

## 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2

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[ 0 : 00 ] We are going to turn to 2 Corinthians 5 and we are going to look at verse 14 to chapter 6 verse 2.

! This week I read a wonderful story about a guy called Lal Dahari who deserves to be much better known. He lives in India.

! In 1975 Lal received a major shock when he applied for a bank loan in the Azangar region in the north of India. And Lal discovered to his surprise that the official records listed him as dead. His uncle had done this in order to inherit Lal's share of the land. And so Lal went down to the records office where the bureaucrat told him, take a look for yourself, it's written here in the registry. What particularly frustrated Lal was that this bureaucrat knew him well and had been around his place for dinner only recently. But nothing he could say could change the guy's mind.

[ 1 : 10 ] So in desperation, and it is a wonderfully true story, Lal tried to do everything that he possibly could to get his name back on the record. He tried to get arrested. He ran for public office.

He sued people. And when that didn't work, he had his wife, and this is the most creative one, he had his wife appeal for widow's benefit. But the very same bureaucrat who told him he was dead wouldn't let him on benefits, which I think is wonderful.

The green day came in 1994 when Lal became a real person again under the jurisdiction of the courts. And now he spends his time working for another 200 people in India who have been declared dead yet or alive.

His legal resurrection took over 19 years. And now he seeks to bring other people who are officially dead back to life. And I love that story. And I love that story because in some ways there's a little picture of what it means to become a Christian.

We don't get legally resurrected. But it is a reality that is nothing short of a new creation. Can you look at verse 17? Therefore, if anyone, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

[ 2 : 28 ] Literally, he is a, his thing is not there. If anyone is in Christ, new creation. New creation. Because the old has passed away, the new has come.

The apostle is writing his speech to his beloved Corinthians. We spent a number of months in this letter. And they are troublesome, they are difficult, they are wealthy, they are brilliant, they are gifted, they are unfaithful.

And the Corinthians do not like Paul's blunt, biblical forthrightness. And it doesn't fit the city style in Corinth.

And rather than speak to Paul directly, what they've done with their false teachers is spread rumours about Paul's ministry and his motives. And so 2 Corinthians, as we saw, and as you read it, it is the most deeply personal of all the New Testament letters.

And Paul opens a window into his heart. And he gives us his ministry and his motives. Just look at verses 10 and 11. And therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.

[ 3 : 32 ] But what we are is known to God. And I hope it's known also to your conscience. We're not commending ourselves to you again. But giving you cause to boast about us. So that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance.

And not about what is in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God. If we are again in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us.

Because we have concluded this, that one has died for all and therefore all have died. The Apostle tells us, verse 14, that his life is now controlled by the love of Christ.

What a massive revolution that was. Do you remember the Apostle? Do you remember Saul? So committed to killing people. To breed out murderings and threatenings of people who followed Christ.

And now he says, the one controlling reality for me, Is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ who loved me. [ 4 : 31 ] And gave himself for me. And the question is obvious, isn't it? Where did this change come from? What is the source and the wellspring of this miracle?

And the answer most simply is the death of Jesus. Look at verse 14. For the love of Christ controls us. Because we have concluded this.

That one has died for all. And therefore all have died. It is the death of Christ. It is the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross. That is the source of the new life. That is the source of the new creation. That is the source of our new identity. It is the death of Jesus. And the death of Jesus changes everything to the apostle. And this evening I want us to look at the last four verses really of chapter 5.

They are perhaps the richest verses in all the New Testament. On the depth of meaning. Of the death of the Lord Jesus. The apostle makes many points.

[ 5 : 29 ] But I just want to summarize them in two. The first is this. The cross is reconciliation from God. The cross is reconciliation from God.

Verse 18. All of this. All of this is from God. Who through Christ. Reconciled us to himself. And gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

We say this often, don't we? That Christianity is not about men and women and boys and girls finding their way to God. It is not about that. But it is God making a way to us. Through the death of Christ.

And if you look through this passage. You will see that God is the author of everything. There are eight verbs in verses 18 to 21. With God as the subject. And so God was reconciling.

And then God gave. And then God did not count. And then God entrusted. In verse 19.

[ 6 : 34 ] And God takes. And God makes. And the new relationship that the apostle has. And all Christians have with Christ.

It comes from God. And the benefit of the new creation. Comes about because of a prior reconciliation. That he has done for us in the cross.

Christianity is a movement from God. To us. And back to God. And the fact that it is God who reconciles us to himself. Demonstrates that it is us who have broken the relationship.

There is a loss. There is a broken relationship. There is a sense of alienation between God and us. And God is the aggrieved party. Because we are the cause of the alienation.

Notice there are two passing references to our rebellion. Verse 19. The word trespasses is used. And verse 21. And verse 21. Sin is used.

[ 7 : 36 ] Here is the source of our estrangement. Of our alienation from God. We have gone our own way. We have heard his voice. But we have disobeyed. And the Bible says that has made a separation.

Our sins have made a separation. Between us and God. And for there to be true reconciliation. It is a costly reconciliation. And the truth must be faced up too.

And the truth is this. That our rebellion fills God's heart with pain. But the God of the Bible takes our sin seriously. And personally.

I've been in this job for 12 and a half years actually. I think it is this week that you voted on me to become the minister. 13 years ago. There is no human illustration. There is none.

That represents what sin really is. It is mutely far more radical than we can humanly illustrate. It is in essence the creature.

[ 8 : 37 ] Setting themselves up as the creator. And we don't have an illustration for that. But this is the root problem that Christianity addresses. Christianity does not come and address our human ignorance.

As other religions do. It doesn't come and address our sense of meaningless. As other religions do. Though it's got things to say about both of them. It comes to us and it addresses us in our guilt.

And it says that your primary obstacle to friendship with God. It says behind your ignorance. And behind our sense of meaningless. Is our sin.

Has separated us from God. But it is at the cross of Jesus Christ. That God is determined to overcome that alienation. And rescue.

And be reconciled to us. And that is why in the New Testament. Reconciliation is a word that is finished. Before it is preached. Reconciliation is a word that is finished.

[ 9 : 40 ] Before it is preached. It's not something that we do. It's something that has been done. And so the job of a Christian preacher. Is to declare that reconciliation.

To declare that reconciliation. That God is one on the cross. And to invite men and women. And boys and girls. To be reconciled to God. Because of the finished work of Christ.

It is a wonderful and brilliant reality. That has been initiated by God. And has been given to us on the cross. That is the Christian gospel. Listen to it. I implore you.

On behalf of Christ. The end of verse 20. Be reconciled to God. Brings us to the second issue. How does the death of Jesus bring our reconciliation? How does it work?

And the answer most simply. Paul gives us. Is that the cross. Is a massive exchange. On a cosmic scale. And before we look at it.

[ 10 : 41 ] I need to say that some of these verses. Are some of the deepest water. In the New Testament. And if you swim too far from the text. You get in trouble. So verse 21.

We are taken to the core. Of what happened at the cross. We are told in this verse. That something outside of us. Something objective. Happened in the death of Jesus.

That God did something there. Through the death of his son. Just look at the verse. It's a beautiful symmetry isn't it? And it speaks about a double exchange.

Now the first half of the exchange. Is the first half of the verse. He says doesn't he. Verse 21. For our sake. He that is God.

Made him. That is Jesus. To be sin. Who knew no sin. That's the first half. God. Made Jesus.

[ 11 : 37 ] Made him. To be sin. Who knew no sin. Jesus knew no sin. The Bible teaches. He was fully. Fully human. The Bible teaches. That Jesus was tempted.

In every way as we are. And yet was without sin. Peter knew him. Probably. Better than anyone else. And he tells us. That Jesus did no sin. John.

Who was very close to Jesus. Who was called. The beloved disciple. The disciple said. In him was no sin. Jesus himself. Was deeply aware. Of this characteristic.

Of his humanity. So in John chapter 8. When his enemies. Are gathered around. To kill him. He says. Which of you. Can prove me guilty. Of any sin. Because of his perfect. Obedience to the father.

Jesus is qualified. To be the one. He's qualified. To be the one. Who can be a substitute. And suffer for our sin. It is only because. He is free. From sins.

[ 12 : 31 ] Of his own. That he can bear our sin. It is only because. Jesus has no need. Of reconciliation. That he can be. Our reconciliation. And this is what.

The first. First half of the verse. Is saying. That as Jesus dies. On the cross. As the sky. Turns black. As we read. In Mark's gospel. God made him.

To be sin. He didn't take him. To be a sinner. But in an act. Of cosmic dimensions. God takes. Our sins.

And makes. Jesus. Our sin. Jesus made. Our substitute. As our sin. God treats. Jesus. As it justly deserves.

Jesus. And you will probably know. That this idea. Scandalizes. Lots of modern. Theologians. That God should take. A third party. And punish.

[ 13 : 23 ] Him. Instead of us. It's said by a number of writers. In this. That it is divine. Cosmic. Child abuse. But the whole point.

Of this passage. Although Jesus is innocent. Understand this. He is innocent. But he's not a third party. Look at verse 19. Verse 19. It's a flabbergasting verse.

That is. In Christ. God was reconciling the world. The world in all its rebellion. And its anger against him.

God was in Christ. Reconciling the world to himself. Not counting their trespasses. Against them. It's not just that somehow.

Christ was divine. It's not that. In general. Throughout his life. God was somehow involved in him. Verse 19. Tells us. That specifically. In the act of reconciliation.

[ 14 : 24 ] Can you see. In the death upon the cross. When Jesus was made. Sin. For us. God was in Christ. God and Jesus.

Are not two separate. Participants. They are one. And God is not laying. The sins of his people. On someone else. When God makes Jesus.

To be sin. He is placing them. On himself. It's the glory of the Trinity. Here is the first half. Of this experience.

What a miracle it is. That in the cross. Of Jesus. God deals with. Our guilt. By directing. His righteous anger. To himself. In the person. Of his son.

He exacts. The full weight. Of separation. You see. When the New Testament. Says that Jesus. Bears our sin. It doesn't mean. Just mean. That he identifies. With us. Or he somehow.

[15:19] Expresses our pain. Or he is persecuted. On account of human sinfulness. It means. He actually endures. The penalty. And the punishment. That our sins deserve. And it's not that God.

Pours out his wrath. From on high. From the safe distance. Of heaven. It is God himself. Who endures. The pain of reconciliation. It is God in Christ.

That all the shame. And the guilt. And all the pain. Causes the holy God. It's absorbed. If I can put it like that. It is absorbed.

In the internal agony. Of the Godhead. Of the cross. And I think that. You get to this point. And you can go no further. I cannot say.

How it is. That Jesus. Can be forsaken. By the father. We say. That when the father. Turns his face away. That is actually right.

[16:19] Psalm 22. Says. The father. Didn't turn his face away. We come to the cross. My God. My God. Why are you forsaking me? And we. We cannot. We cannot comprehend it. But what we can say.

Is that. God. In Christ. Was reconciling the world. For himself. I cannot say.

How it is on the cross. That Jesus can be forsaken. By the father. As sin. And yet. God be in Christ. Can you? I don't know. How that works. But this. I can say.

That it was. God incarnate. On the cross. That the blood. Shed. On Calvary. Was the blood. Of God. In kind. Ephesians 20.

Says. Acts 20. Says. The blood of God. Doesn't it? The love. Shown on Calvary. Was the love of God. And if our sins. Have been paid. Paid for. It means. That they are eternally.

[17:18] And utterly. Forgiven. And they are gone. But that's only the first half. Of the exchange. Jesus becomes sin for us. The second half. Is in the second half. Of the verse. We read.

So that. In him. We might become. The righteousness of God. God. I think.

I think. Most. People. Who would call themselves. Evangelicals. And think. That in the death. Of Jesus. Our sins. Are taken away. And that's the end of it.

Now that we are forgiven. That we've got a clean slate. And there are no more strikes. Against us. But what the second half. Of this verse is saying. Is that is not true. It is not just true.

That we have a clean slate. It's that we actually become. Can you see it at the end of verse 21. The righteousness of God. So some people say.

[18:14] What is justification. Justification is. Just as if I'd never sinned. No. It's really not. That's half. That's the first half. Of verse 21. It's inadequate.

That as Jesus dies. All our sin. Is reckoned to him. And his righteousness. Is reckoned to us. And as Jesus stood in our place.

And received what was rightfully ours. We now stand in his place. And receive what is rightfully his. You see it goes both ways. He is sin.

Or he was sin. Not because of his own sinful deeds. But because of his. This mighty miracle of exchange. We are righteous. Not because of any inherent goodness.

But again by miracle of exchange. We become the righteousness of God. And yes of course we sin. Daily. Hourly. Minute by minute. But through the cross of Jesus.

[19:14] God looks at us. As he looks at Jesus. As the righteous son of God. Listen to Martin Luther.

Learn to know Christ. And him crucified. Learn to sing to him. And say. Lord Jesus. You are my righteousness. I am your sin.

You took what was mine. You set on me what was yours. You became what you are not. Then I might become what I was not.

Lord Jesus. Let me read that again. Learn to sing to him and say. Lord Jesus. You are my righteousness. I am your sin. You took what was mine.

You set on me what was yours. You became what you are not. That I might become what I was not. And that is a terrible.

[ 20 : 12 ] Terrible blow to our arrogance. Isn't it? Our self-sufficiency. And that is why the cross has always been. And it always will be a stumbling block. Because it reveals the seriousness of our guilt.

And our sin. And our utter inability to deal with it. Apart from Christ's death. The death of the Lord Jesus. Puts us all on a level. As Archbishop William Temple said.

The only thing of my very own. Which I contribute to my redemption. Is the sin from which I need to be redeemed. The only thing we bring to the table.

In this passage. Are trespasses verse 19. And sin verse 21. The great exchange has achieved for us. On the cross. And that is how he has reconciled us for himself.

That is how we become a new creation. As we finish tonight. I want to point out. That the Apostle Paul makes the application for us. We don't have to do the hard work. And think. Well what does this mean to us?

[ 21 : 12 ] He says that the cross. And this exchange. And the reconciliation. Show itself in two ways. First of all. Verse 15. It changes. The way we think about ourselves.

Doesn't it? Verse 15. Can you see that? It changes the way we live. The way we think about ourselves. Verse 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. The purpose of Jesus' death. Is not to be stored away. In the privacy of my own heart.

Bring me joy for myself. It has consequences that are most practical. The cross of Jesus Christ. Is the fulcrum in our lives. It is the thing in our lives.

Which moves me out of the centre. And it moves Christ into the centre. And it is only the cross of Jesus Christ. That has got the power.

[ 22 : 08 ] To stop me living for myself. And to recreate it as a body. To live for Christ. It is only the cross. That rescues me from self-centred living.

Here is the proof. That you and I are reconciled to God. That you and I are able to say no to ourselves. By the power of his spirit. And yes to Jesus Christ.

In the concrete decisions of our daily life. And so the question is. Who are you living for? Are you living for yourself? Or for Christ? And the apostle says.

To be reconciled. It changes the way we live. It changes the way you go to work tomorrow. It changes the way you walk to the bus tomorrow morning. Because we no longer live for ourselves. And secondly. It changes the way you think about others. Verse 16. From now on. Verse 16. Therefore we regard no one. No one according to the flesh.

[ 23 : 08 ] Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh. We thought of him like everybody else. We regard him thus no longer. You see. Being reconciled to God. Means seeing that in the death of Jesus.

Is that God was in Christ. Working that great exchange in the cross. And we are righteous now in God's sight. And the cross therefore is the wellspring.

Of how we relate to one another. And it's the source and the supply. Of what does it mean to be a living church. Because reconciliation with God.

Not only changes the way that we view ourselves. That we're no longer in the centre and on the throne. But Christ is in the centre and on the throne. But it changes the way we view those around us.

That we are no longer confined by human, cultural, social blinders. So it means that if you look around tonight.

[ 24 : 06 ] You don't look at each other through the lens of society anymore. We look upon one another as transformed creatures. As new creations.

As boys and girls and men and women. Who have the power of the life to come. Already and work in us. And so you look around this room.

And you see one another. And you see Will Lind. New creation. You see Jessica Ray. New creation. You see Leslie Barnes. New creation.

It changes how we deal with each other. And it also helps us to look around the world. Doesn't it? It changes those. It helps us to look at those around us.

Who have not yet discovered the wonderful good news. In Jesus Christ. And it gives us a passionate desire. That other men and women. And other boys and girls.

[ 25 : 03 ] Should discover that in Christ Jesus. God has reconciled the world to himself. And through faith in him we might be saved. And that is why throughout this passage.

There is a constant refrain. Have you seen it? God has given to us the ministry of reconciliation. God has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation.

The end of verse 20. And he has made you and me into ambassadors. Ambassadors of reconciliation. For Christ. That God makes his appeal through us.

The middle of verse 20. He doesn't do that from heaven. He makes it through us. Notice what it means to be rescued and reconciled.

There is a role of great dignity. There is a role of great dignity. It is to tell others that they must be reconciled to God. And so as we start another week.

[ 26 : 07 ] You are Christ's representative. So am I. In your family. And in your school. And in your place of work. And on your street.

And it is through you. And it is through me. That God extends his love. And he has given us a message to the world. To your family. To your school friends. To your work colleagues. To your neighbours.

It is a message of his love. Which is urgent. And effective. And it is be reconciled to God. And that is why Paul finishes this section.

In chapter 6. With these words. Should we just look down and look at them. Working together with him. Isn't that astonishing? Working together with him.

That is as his ambassadors. We work with God. And he says. We appeal to you. We entreat you. Not to receive the grace of God in vain.

[ 27 : 03 ] Don't just receive it for yourself. Give it away. For he says. In a favourable time I listened to you. And in a day of salvation I helped you.

And then these wonderful words. The terrified words at the end of verse 2. Because behold now is the favourable time. Behold now is the day of salvation. Today.

Today is the day of salvation. Let's pray.