

We Persuade Others
2 Corinthians 5:11-21
Tim Becker – March 26, 2017

1. Introduction

Please open your bibles to 2 Cor 5:1-10 (page xyz in the pew bible). Last week Kevin preached on this passage. The bad news is that our bodies are going to wear out. Most of us are quite aware of that. We are living it: aches, weaknesses, and disease. Our bodies are like tents: fragile and temporary. The good news is that when our tent-body is destroyed in death, we will be given a much better body, a house like body. This house-body is not fragile or temporary, but will endure ... forever. Imagine: no aches, no weaknesses, no disease. This house-body is not made by hands, but by God. And he will give it to all those who are born again.

This news is very good, good enough to give us courage to go on even though we are living in a body that is wasting away. God will surely take care of those who are his. Reaching the end of your earthly body does not mean an end of you. The eventual loss of your tent-body does not mean you have lost everything. It actually means you have gained something far more valuable, a body that will never wear out. And even better, you will have gained a home in the presence of the most wonderful being in the universe, the Lord God. It's not overstating it to say that when Christians die, that they will have gained God himself, like a bride gains her husband.

Here we are in our tents that are wearing out. How should we live while we have to endure these troubled bodies, waiting for our new bodies? As Kevin answered last week, we should live with the aim to please God. This is what 2 Cor 5:9 says. Paul goes on to write that God will judge all the deeds we do in these bodies, whether good or evil. So we ought not to live like lazy servants who ignore our master's business. We ought to live like servants of God who see the connection between God's judgment and the fate of people around us. This is where Paul's letter leads next. Paul answers the question: in light of God's judgment, what should be our business on this side of eternity?

Please follow along as I read 2 Cor 5:11-21.

Read 2 Cor 5:11-21.

Please pray with me.

* Pray

God, like Paul, we want to rightly know the fear of you and rightly live in light of that. We pray for your Holy Spirit to give us both understanding and affection for this word of yours. Help me to speak in a way that is most helpful and please give my hearers ears to hear you. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.

2. What is our business?

Here is our outline for the rest of this message: 1. What is our business? 2. What is our motivation?

First, what is our business?. Look with me at the first sentence in v. 11. The main clause contains 3 words, “we persuade others.” To persuade someone is to cause them to believe something or convince them to do something. What is Paul wanting to convince others of? Look down at the last half of v. 20, “We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” That’s it. Paul’s aim while living in a tent-body is to persuade others to be reconciled to God.

What does it mean for you to be reconciled to someone? It means to be restored to harmony, to relationship. Kids, some of you have a good friend. You love to be together: talking, playing, listening to music, watching movies, just hanging out. You know a lot about each other. You share thoughts about yourself that you don’t tell just anyone, private things. When you are together, you feel great. You enjoy being with your friend. Imagine if this week at school, you told one of your friend’s private secrets to another kid and then your good friend found out. Would that change your friendship? It sure would! Trust is an important part of your friendship together. And you just broke that trust. You acted like an enemy, rather than a friend. And your friend feels it. Put your hands together like this (clasp hands). Before you told your friend’s secret, you would say that your friendship was as close together as your two hands. Now separate your hands (hold them out in front of you). Look at the space between your two hands. They aren’t close together anymore. Now your friendship is distant, like your two hands. For you to be close friends again, you need to be reconciled to your friend. To be reconciled means to restore your friendship to what it was before you sinned against your friend.

Paul’s main business in life is to go around urging people to be reconciled to God. Why do people need to be reconciled to God? Why aren’t they already reconciled to God? To answer that question, let’s first talk about God. God has been much better to you than a good friend. God put you together when you were still inside your mother’s womb. God gave you breath within moments of your birth. God provided for your every need right after you were born: milk and warmth and diapers. And God’s care for you has continued every day of your life right up until now. You’ve enjoyed seeing sunsets, smelling spring rains, hearing the laugh of a baby, and tasting new foods. James 1:17 would say that every good gift you have ever received has come from one place, your kind Father in heaven.

If God treats us as I just described, then how should we respond to him? We all understand that there is a right and a wrong way to respond to someone’s kindness. Right? When you betray your friend’s trust even though they have been a good friend to you, you know you have done wrong. That’s a bad way to treat your friend. So when God kindly tells us how to live: don’t lie, don’t worship anything other than God, don’t take another’s wife, or husband, or his things, repent when you sin, forgive others when they

sin against you ... when God kindly tells you how to live and you respond by disobeying him ... on purpose ..., is that the right way to respond to his infinite kindness and authority? Surely not. Let me say again that God has been much better to you than a good friend. So your sin against God is very wicked. When you sin against God, you are treating him like an enemy.

Since our earliest days, you and I have ignored God's commands and lived as though we were God. Rather than being grateful for his gifts, we have assumed them as our rights. This has broken your relationship with God, just like it would with your friend. This means that for your relationship with God to be in harmony, for you to stop being his enemy, you must be reconciled to him.

But it is much worse for you to make God your enemy, than to make your friend your enemy. This is because God is not just a friend. God is not your peer. God is your superior in every way. God is a good judge who will one day make all wrongs right. He will one day punish all sins against you. You can be glad for that. Wickedness won't last forever and will be suitably punished. But this also means that your sins will be suitably punished. So if you remain unreconciled to God, he will punish you for your sins. This punishment means that you will be forever separated from God and from all that is kind and merciful. Imagine a place where there are no more good gifts from God, not even a tiny one. Every minute and every day is full of punishment, no mercy, no kindness. This is what enemies of God deserve. And this is what they will get, if they are not reconciled to him. This is good and right and yet it is terrible news for sinners like us.

* How to be reconciled to God

How can a person be reconciled to God? What can they do to make things right with God? Well, when you sin against your friend by betraying their trust, what can you do to make things right? You can apologize and ask for their forgiveness, right? Here's the big question: does your apology earn their forgiveness? If you put the sin of betrayal on one side of a scale and put your apology on the other side, do they weigh the same ... do they balance each other out? No, the betrayal outweighs the apology. This is one reason why our legal system punishes wrongdoers with prison time. Saying sorry doesn't buy back the sin as if there is no longer a debt to pay. We all have a sense that the sinner must be punished for his sin.

Likewise when you sin against God ... over and over since the earliest days of your life, saying you are sorry is right and necessary, but it does not purchase your reconciliation. Your admitting your sins does not earn God's forgiveness. It does not pay the debt you owe for your sin. So how are your sins to be paid for so that God would forgive you?

Look with me at v. 19, "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them." Trespasses means sins. God, not you, has taken the initiative to pay for your sins. You don't have enough in your account to pay for your sins. Only someone sinless has enough to pay for a sinner. And only God is sinless. So

God the Father sent the Son of God from heaven to earth to live a sinless life, to die on a cross paying for the sins of others, and to rise from the dead to prove that this is true.

Verse 21 explains what Jesus accomplished on the cross. Look with me at v. 21. “For our sake [that is, for our benefit] he [that is, God] made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” God gave Jesus our sins as though he was the sinner and punished him for those sins. This paid the debt owed for our sins. And God did that so that if we are “in Christ” we become righteous, as though we didn’t sin. When you betray your friend, if there was a way to pay the debt for your sin, then you would be immediately reconciled with your friend. Your relationship would be restored. If you are in Jesus, then he paid for your sins so that you are reconciled with God. Your relationship with God is restored. You don’t have to pay for your own sins in hell. Jesus paid for them on the cross in your place. Do you see why this is called the good news? Ask yourself, does my heart think this is good news?

Now look with me at v. 17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” All those who are in Christ have had their sins “paid for” by Christ on his cross. But if that was all, then we would be stuck with hearts that still want to be God, still want to sin. We would not want to please God, but please only ourselves. So our sins would be forgiven, but we would still live the same as before. The Bible says this should not be. If you are in Christ, you should live differently than before you were in Christ. We will talk more about being in Christ in a moment, but for now know that you were not born in Christ. You were born in sin, a rebel, an enemy of God. You were born with a nature of sin, not a nature of godliness. Unless you are in Christ, you cannot not sin. You will obey sin’s call to you as if it was your master. And unless you are in Christ, sin is your master.

So v. 17 says that if anyone is in Christ, something old passes away and something new comes. If you are in Christ, what passes away is your inability to say no to sin. And what comes is a new nature that actually wants to please God, actually wants to obey God. The change is so significant that v. 21 says those who are in Christ are now a new creation, as though you were born again. When Christ is in you, you are now dead to sin, you don’t have to obey it, and alive to God, you want to obey him. If you are in Christ, you won’t stop sinning in this life, but you will sin less. Your life will change. You will rationalize your sins less and repent more. This is why John says in 1 John 3:9, “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.” Born of God is the same as in Christ. You no longer keep on sinning like it doesn’t matter because God has given you a new nature, his Spirit is now in you, leading you.

I have been describing the good news of our being reconciled to God. I hope all of you who are hearing me are thinking, “Yes, that is good news. I see that I am a sinner who deserves God’s punishment. And I want to escape that punishment by being reconciled to God.” If you have been listening closely, you have heard me say that the great benefit of being reconciled to God only comes to those who are in Christ, not to everyone. So how can you move from being an enemy of God to being in Christ?

If you wish to be reconciled to God you must admit your sins, repent of them, and believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God who died on the cross to pay for the sins of all who trust in him. To admit your sins means that you are not blaming anyone or anything else for your sins. You are acknowledging to God that your sins are your fault. And to repent of your sins is to feel sorry that you did them, to wish you had never done them, and to wish to never do those sins again. To believe in Jesus and to trust in him means to believe that what he did on the cross really does satisfy God's holy anger towards your sin and to prize Jesus for that. This is what it means to put your faith in him: to believe and trust that Jesus actually did what the Bible says he did, that he took away your sins on the cross.

If you want to be reconciled to God, and I sure hope you do, then talk with God about all this. Admit your sins to him. Repent of them. And believe and trust in Jesus as your sin payer. God won't turn away any who come to him, seeking his mercy. But you must come honestly, humbly. There is no magic formula to this that bypasses your true heart. Don't think you can be like a little boy who says sorry to his sister just because his mom told him he should, but doesn't really mean it. That kind of "sorry" doesn't count for anything. God knows what's in your heart. So if you are truly earnest about being reconciled to God, then tell him that. Use your own words. Don't be afraid.

Everyone, please close your eyes right now. I want to give you a few moments to talk with God. Is there something you want to tell him? I hope so. You don't have to remain God's enemy. You can be reconciled to him. God is eager to hear from you. If some time in the past you have talked with God about these things, but you know you aren't living like it, then now is a good time to talk with him again. [Pause] You may open your eyes. If you have just been talking to God about these things or you want to, then please come to talk with me or with pastor George or Brian. We'd love to walk with you as you walk toward God. Living the Christian life is not a solo sport. God designed this to be done with others.

* Persuade others

Now let's move back to Paul. Paul's message to be reconciled to God is like the message we just heard. While in this tent-body, Paul's business is to implore others to be reconciled to God. He does not merely tell these gospel truths without passion or urging. He is not like the guy handing out free bottles of cold water at the fair who doesn't really care rather you take one or not. Paul cares that others actually take the steps to be reconciled to God.

And this business of Paul's is not just for Paul. All people whom God has reconciled to himself are called by God to persuade others as well. When the old has passed away and the new has come for you, God gives you his business to do. Remember, you aren't God. You aren't your own master. God is your redeemer and master. He did not deliver you from the domain of darkness and transfer you to the kingdom of his beloved Son (Col 1:13) in order for you to finish your days in this tent-body minding your own business, seeking your own pleasures, following your own will.

1 Peter 2:9 says, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” God reconciled you to himself for a purpose. And that purpose is that you may proclaim his excellencies to others. What are his excellencies? That God has made a way for sinners to be reconciled to him! So let’s proclaim it and let’s persuade others. This is our business while we live in these tent-bodies.

2. What is our motivation?

We’ve been talking about evangelism. Can we admit to each other that making evangelism our business is hard? Will you let me twist your arm a bit? Mature people, like you, make themselves do hard things all the time. It’s just a matter of motivation. A guy in love with a girl might stop spending his money on eating out and fun times with the guys in order to save tons of money for an engagement ring. Why? Because he is strongly motivated to marry the girl. Some of you work hard at your work ... it’s no picnic ... because you are strongly motivated to provide for your family.

* Motivation 1: knowing the fear of the Lord

So Paul, can you help us with motivations to do the hard work of persuading others to be reconciled to God? What motivates you, Paul? He gives us 3 motivations here in this passage. First, follow along as I read starting in v. 9.

⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. ¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. ...

Paul says that we ought to make it our aim to please God. Why? Because we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ. It is wicked to not please God with your life. This applies to everyone on the planet, those who profess to be Christians and those who don’t. Paul says that in light of this, “knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.”

What does he mean by the fear of the Lord? Heinrich Himmler was one of the most powerful men in Nazi Germany. He master-minded the brutal Nazi Secret Service and the concentration camps that exterminated 6 million Jews and others. In 2008, the German news magazine Der Spiegel described Himmler as one of the most brutal mass murderers in history. A subordinate described Himmler as someone who actually enjoyed inflicting pain on others. Imagine that you were an American soldier caught behind enemy lines and that you were brought into a torture room with Himmler. You would fear him because you know he is a powerful evil man.

The Lord is not a powerful evil being. He is a powerful good being. He will always do what is right. Why should you fear him? Because you do not always do what is right and

therefore you must be punished. It would be evil for God to wink at wrong, even your wrong. It would be evil for God to not punish wrong. So knowing that you are a sinner, fear God. Your sins must be punished. And if you are a sinner reconciled to God, if Jesus Christ has paid the punishment due to you, then fear God with the respect and awe due him. To treat his gift of salvation lightly is to spit in his face. God is a powerful being. Don't spit in his face. It won't go well with you. Respect him. Worship him. This is what it means for a redeemed-one to fear him.

How is this a motivation to make it your business to persuade others to be reconciled to God? Two ways. First, knowing the fear of the Lord, you know that you owe him your life for what he did for you. You aren't trying to pay him back. You can't and shouldn't. But if you respect and worship him, you will obey him when he says that you are to proclaim his excellencies to others.

The second motivation that comes from knowing the fear of the Lord is that you know the certain punishment coming for all those who remain unreconciled to God. That punishment is more terrible than anything ever experienced and you wish for others to be spared from that as you were. So you work to persuade others to be spared.

* Motivation 2: the Love of Christ controls us

For the 2nd motivation for making our life business persuading others to be reconciled to God, look at v. 14-15.

¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Christ's love for you is most clearly seen in his death on the cross. If you repent of your sins and place your faith in him, then his death becomes your death ... as though you went to the grave to pay the punishment for your sins. But it was him, not you. And now you live heading to life eternal with God. Paul says that he died for you so that you might no longer live for yourself but for him who died for you.

When you consider Christ's death on the cross for you, you see his love for you. And when you see that rightly, you so treasure him that you gladly let him control you. When you see Christ's love as precious, you eagerly stop living for yourself and start living for him. This becomes your worship, a life lived for him. And a life lived for him has a focus on persuading others to be reconciled to God as you have been.

* Motivation 3: God has given us the ministry of reconciliation

For the 3rd motivation for making our life business persuading others to be reconciled to God, look at v. 18-20.

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.

Do you see the “and” in v. 18? God accomplished two things when Christ went to the cross. The first was that he reconciled us to himself. The second was that he gave us who are reconciled the message of reconciliation.

Verse 19 says that God entrusted this message to us. This is not a secret message to be hidden so others don't find it out. It's a message to be proclaimed so that all will hear. To fulfill our God-given trust with the message we must handle the message as God designed, proclaim it for others to hear.

Verse 20 says that God appointed us as ambassadors for Christ. An ambassador is someone sent to represent the interests of the one who sent them. If you have been reconciled to God, then he has appointed you as his ambassador. And as his ambassador, you are to carry out his business, not your own.

Think with me for a moment. What other means has God designed for sinners to hear his message of reconciliation? God makes his appeal through people, through those he has already redeemed. There is no other way. If you and I and all Christians refuse our ambassadorship, then no else will hear of God's mercy to sinners through Jesus Christ.

Don't be a lazy servant of your master. Fulfill your calling as one who is now in Christ. Make it your business to persuade others to be reconciled to God.

3. Conclusion

So in conclusion, God's message of reconciliation is very good news. Your sins make you an enemy of God. And God in his goodness must make all wrongs right. He must punish all sins. God has provided a way for your punishment to be paid by Jesus. If you acknowledge your sins, repent of them, and trust in Christ's payment on your behalf, then God will count Jesus' payment as yours. If you don't, then you will pay for your own sins in hell forever. Please don't wait. Be reconciled to God.

And for all have been reconciled to God, we know the fear of the Lord and the love of Christ. God has entrusted to us this message of reconciliation. We must do all we can to persuade others to be reconciled to God through Christ.