

The Ministry of Reconciliation

The ministry of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5:18 refers to *the work believers have been given to do and the message they declare: you can have a restored relationship with God through Jesus*. The verse says this: “All this is from God, who *reconciled* us to himself through Christ and gave us *the ministry of reconciliation*.”

The ministry of reconciliation involves the proclamation of the gospel and its assurance that forgiveness of sin is available in Christ. Sin prevents us from having a relationship with God, but *Jesus’ perfect sacrifice on the cross made atonement for sin* (Hebrews 2:17) and brought harmony to mankind’s relationship with Him. Jesus reconciled us to God. Now we can proclaim that people can repent of their sin and be right with God again through faith in Jesus (Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:20–21).

2 Corinthians 5:16 (HCSB):	2 Corinthians 6:1-2 (HCSB)
<p>16. From now on, then, we do not know anyone in a purely human way. Even if we have known Christ in a purely human way, yet now we no longer know Him in this way.</p> <p>17. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come.</p> <p>18. Everything is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us <i>the ministry of reconciliation</i>: 19. That is, in Christ, God was <i>reconciling</i> the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He committed the message of reconciliation to us. 20. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, certain that God is appealing 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 we might <i>become the righteousness of God</i> in Him.</p>	<p>1. Working together with Him, we also appeal to you, “Don’t receive God’s grace in vain.”</p> <p>2. For He says: I heard you in an acceptable time, and I helped you in the day of salvation. Look, now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation.</p> <p><i>Romans 5:10</i> “10 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!” HCSB</p> <p><i>Romans 12:18</i></p>

Reconcile, reconciliation; Greek trans. *Katallassō*, properly denotes to change, exchange (especially of money); hence, of person, to change from enmity to friendship between God and man.

2 Corinthians 5:16-21(HCSB)

2 Corinthians 5:16–21 (TWBCV15:GR): If it sounds as if Paul is calling us to grit our teeth and try harder to be good, then we are missing the point of 2 Corinthians. Paul intends for us to see the world in a completely new way, so that our actions stem from this new understanding, not from trying harder.

Scripture	Brief Commentary on Verse	Cross-Reference Scripture
<p>V. 16. From now on, then, we do not know anyone in a purely human way. Even if we have known Christ in a purely human way, yet now we no longer know Him in this way.</p>	<p>1. Weanedness from the world: "Henceforth we know no man after the flesh, v. 16. We do not own nor affect any person or thing in this world for carnal ends and outward advantage: we are enabled, by divine grace, not to mind nor regard this world, nor the things of this world, but to live above it. The love of Christ is in our hearts, and the world is under our feet."</p>	
<p>V. 17. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come.</p>	<p>2. A thorough change of the heart: For if any man be in Christ, if any man be a Christian indeed, and will approve himself such, he is, or he must be, a new creature, v. 17. Some read it, Let him be a new creature. This ought to be the care of all who profess the Christian faith, that they be new creatures; not only that they have a new name, and wear a new livery, but that they have a new heart and new nature.</p>	
<p>V. 18. Everything is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation</p>	<p><i>Reconciliation, which is here spoken of under a double notion:-</i></p> <p>1. As an unquestionable privilege, v. 18, 19.</p> <p>Reconciliation supposes a quarrel, or breach of friendship; and sin has made a breach, it has broken the friendship between God and man. The heart of the sinner is <i>filled with enmity</i> against God, and God is justly offended with the sinner. Yet, behold, there may be a reconciliation; the offended Majesty of heaven is willing to be reconciled.</p>	
<p>V. 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.</p>	<p>1. As an unquestionable privilege, v. 18, 19.</p> <p>Reconciliation supposes a quarrel, or breach of friendship; and sin has made a breach, it has broken the friendship between God and man. The heart of the sinner is <i>filled with enmity</i> against God, and God is justly offended with the sinner. Yet, behold, there may be a reconciliation; the offended Majesty of heaven is willing to be reconciled.</p>	
<p>V. 20. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, certain that God is appealing through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God."</p>	<p>Reconciliation is here spoken of as our indispensable duty, v. 20. As God is willing to be reconciled to us, we ought to be reconciled to God. And it is the great end and design of the gospel, that word of reconciliation, to prevail upon sinners to lay aside their enmity against God. Faithful ministers are Christ's ambassadors, sent to treat with sinners on peace and reconciliation: they come in God's name, with his entreaties, and act in Christ's stead, doing the very thing he did when he was upon this earth, and what He wills to be done now that He is in heaven.</p>	<p>Ambassadors: an accredited diplomat sent by a country as its official representative to a foreign country:</p>
<p>V. 21. He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.</p>	<p>And for our encouragement so to do the apostle subjoins what should be well known and duly considered by us (v. 21), namely, the end and design of all this: that we might be made the <i>righteousness of God</i> in him, might be justified freely by the grace of God through the <i>redemption</i> which is in Christ Jesus.</p>	<p>subjoin verb FORMAL subjoined add (comments or supplementary information) at the end of a speech or text.</p>

2 Corinthians 6:1-2

Scripture	Brief Commentary	Cross-Reference Scripture
<p>V. 1. Working together with Him, we also appeal to you, “Don’t receive God’s grace in vain.”</p>	<p>The errand or <i>exhortation</i> itself, namely, to comply with the gospel offers of <i>reconciliation</i>-that, being favored with the gospel, they would not receive this grace of God in vain, v. 1. The gospel is <i>a word of grace</i> sounding in our ears; but it will be in vain for us to <i>hear it</i>, unless we <i>believe it</i>, and <i>comply with the end and design of it</i>. And as it is the duty of the ministers of the gospel to exhort and persuade their hearers to accept of grace and mercy which are offered to them, so they are honored with this high title of co-workers with God.</p>	
<p>V. 2. For He says: I heard you in an acceptable time, and I helped you in the day of salvation. Look, now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation.</p>	<p><i>The present time is the only proper season to accept the grace that is offered and improve that grace which is afforded: NOW is the accepted time, NOW is the day of salvation, v. 2.</i> The gospel day is a day of salvation, the means of grace, the means of salvation, the offers of the gospel, the offers of salvation, and the present time the only proper time to accept of these offers: <i>To-day, while it is called to-day.</i></p>	<p>Grace is the basis for the Christian faith. We believe we are saved by faith through grace. God's grace is usually defined as undeserved favor. Grace cannot be earned; it is something that is freely given. We count on God's grace and the bridge he built in our relationship with him.</p>

Background and Setting

Paul’s association with the important commercial city of Corinth (see Introduction to 1 Corinthians: Title) began on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1–18), when he spent 18 months (Acts 18:11) ministering there. After leaving Corinth, Paul heard of immorality in the Corinthian church and wrote a letter (since lost) to confront that sin, referred to in 1 Cor. 5:9. During his ministry in Ephesus, he received further reports of trouble in the Corinthian church in the form of divisions among them (1 Cor. 1:11). In addition, the Corinthians wrote Paul a letter (1 Cor. 7:1) asking for clarification of some issues. Paul responded by writing the letter known as 1 Corinthians. Planning to remain at Ephesus a little longer (1 Cor. 16:8, 9), Paul sent Timothy to Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10, 11). Disturbing news reached the apostle (possibly from Timothy) of further difficulties at Corinth, including the arrival of self-styled false apostles.

3. (2 Corinthians 5:16) Because of this new life made possible by Jesus, old earthly attachments are far less important.

Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.

a. **We regard no one according to the flesh:** Why?

- Because we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen (2 Corinthians 4:18).
- Because our earthly tent will be destroyed, but we will have a new body, eternal in the heavens (2 Corinthians 5:1).
- Because we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).
- Because we do not glory in appearance, but we glory in heart (2 Corinthians 5:12).

i. For all these reasons, we don't look to the image and appearance of the flesh but to the substance of the heart.

b. **Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet we know Him thus no longer:** Even those who knew Jesus in the flesh found their new relationship with Him through the Holy Spirit far more rewarding.

i. Because Paul writes we have known Christ according to the flesh, we can surmise that Paul knew of Jesus during the days of His earthly ministry and probably even heard Jesus teach in Jerusalem. Paul may have even been among some of the Pharisees who often confronted Jesus! Paul certainly fondly looked back on what he remembered of Christ according to the flesh. At the same time, he knew his relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit was far better.

ii. "When he knew Christ after the flesh he considered Him as the leader of a new sect, the leader of a new party, a menace to holy religion. He says we do not see Him like that any more. We know Him now in the Spirit, by the Spirit." (Morgan)

iii. So, to have known Jesus in the flesh didn't guarantee anything. "Great numbers had followed Christ in person who afterwards deserted Him and demanded His crucifixion." (Hughes) Even the disciples were poor followers of Jesus until they knew Him by the Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

c. **We know Him thus no longer:** Some think that it would be better if Jesus were present with us according to the flesh, but it would not be and Jesus knew this. This is why Jesus told His disciples It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you (John 16:7).

4. (2 Corinthians 5:17) The resurrection life of Jesus gives us new life.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

a. **If anyone:** This is a promise for anyone. Anyone! It doesn't matter what class, what race, what nationality, what language, or what level of intelligence. Anyone can be a new creation in Jesus Christ.

b. **Is in Christ**: This is a promise for **anyone** who **is in Christ**. This is not a promise for those who are in themselves, or in the religion of men, or in someone or something else. This is for those **in Christ**.

c. **He is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new**. Paul here teaches the great principle of **regeneration**. Jesus Christ changes those who come to Him by faith and who are **in Christ**. The saved are not "**just** forgiven." They are changed into a **new creation**.

i. It is unfair for us to expect those who are not **in Christ** to live as if they were **a new creation**. However, it is **not** unfair to expect a changed life from people who say they are Christians. "I know no language, I believe there is none, that can express a greater or more thorough and more radical renewal, than that which is expressed in the term, 'a new creature.'" (Spurgeon)

ii. However, being a **new creation** doesn't mean that we are perfect. It means that we **are** changed and that we are **being** changed.

d. **He is a new creation**: Who makes us **a new creation**? This is something God alone can do in us. This isn't just "turning over a new leaf" or "getting your act together." Yet the life of a **new creation** is not something God does **for us** but **in us**. So, we are told to **put off... the old man** and to **put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness** (Ephesians 4:22-24).

i. Being **a new creation** is a gift from God received by faith. "God is surely the author of the second creation as he was of the first." (Harris) "A phrase which argueth the greatest change imaginable, and such a one as can be wrought in the soul by no other power than the power of God." (Poole)

ii. The work of **a new creation** is even greater than God's work of creating the world. "My brethren, it was more difficult, if such terms are ever applicable to Omnipotence, it was more difficult to create a Christian than to create a world. What was there to begin with when God made the world? There was nothing; but nothing could not stand in God's way — it was at least passive. But, my brethren, in our hearts, while there was nothing that could help God, there was much that could and did oppose him. Our stubborn wills, our deep prejudices, our ingrained love of iniquity, all these, great God, opposed thee, and aimed at thwarting thy designs... Yes, great God, it was great to make a world, but greater to create a new creature in Jesus Christ." (Spurgeon)

iii. Living as **a new creation** is something God works in us, using our will and our choices. So, we must both **receive the gift** of being **a new creation** and be challenged to **live the life** of **a new creation**. All this is God's work in us that we must submit to. This reminds us that at its root, Christianity is all about what **God did for us**, not what we can or should **do for God**. "Beloved, if you have no more religion than you have worked out in yourself, and no more grace than you have found in your nature, you have none at all. A supernatural work of the Holy Ghost must be wrought in every one of us, if we would see the face of God with acceptance." (Spurgeon)

e. **All things have become new** is the language of God's perfect, recreated work (Revelation 21:5). God wants to do a **new** thing in our life.

i. "The man is not only **mended**, but he is **new made**... there is a **new creation**, which God himself owns as his workmanship, and which he can look on and pronounce **very good**." (Clarke)

5. (2 Corinthians 5:18-19) The message and ministry of reconciliation.

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, 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.

a. **All things are of God**: Paul soars high here and wants the Corinthian Christians to know that he is writing of things that **are of God**, not of man. This work of a new creation and our eternal destiny are works **of God**, not something we have to earn and achieve.

b. **God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ**: God initiated this ministry of reconciliation, even though He is the innocent party in the estranged relationship. He **reconciled us to Himself**; we did not reconcile ourselves to Him.

i. Importantly, God did this **through Jesus Christ**. God did not **reconcile us to Himself** by neglecting His holy justice, or "giving in" to sinful, rebellious humanity. He did it by an amazing, righteous, sacrifice of love. God demands not one bit less justice and righteousness from man under Jesus, but the demand has been satisfied **through Jesus Christ**.

c. **And has given us the ministry of reconciliation**: Having **reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ**, now God expects us to take up the **ministry of reconciliation** and has therefore **committed to us the word of reconciliation**.

i. Reconciliation comes by **the word of reconciliation**. God uses the preached word to reconcile men and women to Himself.

d. **God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself**: Through all the terrors of the cross, God the Father worked in and with God the Son, **reconciling the world to Himself**. The Father and the Son worked together on the cross.

i. **God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself** is all the more amazing when understood in light of what happened on the cross. At some point before Jesus died, before the veil was torn in two, before Jesus cried out "it is finished," an awesome spiritual transaction took place. The Father set upon the Son all the guilt and wrath our sin deserved, and Jesus bore it in Himself perfectly, totally satisfying the justice of God for us.

ii. As horrible as the physical suffering of Jesus was, this spiritual suffering — the act of being judged for sin in our place — was what Jesus really dreaded about the cross. This was the cup — the cup of God's righteous wrath — that He trembled at drinking (Luke 22:39-46, Psalm 75:8, Isaiah 51:17, Jeremiah 25:15). On the cross Jesus became, as it were, an enemy of God who was judged and forced to drink the cup of the Father's fury so that we would not have to drink that cup.

iii. Yet, at the same time, Paul makes it clear that **God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself**. They worked together. Though Jesus was being treated as if He were an enemy of God, He was not. Even as Jesus was punished as if He were a sinner, He performed the most holy service unto God the Father ever offered. This is why Isaiah can say, Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him (Isaiah 53:10). In and of itself,

the suffering of the Son did not please the Father, but as it accomplished the work of **reconciling the world to Himself**, it completely pleased God the Father.

iv. Robertson rightly comments: "We may not dare to probe too far into this mystery of Christ's suffering on the Cross, but this fact throws some light on the tragic cry of Jesus just before he died: 'My God, My God, why didst thou forsake me?'" In that cry (Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34), Jesus expresses both His partnership with God the Father (*My God*) and the agonizing feeling of receiving the wrath of God that we deserved.

e. **Not imputing their trespasses to them**: Why? Was it because God went soft and gave mankind a "Get Out of Hell Free" card? Not at all. Instead, it is because our trespasses **were** imputed to Jesus. The justice our sin demanded is satisfied, not excused.

i. If God sets aside His wrath or His justice to save sinners, then the cross, instead of being a demonstration of love, is an exhibition of unspeakable cruelty and injustice, and of one man's misguided attempt at do-goodism. If sin could just be **excused**, then it never needed to be **satisfied**.

6. (2 Corinthians 5:20) Ambassadors for 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.

a. **Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ**: Paul sees that he serves in a foreign land as the representative of a King. The King has a message, and Paul is delivering that message **as though God were pleading through us**.

i. There is so much to the idea of being **ambassadors**! An ambassador does not speak to please his audience, but the King who sent him. An ambassador does not speak on his own authority; his own opinions or demands mean little. He simply says what he has been commissioned to say. But an ambassador is more than a messenger; he is also a representative, and the honor and reputation of his country are in his hands.

b. **Ambassadors**: This is a glorious title for Paul and the other apostles. However, it is not more glorious or more stunning than the thought of God, out of love, **pleading** to man. Why should God plead for us?

c. **We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God**: As an ambassador Paul makes a simple, strong, direct plea: **be reconciled to God**.

i. This makes it clear that the work of reconciliation mentioned previously in the chapter does not work apart from our will and our choice. Who are the ones **reconciled to God**? Those who have responded to Jesus' plea, made through His ambassadors.

ii. This makes it clear that it is **we** who must be **reconciled to God**, not He to us. **We** are the party in the wrong.

iii. Who is Paul imploring? The **you** of **we implore you** was added by the translators. Paul may have said, "*We implore the whole world on Christ's behalf*," or he may have said, "*We implore you Corinthian Christians on Christ's behalf*." The thought is valid either way, and both ideas may be in mind.

d. **Be reconciled**: We are not commanded to do the work of reconciliation between man and God. He has done the work; it is merely ours to embrace and receive. "It is not so much reconcile yourselves as 'be reconciled.' Yield yourselves to him who round you now the bands of a man would cast, drawing you with cords of love because he was given for you... Submit yourselves. Yield to the grasp of those hands which were nailed to the cross for you." (Spurgeon)

7. (2 Corinthians 5:21) How God made reconciliation possible.

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

a. **Him who knew no sin**: The idea that any man could be sinless was foreign to Jewish thinking (Ecclesiastes 8:5). Despite that, no one challenged Jesus when He claimed to be sinless (John 8:46).

b. **He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us**: Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul carefully chooses his words. He does not say Jesus was made *to be a sinner*. Jesus never became a *sinner*, but He did become **sin for us**. Even His becoming sin was a righteous act of love, not an act of sin.

i. Jesus was not a sinner, even on the cross. On the cross, the Father treated Him as if He were a sinner, yet all the while, sin was "outside" of Jesus not "inside" Him and it was not a part of His nature (as it is with us).

ii. "Christ was not guilty, and could not be made guilty; but he was treated as if he were guilty, because he willed to stand in the place of the guilty. Yea, he was not only treated as a sinner, but he was treated as if he had been sin itself in the abstract. This is an amazing utterance. The sinless one was made to be sin." (Spurgeon)

iii. "I do not say that our substitute endured a hell, that were unwarrantable. I will not say that he endured either the exact punishment for sin, or an equivalent for it; but I do say that what he endured rendered to the justice of God a vindication of his law more clear and more effectual than would have been rendered to it by the damnation of sinners for whom he died." (Spurgeon)

iv. "We obviously stand at the brink of a great mystery and our understanding of it can only be minimal." (Kruse)

c. **He made Him**: We note that well. This was the work of God Himself! The Father and the Son (and the Spirit as well) were in perfect cooperation in the work on the cross. This means that the work of atonement on the cross was *the work of God*. "If God did it, it is well done. I am not careful to defend an act of God: let the man who dares accuse his Maker think what he is at. If God himself provided the sacrifice, be you sure that he has accepted it." (Spurgeon)

d. **That we might become the righteousness of God in Him**: Jesus *took* our sin but *gave* us His **righteousness**. It is a tremendous exchange, all prompted by the love of God for us!

i. "Not only does the believer receive from God a right standing before him on the basis of faith in Jesus (Phil 3:9), but here Paul says that 'in Christ' the believer in some sense actually shares the righteousness that characterizes God himself." (Harris)

ii. **The righteousness of God**: "What a grand expression! He makes us righteous through the righteousness of Jesus; nay, not only makes us righteous, but *righteousness*; nay, that is not all, he makes us the righteousness *of God*; that is higher than the righteousness of Adam in the garden, it is more divinely perfect than angelic perfection." (Spurgeon)

iii. "The righteousness which Adam had in the garden was perfect, but it was the righteousness of man: ours is the righteousness of God." (Spurgeon)

iv. This is the whole truth of justification stated simply: Our sins were on Jesus, and His righteousness is on us. And, "As Christ was not made sin by any sin inherent in him, so neither are we made righteous by any righteousness inherent in us, but by the righteousness of Christ imputed to us." (Poole)