens to this old world," and the hysteria over the environment. You hear it often from celebrities and spokespeople—this is the only world we'll ever have..." no it isn't. The world has been subject to decay, and frustration, and left "unreconciled." And God, through Christ, reconciles us and all things to himself. New creation is part of our message.

Recap:

While we were helpless, sinners, enemies of the cross...God sent his son to demonstrate the full extent of his love—and to prove beyond the peradventure of a doubt that we are sinful.

We no longer identify people from a worldly perspective—over the myriad of things that divide us. Instead we see them as objects of God's wrath—now made objects of his compassion, his mercy, his love.

Living in reconciled relationships takes “every effort” to maintain the bonds of peace and unity.

So instead of being lazy, we're going to dialogue with people we don't agree with.

We're going to cultivate reconciling relationships.

Don't think for one second that God is going to through the effort to make this good world and then just discard it. No, he's going to reconcile all things in the cross. The rebels in the realm and the realm.