

The Ministry of Reconciliation

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[0 : 00] Well, thank you, Rachel. Thank you for reading God's Word to us. Let me just pray before we begin. God and Father, just thank you for your Word. We thank you for all that we have sung in the truths in these hymns and choruses that we have sung.

We thank you for this passage and the Lord Jesus in it. And we just pray that as you speak to us that we will have open ears to listen and soft hearts to take on your Word. And so we ask that your Holy Spirit will work in each one of us this morning.

In the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen. Well, good morning. I'm JT. I'm one of the elders. It's my privilege to take us through this passage this morning.

And what a passage! You know, when it was, I saw what passage I had. I didn't recognize it from the, you know, 2 Corinthians 5, 11, 62. I didn't recognize it.

But when I looked in it to see what it was all about, well, as the more I've looked into it this week, the more excited I've got about reading it and about what it contains.

[1 : 05] This morning, this is the gospel. This is the truth of what God has done for us through the Lord Jesus Christ. So let's start with a little bit of a catch-up.

So we're in 2 Corinthians. And as Graham said, this is the second letter of Paul to the church in Corinth that is recorded in the Bible as we have it today.

We think there was letters in between times, but we don't need to get into that. And Corinth, well, it was a cosmopolitan city. It was kind of near Athens. And it was a city of pleasure.

It was wild. It had a reputation for that. And Paul, he had set up this as the Apostle Paul. He set up lots of churches. And this was one of them in Corinth.

But there was this problem of there was these false teachers. And they were teaching that it was all about what you show on the outside. It's all about what you portray to people. That's what's important.

[2 : 04] And they were saying because of that, Paul, well, Paul wasn't a well man. He didn't keep very well. He had a poor job. You know, he didn't actually speak very well. He wasn't a great orator.

And they were saying, Paul isn't good enough to have authority over you, to teach you, to guide you. But Paul here, and especially in these chapters 4 to 7, he is addressing these claims.

And in chapters 4 to 7, we have this paradox of the cross where we find strength in weakness. And that is where we get this heading from, boasting in weakness.

Christ himself was self-giving. He gave himself. There was great glory in the suffering of the cross. And Paul here, he is saying that the church in Corinth, they are to imitate the cross.

They are to expect poverty. They are to expect suffering. They are to be humble. These things are to be expected. And in fact, there is glory in these things.

[3 : 09] And last week, Graham, he took us through the first 10 verses of chapter 5. And some of the headlines from that would be that we live by faith and not by sight.

We will live differently if we remember the fact that our home is in fact in heaven. That like tents are just temporary dwellings. No one lives in a tent forever, do they? No, this is not our forever home.

And when we live like that, then we will live differently. And we saw that there is judgment coming. There is justice coming. And this brings us comfort.

We want justice, don't we? But it's also a challenge to believers that the judgment seat of Christ is coming, where Christians will be judged on their good works and the things they have done for God.

And that's important because that brings us to this week and this passage where Paul carries on. And this week, to help think about it, we're going to look at it a little bit like a court case.

[4 : 10] Okay? Graham was a lawyer. I am no lawyer. And you'll see that from the way I've twisted my illustration to make it fit this morning. That some of you might be a lawyer.

But I've seen enough TV programs or films or read enough books with law elements to know roughly how it works. And always the key thing they say is, well, we must find the motive. Why was this crime committed?

We need a motive. But you also need the facts of the case, don't you? You need the content. What happened? What went on? What actually happened? And there's always a plea, isn't there?

There's a plea made. There's a call made at some point. And we're going to see this this morning in this passage when Paul is talking about this ministry of reconciliation.

Your Bible might have that as a heading. Well, Paul here, he explains the message and the character of this new covenant ministry that the church in Corinth is to be a part of.

[5 : 08] And to help us think about that, this is a definition that someone has put about what reconciliation is. It's not really a word that we use in everyday language. But Christian reconciliation is the work of God through Christ by which he restores mankind to a favorable relationship with himself.

It is mending that relationship between God and man. And that is what Paul is talking about this morning. So we're going to look at it in three ways.

We're going to see Paul's motive. We're going to see Paul's facts. And we're going to see Paul's plea that he makes. You know, there's two streams as we go through this.

The things that we look at here, they're going to apply to those who are not saved. Those who do not know the Lord Jesus as their savior. Yeah. And they're going to be also pleased to those who are saved already. And it will apply to those who would call themselves Christians who have that saving faith in the Lord Jesus.

And you know, it does that because that is true in life. Before God, we are one of those two things. It's as simple as that. So whoever you are today, whichever category you fall into, this passage is for you.

[6 : 30] But as we go through, let's remember the context of Paul speaking to this church in Corinth. Right, so let's get stuck into the motive. Paul here in the first few verses, he lays out his motivation behind this ministry.

In the light of the knowledge of the judgment seat of Christ that we finished on last week, Paul says, since, in verse 11, since then we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others.

And this could mean two things. Paul is defending his character to these false prophets, to those in the church. He is saying that I do have true faith. I fear the Lord.

Paul has that saving knowledge. That reverent obedience, that devotion, that awe of God. That is what it means to fear the Lord. You know, Paul is also motivated to persuade others of the truth of these things.

Those that do not know these things for themselves. Paul, why is he defending his character? What is the point here? Why does he feel the need to do that?

[7 : 42] Well, if he doesn't defend his character, then he has no leg to stand on, really. That would be a modern phrase for that. There's no point laying out the truths of these things if no one's going to listen to him anyway.

How often do we see politicians, you know, high up politicians in all levels of government or famous people, society, but then something goes wrong? There's the expenses scandals.

There's parties that they shouldn't be having. There's affairs. All these things. And what happens? Well, these people just resign, don't they? Why do they resign? Well, no one trusts them anymore.

No one's going to listen to them. No one's going to do what they say. That's a little bit like here that Paul needs to defend himself first to show that he is truly who he says he is.

And how does he back this up? Well, he says what we are is plain to God. There's no hiding from God. God knows the truth of who we are.

[8 : 44] No matter what others say about us, God knows who you are this morning. And in contrast to Paul's true faith, he challenges those who take pride in what is seen, as it says in verse 12.

These are the false prophets who are just totally interested in what is on the outside. What is important is what is in their heart. So Paul has defended his character and then he goes on to say his motivation for these things.

Verse 14, read it with me. For Christ's love compels us because we are convinced that one died for all and therefore all died.

The strong language there compels, convinced. Paul is motivated here. Do you get the sense of that? You know this passage, one died for all, it says there, therefore all died.

Yes, all can be saved. Jesus died for all. But it also means that all need saved. And that's important to know. Everyone has been separated from God through sin.

[10 : 02] Through the first man, Adam, and if you want some reading this afternoon, go and read Genesis 3. Through the first man, Adam, sin came into the world. And from that point on, all were dead men before God.

I've not seen it, but I've heard of a show called The Walking Dead. I wouldn't recommend it because I don't know anything about it. But you know, it's that kind of concept, isn't it? It's that everyone is the walking dead.

We're just walking around, but before God, we are dead in our sins. Romans 3, 23, a famous verse. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

You know, I've got two daughters. One's four and one's one. And, you know, the youngest one at the moment, she's already, and she kind of finds it funny and she pulls this little pout, but her favorite thing at the moment is to go, no.

She sort of pouts at us all and scowls. You know, it's kind of funny, it's kind of cute. You know, we kind of try not to laugh because it encourages her. But, you know, even from such a young age, the disobedience is built into her, isn't it?

[11 : 10] And we're all disobedient. We're disobedient to God. But the good news is that that's not the end. Romans 3, 23, shut your Bible. No, that's not the end.

Romans 3, 24. The good news is that the work is done. All are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. All are justified freely.

We'll see in verse 17 that that saving is not universal, that we need to do our part. But we will look at that later on. But Paul, he's so enthused by the truth of these things, by the fact that he has that saving faith, that he is convinced that these things are true, that he is so compelled to tell others.

Verse 15, and he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again.

In that verse, we start with the death of the Lord Jesus, and we finish with his life, his raising again. You know, if we believe these things, then our worldview is totally changed.

[12 : 26] Someone's worldview, it really impacts how they live their life. It affects what they eat. It affects how they spend their time. It affects how they spend their money. Now, if we are living in the reverent fear of the Lord as Paul is, then that will totally change how we live our lives.

Or it should do. Not living a self-focus the world revolves around me. How can I further myself? That should not be our primary aim. So what is your motivation in life?

God knows who you truly are. There is no hiding from him. We all start in that position of being separated from God through sin. Christ died for all, but salvation, it needs accepted.

Forgiveness needs asked for. And if we are saved, then what does our character say about us? Paul had to defend his character here because he was being falsely accused.

But does our character allow us to actually go and tell others? Do our words match our actions? And if so, are we passionately convinced and compelled to go and tell others?

[13 : 40] Are we living our lives for the one who's done so much for us? That was Paul's motivation. Then we're going to see Paul's facts.

So he's laid out his motive for these things, and he's going to lay out the content of this ministry of reconciliation. Verse 16.

So from now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view. I don't know about you, but I can't think of the words from now on and not start sort of tapping your foot and singing along.

The ones laughing in the room know what I'm talking about. So it's The Greatest Showman. It's a good film, isn't it? It's got that really catchy song, From Now On. And you know, in that, Hugh Jackman's character, his life at that point has changed.

He's decided in his mind that he is going to live differently. Not in the same sense that we have here. But he's saying in that song, From now on, I'm going to do this. From now on, I'm going to live like that. From now on, life will be different.

[14 : 42] You know, that is the sense that we have here. As saved people, our worldview is radically altered. Paul says that even Paul, he once viewed Jesus as just a man, but not anymore.

How do you view Jesus? How we view Jesus, well, it changes our view on those around us. And that affects how we act towards each and every person that we come across.

Verse 17, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come.

If we believe in Christ, the new creation has come. The old has gone. The new is here. You know, that if there is vital in that verse. There's not universal salvation.

We are not all saved by the work of the Lord Jesus automatically. We must do our part. I was thinking now to try and illustrate this, and nothing really does it justice, but I was thinking, right, if I stand up here and go, right, everyone, free coffee at the end.

[15 : 50] Okay, I've got vouchers. Okay, come and see me at the end. You think, oh, great. Yeah, free coffee, brilliant. But unless you come up to me, ask me for a voucher, accept it from me, and go and get the coffee, then one's not just going to appear in your hand.

You know, that's a trivial example, but that is essentially the case. We need to accept what the Lord Jesus has done. We need to ask for forgiveness. In Christ, we need to be joined to him by faith as Savior.

And if so, then we become a new creation. A new creation. Reborn and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Our spirit and our mind is totally made new, but not yet our bodies, which is important to note.

Our previous condition, it is gone. We have a new position before God. I want to be clear here. We are not made perfect at that point.

We are not made perfect. We know that. We mess up. We still sin. Our practice sometimes fails us, but our position before God is secure and changed.

[17 : 05] I am a new creation. No more in condemnation. Here in the grace of God, I stand. It is our position that is secure in Christ. So well done us, right?

Well done. We're in that position. Go us. Well, no, I like the humble verses of the Bible. I think they're always good. They really put us in our place. You know, verse 18 is one of those.

All of this, all of what we've been talking about, this being made new, being in Christ, this change, all this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and he gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

See which direction that is going? It is all God. We sung it this morning. Jesus paid it all. All to him I owe.

God has made us acceptable to himself through the work of the Lord Jesus, his death and resurrection that we saw in verse 15. Sin caused that separation, but Christ allows that restoration.

[18 : 16] God is holy. God cannot accept us in our sinful state. That wouldn't be right. God is just. We need our problem solved. And we are reconciled, not just that we just sit back and do nothing, but know that our examples will bring others to know God.

God was reconciling us to himself in Christ, verse 19 says, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

God doesn't hold our sins against us. At this point, I was brought to think of John 8 where the Lord Jesus, he goes to the, there's a woman who's caught in adultery and everyone has picked up stones and they're about to stone her.

They're about to kill her. And Jesus says, he who has committed no sin can cast the first stone. Gradually, everyone just drops their stones and walks away.

You know, Jesus, he hadn't committed a sin, but he doesn't stone her. He doesn't hold her sins against her. We need to accept Jesus's death and resurrection as being that just payment for our wrongdoing.

[19 : 37] Jesus has done it all. He has done enough. And that good news message, it is committed to us. What a privilege and a challenge. You know, we're looking at the facts here, aren't we?

We need to know the facts of these things. We need to have these things straight in our heads so that we can actually go and tell others about them. You know, we've had the students stand up this morning, but your lecturers are the experts in their field.

They know what they're, well, I really hope they know what they're talking about. And they are experts. They know all about it. Their life revolves around it and that allows them to be able to teach you. Hopefully, that should be the case anyway.

You know, that's like us. We need to know the facts of these things. We need to have them clear so that we can go and be witnesses and tell others. How do we do that? Well, it's Bible study, quiet time, spending time improving our relationship with God, attendance at church services, being in occasions where God's word is read and spoken from, but also our home groups.

Get involved in a home group. Discuss these things. Wrestle with these things during the week. Discuss how they really apply to our lives. These things are vital. So that's Paul's facts.

[20 : 57] And what is our response to these facts? What is our worldview? Have we had that life-changing moment where we are then in Christ? That previous condition is gone. We have that new position before God and we are set aside as blameless before him.

And if we are, then are we clear in these facts so that we can tell others? So that brings us to our last point, the plea. So Paul has laid out his motive for writing these things.

He's laid out the facts of the case and now he's going to make a plea. Paul finishes by pleading to listen and to act on this ministry of reconciliation.

Verse 20, We are therefore Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf be reconciled to God.

Christ's ambassadors. You know, we have a group called the Embassy. It's for the teenagers. You'll see them meeting over there after the service to discuss some of these things that have gone on that have been talked about.

[22 : 04] You know, why is it called embassy? Well, it's because we are to be ambassadors for God in this world. You know, potentially here Paul is talking about himself as an apostle because they certainly had a special role in setting up the first churches and they were certainly slightly different.

But you know, it still applies to us today. The Church of Christ, it is like a divine embassy in this hostile world and we are part of that. Last week, we thought that this is not our home forever.

That we are just temporary dwellers and in fact, we are almost like foreigners here in this world. Paul, that strong language again, we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

Be saved, he is saying. And I implore you today, if that is not you, if that is not you, then don't leave without speaking to someone. don't leave here without addressing the problem that we all have.

Verse 21, God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God. One of these verses in the Bible that's kind of unexplainable, the truths of these things, in one sense it's so simple but in other senses it's just so complex.

[23 : 37] Sin that wholly characterizes us. And Christ, he was made all that we are when he died on that cross. And in the same way, righteousness is what totally characterizes God.

And we are made so when we are in Christ. We are placed in that right relationship by his gracious loving kindness. So God has done it all.

Are we willing to do our part? That is Paul's plea this morning. 6 verse 1 is God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.

So once again we have those two streams. First of all he's urging people to accept these things, to accept the truth of these things. And if we have accepted already then don't keep it to yourself.

Don't live a life for yourself but live a life for God doing as he would want us to do. Don't waste the opportunity of God's grace. It is wonderful. It is marvelous.

[24 : 51] And Paul finishes by quoting from Isaiah 49 verse 8. It's a bit of a difficult verse this one but it says in the time of my favor I heard you and in the day of salvation I helped you.

And what that is there that it is prophetically addressing the Messiah so it is Jehovah speaking to Christ Jesus the Messiah. God here is answering Christ's prayer by raising him from the dead.

You know why is Paul put that in there? Well he says I tell you now is the time of God's favor now is the day of salvation. The day of salvation has begun.

Lord Jesus he has died he has risen again we are in the day of salvation. Salvation is open to us. It is available. It is available to everyone that we meet and greet.

But that won't go on forever. It's until that day of judgment comes or until we die and our life is taken from us. And hopefully that brings a sense of urgency to these things.

[26 : 02] Today is the day. You know so often in this life we worry about tomorrow what is your 10 year plan where will you be in 20 years what are you going to do in your retirement? You know the Bible says for us to focus on today because we do not know what tomorrow may bring.

So don't waste the opportunity of God's grace. Witness to others do all that we can. We are part of that embassy of Christ in this world.

Today is the day don't delay. You know there's an old old hymn and it says this it's called Almost Persuaded. One of the verses says Be now persuaded O sinner here Be now persuaded Jesus is near His voice is pleading still Turn now with heart and will Peace will your spirit fill O turn today So let me just sum this up.

Paul in regards to this ministry of reconciliation he laid out his motive for writing these things he laid out the facts that he wanted to get across and he has made his plea he has made his plea all have sinned we've seen that God cannot accept us as we are in that state as he is holy and just all need to accept the facts of these things to have that relationship with God restored to be reconciled to him and we can give praise and thanks that God in Christ has done all of the work it was all him required for salvation Jesus died he took that guilt and that shame for us and he rose again and lives forever and we can worship him and if we are a new creation already then that is brilliant we have been made new and we look forward to that day in heaven when we will have our new body and that we will be made perfect and won't mess up anymore and if that is the case then we should be convinced about these things we should be compelled by these things to go and tell others to witness to do whatever we can witness in our daily lives show good character to everyone that we come across spreading the good news that we know to be true ourselves

God Father we just thank you for your word we thank you for the depths of it that just cannot be explored we thank you for the truths of the ministry of reconciliation the work that was done by the Lord Jesus that you brought us to yourself through that great work the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus us we pray that as we continue to think of these things and as we go from here that these things will dwell in our minds and in our hearts and that the Holy Spirit will work in us to convict us of these things throughout today and this week we just ask your blessing as we close and we do just once again give you the thanks for the Lord Jesus in his name we pray Amen