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# 2 Corinthians

**Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, 2 Corinthians 5:18**

Bible scholar Charles Ellicott notes: "The presence of the article in the Greek indicates that he is speaking, not of the universe at large, but of the new things belonging to the new creation of which he had spoken in the previous verse."

In other words, this verse cannot be used for the doctrine of "universal salvation" as if God has reconciled to Himself "all things" in the absolute sense. It is referring to "all things" that He has, in fact, reconciled which were mentioned in the previous verse. It is in this sense that God "has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ."

The word "reconciled" is used in three different passages in the New Testament, but only here and in Romans 5 is it speaking of the reconciliation which occurs between God and man through the work of Christ. In Romans 5:10, he states -

"For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

In this, God is the one who primarily moves the process which is done through Christ His Son. In other words, without Christ there could be no reconciliation. But God accomplished this of His own accord in the giving of His Son. This then

excludes any works on our part in the process. We simply receive the work by faith and the reconciliation is accomplished.

And in order for this to come about, Paul continues with the words that God "has given us the ministry of reconciliation." There is a difference in the use of the word "us" here. In the first use of it (...reconciled us to Himself) the word is in the accusative. Here (...given us the ministry) the word is in the dative. Again, Charles Ellicott provides clarity -

"It is obvious that the personal pronoun is used with a different extent in the two clauses: the first embracing, as the context shows, the whole race of mankind; the last limited to those who, like the Apostles, were preachers of the Word."

The message of the work of Christ has been given to man to spread. What a responsibility!

Life application: We were fallen and at enmity with God and yet God reached out in love to reconcile us to Himself. When so reconciled, we are considered acceptable in God's eyes to such an extent that we are granted the right to tell this saving message to others. Let us never fail to open our mouths and speak! God has offered to this world the chance to go from condemned to saved... if we will but open our mouths and share the good news.

**...that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.**

2 Corinthians 5:19

The words "that is" are used to further clarify what was just written concerning the "ministry of reconciliation." This ministry involved a process which comes directly from the eternal and infinite mind of God. It is "that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." Concerning the words "was" and "reconciling," Vincent's Word Studies notes that -

"These words are to be construed together; the participle with the finite verb marking the process of reconciliation. The emphasis is on the fact that God was reconciling, not on the fact that God was in Christ. God was all through and behind the process of reconciliation. The primary reference of the statement is, no doubt, to God's reconciling manifestation in the incarnation and death of Christ; yet, as a fact, it includes much more. God was engaged in reconciling the world from the very beginning, and that in Christ."

What Vincent says here shows the immense love of God for the objects of His affection. Despite His wrath at our sin, God looked beyond that and has worked since the very beginning of time to restore us to Himself. This is why all of the stories of the Bible are included. Each shows another step in the process of leading the world to Jesus. God has been reconciling us to Himself each step of the way.

Further, Paul explains that in this process, God has arranged these things for His people in a way that He is "not imputing their trespasses to them." For those who have received His offering of peace, we are not to be punished as we justly deserve. Instead, God united with flesh in the Person of Jesus and took the punishment that we deserve upon Himself. Therefore, by this act, there is no longer an expectation of punishment and condemnation, but rather one of divine favor and reconciliation.

This also shows, quite clearly, why Jesus can claim that there is only one path to God and it is through Him (see John 14:6). If the vicarious offering is not accepted, then only an expectation of wrath and condemnation remains. "The world" in this verse is speaking of humanity, but more specifically those who have received Jesus. For this reason, Charles Ellicott gives the translation as, "How that it was God who was reconciling in Christ a world unto Himself."

In other words, what God has done is for a group in this world who will become "a world unto Himself." Those who are not in this group will not receive of this benefit. This is why there needs to be apostles, preachers, and teachers of this word. If all people were being reconciled to God, then there would be no need for

"the word of reconciliation." It would be a forgone conclusion that all were saved. But because there is a need for the word of reconciliation to be communicated, it shows that the communication of that word is a necessary part of the process. As Paul says in Romans 10:17, "...faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

It is the transmission of this message which God committed to the apostles that is now contained in the pages of the Bible. For those faithful preachers and teachers who follow after them, there is the burden of properly passing this message of hope on to the world.

Life application: If you are feeling weighed down by the troubles of the world, just take time to contemplate the message found in this verse. God has been working on a plan since the very beginning of time in order to reconcile you to Himself. That plan included the ministry, suffering, and death of Christ. If God went through all of that for you, then your time of trial has a purpose in that plan, and it will have an end as well. Be of good cheer and stand strong in your faith in Christ.

**Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:20**

In the previous two verses, Paul has spoken of the "ministry of reconciliation" and the "word of reconciliation." Now, he combines those thoughts into this verse. He begins with "Now then..." The Greek word for this is *huper* and it "is usually best translated 'for the betterment (advantage) of,' i.e. focusing on benefit" (M. Vincent). In other words, "Because of the ministry which we have been given, we now relay the following which is for your benefit..." With that understood, he says that "we are ambassadors for Christ."

The word translated as "ambassadors" is used only twice in the New Testament, here and in Ephesians 6:20. It is *presbeuó* and it "means to act as an established statesman (diplomat) – a trusted, respected ambassador who is authorized to

speak as God's emissary (represent His kingdom)" (HELPS Word Studies). In essence, Paul is saying that the message he and the apostles carry is as if Christ were personally speaking it.

This is the job of an ambassador. They are to convey the desire and intent of the one they represent, speaking in the stead of the one who appointed them. In the case of the apostles, they spoke "as though God were pleading through us." Without a doubt, and what can be taken in no other way based on his words here, is that there is nothing God needs to do concerning the matter which will be stated. Rather there is something that man must do. This is why Paul uses the term "pleading." It is as if God's hands were stretched out and asking for a response.

And the message that these ambassadors proclaim from God who is pleading through them is that "we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." If God need do nothing, and the burden is laid on the one being petitioned, then this verse shows with all certainty that the Calvinist doctrine of predestination and election is false. They teach that God predestines some for salvation and some for condemnation and that free-will is not involved in the process. Based on Paul's words here, that is not only utterly ridiculous, it is dangerous.

Why would God "plead" through His ambassadors for man to be reconciled to Him if man was under no obligation to respond? Further, why would God plead this "on Christ's behalf?" What would the point of saying this be if Christ's work encompassed election apart from free-will? Such a doctrine does damage to the purpose of the cross of Christ which was to provide atonement for all people potentially, based on their choice of being reconciled. If they refuse His offer, the atonement that was offered is withheld; if they receive it, it is granted.

Life application: Paul's words are clear and concise, and they are also consistent. Man has an obligation to respond to the gospel message of Christ. If he refuses the offer, there is no other way to be reconciled to God. Exercise your free will wisely. Choose Christ!

**For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Corinthians 5:21**

From time to time, it is recommended by the commentator that a verse should be memorized and ready to be repeated at all times. This is one of them. In grasping the words of this verse, we find what the significance of the cross truly is. The order of the words in Greek show an emphasis which is lacking in our translations - "Him that knew no sin He made sin for us."

God sent Jesus on a definite mission in order to redeem fallen man. He was born without inherited sin and He lived His life perfectly under the law, God's standard for man. This is testified to on numerous occasions in the New Testament, such as John 8:46, John 14:30, Hebrews 7:26, 1 Peter 2:22, and etc. In being perfect and sinless, Jesus was thus qualified to become a sacrifice of atonement for those who otherwise had no hope.

It is important to note that the words "to be" are inserted by the translators, but are not in the Greek. Instead it says "He (has) made him sin." Does this merely mean a sin-offering, or does it literally mean He was made sin? The answer is to be found in the Old Testament sacrificial system.

An innocent animal was brought before the Lord and the offender laid his hands on it and confessed over the animal. In this act, the sin was transferred to the animal. Thus the animal became not just the sin offering, but the sin itself. The transfer was made in accordance with the law and therefore God viewed the offender as having been purified and the animal as being sin-filled. The "sin-offering" does not mean that the sin was offered to God, but that the animal which was "the sin" was to be killed because "the wages of sin is death." The life of the offender (the recipient of the transfer) was offered in order to remove the sin.

For this reason, the sin offering was to be wholly burnt; none of it was to be eaten. If the sin-offering was consumed, it would in essence be a "taking in again" of the sin which was transferred to the animal.

However, the book of Hebrews shows that this was only a picture of faith in the greater work of the Lord because, "...*it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). These Old Testament sacrifices only looked forward to the work of Christ. And this is exactly what Christ did for them (looking forward), and for us (looking backward) on the cross.

God sent Him on this mission - perfect, pure, and spotless. He went to the cross bearing sin - our sin. The transfer is from the offender to the innocent and so He literally became sin. As the "wages of sin is death," then He had to die in order for the sin which was transferred to Him to be removed. But, something more incredible occurred. Because He had no sin of His own, He died not "in" sin, but "for" sin. Without His own sin, it was not possible for Him to remain dead (Acts 2:24). Thus, He rose from the dead.

Therefore, sin was judged in Him - our sin. Once such a judgment is rendered, it can never be made again. And so an exchange was made at the cross. God made Him "sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." As our sin has been judged, then there is only righteousness left. In God's eyes, our sin - past, present, and future, has been judged in Christ. Without any sin, we have become the righteousness of God in Christ.

This concept spoken of here is similar to that of Galatians 3:13 -

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree")...

The law stood against us and testified to our sinful state, but Christ who fulfilled the law condemned that sin through His marvelous work. Again, Paul speaks of this in Romans -

"For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh..." Romans 8:3

This "righteousness of God" is something that we cannot do without if we are to be reconciled to Him. Either we possess it, or we can never enter into His presence. As Charles Ellicott notes -

"The 'righteousness of God,' as in Romans 3:21-22, expresses not simply the righteousness which He gives, nor that which He requires, though neither of these meanings is excluded, but rather that which belongs to Him as His essential attribute."

As incredible as it seems, Christ Jesus was seen as our sin there on Calvary's cross. At the same time, we were (and are even now) viewed as Christ's perfection. Because of His work, we take on a new nature in God's eyes.

Life application: Because God views us as sinless, isn't it right that we act as such? The cost of our sin was the life of our perfect, sinless Lord. As He died for us, let us endeavor to live for Him.

**We then, *as workers together with Him* also plead with *you* not to receive the grace of God in vain. 2 Corinthians 6:1**

Again, as in 2 Corinthians 5:20, this verse clearly demonstrates the incorrect theology of Calvinism which excludes free-will. One has to read right over such verses, ignoring their intent completely, in order to develop such an unsound systematic theology (which then isn't very systematic).



Paul begins the chapter with, "We then..." He is speaking of himself and the other apostles, as he has even from the first chapter of this epistle. As apostles and "as workers together *with Him*" his petition will be made. The words "with Him" are inserted, but they are implied based on the use of the compounded Greek *oun*, meaning "with" which is found in the word *synergountes*. The word *sunergeó* means "to work together" or "cooperate." Therefore, when compounded with *oun*, it means "to work together with."

The question some scholars debate is whether "Him" then refers to "God" or to "Christ." The reason for this debate is because "with" is certainly referring back to verse 20 of the previous chapter -

"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." 2 Corinthians 5:20

It is actually a bit silly to argue this, but for clarity we should analyze it. Paul said in this verse that the apostles are "ambassadors for Christ." An ambassador speaks for the one who sent them. However, it is "God" who is said to plead through the apostles. Therefore, either option is a possibility if one wants to divide Paul's thought into two different entities. But if we understand that Christ is God, then the debate is unnecessary. God is pleading through Christ, because Christ is God's revelation of Himself. Further, Paul says the same thing concerning God in the book of 1 Corinthians -

"For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, *you are* God's building." 1 Corinthians 3:9

Understanding that we, as the church, are "living stones" in this temple (1 Peter 2:5) and that the church is Christ's body (Ephesians 1:23), then we can see that these are ultimately one and the same. It then is the apostles, together with Him, who "also plead with *you* not to receive the grace of God in vain." The grace of God he is writing about can be nothing other than the message of salvation, the

gospel. It is the message of pardon leading to reconciliation with God which is found in the sacrificial giving of Christ for fallen man.

And so the question must be asked, "Why would God/Christ plead along with the apostles for us to "not receive the grace of God in vain" if free-will were excluded from the equation? One can see how dangerous this type of theology is. If someone is expected to make a volitional act of the will in coming to Christ, but they are told this isn't necessary because God has elected them already apart from their free-will, then they could end up never making such a decision. Thus, they will be excluded from the very hope which God is pleading for them to possess.

Life application: If you have never simply received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, calling on Him as Lord, then do so today. The choice is an eternity-deciding decision and the choice is yours.

**For He says:**

**"In an acceptable time I have heard you,  
And in the day of salvation I have helped you."**

**Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation.**

2 Corinthians 6:2

In verse 1, Paul said that they (meaning the apostles) as "workers together *with Him* also plead with *you* not to receive the grace of God in vain." Now to show the importance of calling on Christ at the present moment, whatever that moment may be, he goes to Isaiah 49:8 to demonstrate that even the Old Testament showed there would be an acceptable time for both Jew and Gentile to reach out and be saved.

His quote is from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), but even the Hebrew version carries the idea that he is conveying -

"Thus says the LORD:

'In an acceptable time I have heard You,  
And in the day of salvation I have helped You;" Isaiah 49:8

"For He says" then is speaking of the Lord, who is God. As Jesus is one and the same with the Lord of the Old Testament, it is again a note concerning the deity of Christ (as was explained in verse 1). It is He who says, "In an acceptable time I have heard you." There was to be found a time of special grace upon the world. That time came at the advent of Jesus Christ. He, born without original sin, lived under the law perfectly, and gave His life up in exchange for the sin of the world.

His resurrection proved that this was so. Fifty days later, the Holy Spirit was poured out on all who believed. This is that acceptable time. It is a period of grace where man's sins are not counted against them. As Paul continues he writes, "And in the day of salvation I have helped you."

Where we cannot help ourselves, Christ stepped in to help us. We already bear Adam's sin and thus stand condemned before God. We cannot traverse time and undo what Adam has done and so we stand helpless to do anything about our miserable plight. But at the coming of Christ, and in the completion of His work, He has helped us. There is now a way of being reconciled to God. But there is something important attached to this that Paul informs us. He says, "Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation."

The urgency of his words shows us at least two things -

- 1) There must be an obligation upon us. If not, then there would be no need to worry about God or the apostles pleading for us to act.
- 2) There is a point when this "accepted time" will end.

Christ's offer is exactly that, an offer. It can be accepted and it can be refused. Further, it is not forced upon anyone. No person is "regenerated in order to

believe." Rather they are given an offer of peace and they must accept it. "The day of salvation" then is any day that we have. As we only have "today" (as Hebrews chapters 1-4 so minutely explains), then we need to understand that Today is in fact the day of salvation.

There is a day when we will die, or at least become incapable of choosing Jesus. At that point, Today is over and our fate is sealed. Paul's words in this verse are a sobering reminder to all that our days are numbered, but that this set number is unknown to us. The first chapter of Proverbs shares the same thought with us -

"Because I have called and you refused,  
I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded,

<sup>25</sup> Because you disdained all my counsel,

And would have none of my rebuke,

<sup>26</sup> I also will laugh at your calamity;

I will mock when your terror comes,

<sup>27</sup> When your terror comes like a storm,

And your destruction comes like a whirlwind,

When distress and anguish come upon you.

<sup>28</sup> "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer;

They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me." Proverbs 1:24-28

Life application: If you have heard His voice, don't rebel against it. Receive Jesus Christ and be reconciled to God. Truly there is no Tomorrow that we can count on. Call on Jesus Today.