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## Reconciliation: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

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**RECONCILIATION**  
**2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-21**

**BY**

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## 1.1 ABSTRACT

The New Testament doctrine of reconciliation has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. The historical result has been a faulty understanding of the Pauline model of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. Both Aulen's *Christus Victor* and Barth's *Humanity of God* have stopped at general reconciliation. It is through Christ's death that the world has been reconciled to God and God to the world. No offer of salvation is necessary. The failed understanding of the meaning of reconciliation has led to focus on the horizontal relationship of reconciliation between individuals and peoples of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Some support is found in Ephesians 2:14-18. However, the vertical personal relationship between God and man is omitted (2 Cor. 5:20-21). Modern attempts to reconstruct the historical Jesus account fail to give adequate emphasis to his death. Reconciliation mustn't be thought of as concluded. The text of 2 Corinthians 5:20 argues for personal reconciliation to God. The God of 2 Corinthians 5:20 is explained to be Christ in 5:21. This second part of the doctrine of reconciliation is omitted.

## 1.2 KEY WORDS

reconciliation, reconciled, atonement, salvation, forgiven

## 1.3 THE PAULINE MODEL OF RECONCILIATION – 2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-21

### 1.3.1 The Translation of the Text

1.3.1.1 ‘So that we from the present know no one according to flesh if also we have known Christ according to flesh but now no longer we know (5:16)’

1.3.1.2 ‘so that if anyone in Christ, new creature (ktises) the old has passed away, behold have become new things (5:17)’

1.3.1.3 ‘Now all from God the one having reconciled us to himself through Christ and having given to us the ministry o reconciliation (5:18)’

1.3.1.4 ‘as (hos) that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself not reckoning their transgressions to them and having placed (tithemi) with us the word (ton logon) of reconciliation (5:19)’

1.3.1.5 ‘Therefore in place of Christ we are ambassadors as God exhorting through us we ourselves beg in place of Christ, start having been reconciled to God (Aorist imperative passive voice) (5:20)’

1.3.1.6 ‘the one not knowing sin, he made sin in our place in order that we may have become the righteousness of God in him (5:21)’.<sup>1</sup> [author’s translation]

### 1.3.2 The Outline of the Text

1.3.2.1 Paul didn’t judge based on external appearance.

1.3.2.2 Paul had known Christ according to flesh but we know now no longer. Paul had opposed and persecuted Christians (5:16).

1.3.2.2.1 He had information concerning Christ but hadn’t believed in Him. He had changed from a persecutor of Christians.

1.3.2.3 Paul was a new man because of his conversion (5:17).

1.3.2.3.1 His old life in Judaism as a persecutor of Christians had been done away with.

1.3.2.3.2 He had a new relationship to Christ (5:17).

1.3.2.4 This came about from God.

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<sup>1</sup> B F Westcott, & J A F Hort, *The Greek New Testament in the Original Greek*. (New York: American Bible Society, 1968), 631.

1.3.2.4.1 God had reconciled Paul and the Corinthians to Himself (5:18).

1.3.2.4.1.1 This reconciliation came about through (because) Christ (5:18).

1.3.2.4.1.2 God gave to Paul and the Corinthians the ministry of reconciliation (5:18).

1.3.2.4.1.3 Paul explains the ministry.

1.3.2.4.1.3.1 God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (5:19).

1.3.2.4.1.3.2 God wasn't counting/reckoning to them their transgressions (5:19).

1.3.2.4.1.3.3 God was placing with Paul and the Corinthians the word of reconciliation (5:19).

1.3.2.4.1.3.4 Therefore, Paul and the Corinthians were ambassadors. God exhorted through them.

1.3.2.4.1.3.4.1 Paul begged on behalf of Christ

1.3.2.4.1.3.4.1 start reconciling yourself to God (5:20).

1.3.2.4.1.3.4.1.1 The article acting as a pronoun refers back to God. God is the nearest antecedent. That God is Christ (5:21). Personal reconciliation to God brings salvation.

1.3.2.5 Paul makes three points concerning the need for personal reconciliation with Christ (5:21).

1.3.2.5.1 Christ was sinless.

1.3.2.5.2 Christ was made sin offering in behalf of Paul, the Corinthians, and those who would believe through the ministry of the Word of God. The preposition 'hyper' confirms that Christ's death was a substitutionary death for the sinner.

1.3.2.5.3 Those who trust Christ may become righteousness of God in Christ.

1.3.2.5.4.1 Those who trust Christ will have Christ's righteousness imputed to them.

1.3.2.6 Personal reconciliation to God through Christ is a must to be saved (5:20).

1.3.2.7 The reconciliation of 5:19 is to be understood theologically as the world was now rendered saveable.

1.3.2.8 The New Testament confirms that it is impossible to have God the Father without coming through God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:6, Acts 4:12).

1.3.2.9 Views of the atonement perpetuated by the writings of Aulen in his *Christus Victor* and Barth's *Humanity of God* envisioning the human race is saved because Christ laid down his life willingly and because Christ died are false.

1.3.2.10 If you have read this article and have never trusted Christ as your personal Savior then I exhort you to trust Christ as your Savior now to forgive your sins and bring you into a right relationship with God the Father (5:19).

### 1.3.3 The Exposition of the Text

The apostle Paul draws the reader's attention to two results that flow from Christ's cross in 2 Corinthians 5:15. The text (5:16) opens with 'hoste' a subordinate conjunction of consecutive or logical results.<sup>2</sup> This result is related back to 2 Corinthians 5:15. This verse is to be translated 'and in place of all he has died [Christ] in order that the one's living no longer may live to themselves but to the one having died (2<sup>nd</sup> aorist active participle, dative masculine singular) and having been raised'.<sup>3</sup> This last verb is an aorist, passive participle, dative, singular, masculine.<sup>4</sup> The action was done to Christ. The text indicates the work of the other members of the Trinity in the resurrection of Christ. The first result from Christ's cross is found in 2 Corinthians 5:16. Our judgment of individuals shouldn't be made on externals and appearances.<sup>5</sup> Saul of Tarsus had changed. He was now Paul the apostle. He had stopped persecuting Christians. The first class conditional clause of 5:16 points to this fact. 'If we have known Christ according to flesh but now we know no longer' [author's translation]. The verb 'we have known' is a perfect active indicative, first person plural which refers to Paul, Timothy, the Corinthians, and those who would read his epistle through the centuries. The perfect tense is a consummative pointing to completed action. The apostle Paul was now a changed man. Paul had known Christ according to the flesh that is he persecuted both the body of Christians and in doing so the head of the body from heaven. However, Paul knows Christ not any longer in this way on the basis of human judgments. The second result is found in 2 Corinthians 5:17.<sup>6</sup> This second result is introduced by 'hoste' a subordinate conjunction indicating a consecutive or logical result. Paul had become a Christian. He was now a new man. He wasn't persecuting the saints and the church

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<sup>2</sup> H W Hoehner, *Greek Exegesis Class*. (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1974).

<sup>3</sup> N E Han, *A Parsing Guide to the Greek New Testament*. (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald, 1974), 341.

<sup>4</sup> Han, *Parsing Guide*, 341.

<sup>5</sup> D K Lowery, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: an exposition of the Scriptures*, New Testament, edited by J F Walvoord, and R B Zuck. (Wheaton: Victor), 567.

<sup>6</sup> H C G Moule, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. (Fort Washington, Pa: Christian Literature, 1976), 51-52.

any longer. ‘Hoste’ is followed by a first class condition that assumes the reality of the fact. This is ‘if anyone in Christ, a new creation’.<sup>7</sup> [author’s translation] ‘Old things (ta apchaia) have passed, behold new things have become’.<sup>8</sup> The phrase ‘old things to behold new things have come’ is a parenthesis. This is a Pauline interpretation of his words in 5:17 ‘so that if anyone [is] in Christ [they are- understood – not in manuscript] a new creation’ [author’s translation]. Paul is referring to his present position of being in Christ.<sup>9</sup> This took place at the point of his salvation as he explained earlier in I Corinthians 12:13. ‘Kaina’ is the best textual reading based on the earliest manuscript (p 46).<sup>10</sup> Secondly, this is based on the fact that 5:18 is a further explanation of 5:17. This further parenthesis stops the sequence in the flow of Paul’s thought. Two essential points are drawn in 5:18. The source of all this is from God. He is the one ‘having reconciled us to himself through Christ’.<sup>11</sup> God reconciled Paul, Timothy (1:1), the Corinthians, and all those in Christ (5:17) to Himself.<sup>12</sup> ‘Having reconciled’ as an aorist refers to point action. The main idea is that it occurred without reference to time. Reconciliation is to be understood as mankind’s relationship to God. This was possible ‘through Christ’. The reconciliation of 5:18 refers to Paul, Timothy, the Corinthians and all who would trust Christ through the centuries. Arndt and Gingrich’s understanding of reconciliation in 5:18 is typical of the current misunderstanding abroad in the world today that mankind is reconciled to God.<sup>13</sup> Personal reconciliation is needed as indicated by the words of 5:18 ‘and having given to us the ministry of reconciliation’.<sup>14</sup> Second Corinthians 5:19 does confirm that a general reconciliation of the world to God has taken place. However, God has placed with Paul, Timothy, the Corinthians, the saints in Achaia (2 Cor. 1:1) the ministry and word of reconciliation (5:18-19). Second Corinthians 5:18 must be interpreted as referring to Paul, Timothy, the Corinthians, all the saints in Achaia, and those who would trust Christ through the centuries. The reconciliation undertaken by God the Father in 5:19 renders the world now salvaged. However, a further personal reconciliation is necessary indicated by the fact that God has placed with Paul, and Timothy, and us the word (ton logon) of reconciliation (5:19). God the Father gave the ministry of reconciliation (5:18), and the word of reconciliation (5:19) to Paul, Timothy, the Corinthians, the saints in Achaia, and those saved through the centuries this vital ministry described in both 5:18 and 5:19. The ministry of reconciliation (5:18) is defined for us in 5:19. First, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. Second, God was in Christ not counting their trespasses against them. Third, God was in Christ placing with Paul, Timothy, the Corinthians, the saints in Achaia, and us ‘the word of reconciliation’. In 5:19, Paul uses ‘hos hoti’ a subordinate conjunction to introduce a comparative clause. The comparison is what the Father’s reconciliation means to the world (kosmos). God the Father was at work ‘in Christ’ reconciling the world to Himself (5:19).

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<sup>7</sup> B F Westcott, & J A F Hort, *The Greek New Testament*, 631.

<sup>8</sup> Westcott, & Hort, 631.

<sup>9</sup> H C G Moule, *Corinthians*, 52.

<sup>10</sup> Westcott, & Hort, 631.

<sup>11</sup> Westcott, & Hort, 631.

<sup>12</sup> A T Robertson, *Word Pictures In The New Testament, Vol IV*. (Nashville: Broadman, 1931), 232.

<sup>13</sup> W F Arndt, & F W Gingrich, *A Greek- English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 415 (2) a.

<sup>14</sup> Westcott, & Hort, 631.

The God of 2 Corinthians 5:19 could be Christ as well since this fact is supported by the wider context of 5:20 and 5:21. ‘Hos hoti’ translated that is the expegetical use of ‘hoti’ completing Paul’s previous words that the Father had given to them the ministry of reconciliation.<sup>15</sup> Why would God need to give to Paul the ministry of reconciliation if the world had been already reconciled to God by Christ’s death? Paul draws a partial conclusion (inference) by the word (oun) in 5:20. The apostle explains the ministry of reconciliation: ‘In behalf of Christ, we are ambassadors as God is, exhorting through us (Genitive Absolute), we beg you start being reconciled to God.’<sup>16</sup> Robertson pointing to the Genitive Absolute informs that ‘God speaks through Christ’s apostle.’<sup>17</sup> Paul, Timothy begged people standing in the place of Christ to be reconciled to God. The phrase ‘katallagete to theo’ is the content of Paul’s message. Katallagete is aorist passive imperative, 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural.<sup>18</sup> As an aorist imperative, it needs to be translated start being reconciled. This step is essential in securing the individual’s acceptance by God the Father.<sup>19</sup> As it is a passive voice, the action is being done simultaneously to those who heed Paul’s words to be reconciled to God. Reconciliation must be personal. It could have a secondary meaning to the relationship of Paul to the Corinthians. The wider context of this second epistle may argue for this because the relationship between Paul and the Corinthians had been strained. He is writing this epistle as well to defend his apostleship. The Corinthians could have been out of fellowship with God. ‘Start having been reconciled to God’ (5:20) relates back to the word of reconciliation in 5:19. ‘Katallagete is the imperative mood expressing the divine desire to see people saved. 2 Corinthians 5:21 is a parenthesis. The article ‘ton’ acting as a pronoun refers back to God ‘theo’ of 5:20. The one ‘ton’ of 5:21 is Christ. The apostle points out three truths concerning God, the eternal son, Jesus Christ in 5:21. The first is Christ’s impeccability. He was sinless. Second, Christ was made the sinner’s substitute (a sin offering). The Greek preposition huper supports Christ’s death as substitutionary atonement for the sinner. Third, this was with a divine purpose as indicated by the ‘hina’ clause in 5:21. The righteousness of God may be imputed to the believer. The righteousness of God a right standing before God the Father is only available in Him that is in Christ. The Word of God has stated that it is impossible to be reconciled to God the Father without being reconciled to the eternal Son, Jesus Christ. The current misunderstanding abroad in the world is to mistake the general reconciliation of 5:19 to mean salvation.

The current misunderstanding abroad in the world of the word ‘reconciliation’ is to mistake the general reconciliation of 5:19 to mean salvation. The verb ‘katallasso’ of 5:19 is made up of two Greek words the preposition ‘kata’ and the verb ‘allasso’.<sup>20</sup> The preposition ‘kata’ indicates that a

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<sup>15</sup> A T Robertson, *Word Pictures, Vol IV*, 233.

<sup>16</sup> Westcott, & Hort, 631.

<sup>17</sup> A T Robertson, 233.

<sup>18</sup> Han, *Parsing Guide*, 340.

<sup>19</sup> Moule, 54.

<sup>20</sup> Arndt, & Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 38 (1), 408 (5) (B).



judgment has been rendered. The Greek verb 'allasso' means to change or alter. God rendered a judgment that the world was now saveable because of the death of Christ (5:19). Yet personal reconciliation to Jesus Christ is necessary on the part of the individual to obtain salvation (5:20-21).

### 1.3.4 Soteriology

The doctrine of reconciliation has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. Karl Barth's teaching on reconciliation illustrates this point. Erickson draws our attention to Barth's view of reconciliation. Barth interpreted the death of Christ as effecting salvation for the entire human race. No offer of salvation is necessary. The death of Christ according to Barth made universal salvation effectual for the human race. Mankind needs to know that the blessings of this universal salvation is their possession.<sup>21</sup> Walvoord argues that Barth's position on reconciliation is based on Christ's incarnation rather than his death. Historically, Barth views the incarnation of Christ as an act of redemption rather than the death of Christ.<sup>22</sup> Chafer discusses the two aspects of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5:19-20.<sup>23</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:19 confirms that the world has been reconciled to God. This has been accomplished by the death of Christ. Chafer defines reconciliation as changed completely. The position of the world has been changed because of Christ's crosswork. God, however, as Chafer points out is not changed nor is he reconciled. 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 doesn't teach universalism. That is because Christ died that everyone is saved. Chafer acknowledges this false assumption that is so prevalent that general reconciliation is equivalent to a general salvation. Paul's exhortation in 2 Corinthians 5:20 emphasizes the must of personal reconciliation to God. The complete change of 2 Corinthians 5:19 doesn't save anyone. General reconciliation means that the world is saveable because of the death of Christ. Now, personal reconciliation of 2 Corinthians 5:20 was made possible. The value of Christ's death isn't applied to the sinner at the time that Christ died but when the sinner repents and believes. The two fold aspect of reconciliation of both the world and the individual who is saved when repentance and faith is placed in Christ Jesus is also evidenced in Romans 5:10-11. The death of Christ is declared to have reconciled his enemies to God. This is the first aspect of reconciliation which is the aspect of reconciliation of the world in 2 Corinthians 5:19. The second aspect of reconciliation is through personal repentance and faith in Christ's death for us. It is through personal repentance and faith in Jesus that the second aspect of personal reconciliation is effectual. Every article on an aspect of Christ's death should have an offer of salvation. If you have read this article and never trusted Christ as your personal Savior then today is the day of salvation. You need to be reconciled to Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:20-21). I am asking you while it is today to repent of your sin and trust Jesus Christ to save you. Christ took your place on the cross. He was your substitute. Christ died in your place. The righteousness of God the right standing before God will be imputed to you by repenting and trusting Jesus as your personal Savior (2 Cor. 5:21).

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<sup>21</sup> M J Erickson, *Christian Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1027.

<sup>22</sup> J F Walvoord, *Jesus Christ Our Lord*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 180-181.

<sup>23</sup> L S Chafer, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1971), 91-93.