

# THE MINISTRY: ITS MESSAGE

## 2 CORINTHIANS 05:17–06:02

### *Introduction*

This is one of the great passages of Scripture. So much is covered, a life-time could be spent in its depths. Two overall subjects leap out at the reader: the message of the ministry and the new world order of the ministry.

The outline chosen for this study is the Message of the Ministry. The Outline for the New World Order can be seen in footnote one. The message of the ministry is powerful, and it offers the only hope for a sinful person who is aging and moving ever so rapidly toward death.

- I. A message of regeneration: man can become a new creation, a new man, a new person (v. 17).
- II. A message of reconciliation: a world of men brought back to God (vv. 18-19).
- III. A message committed to ambassadors: a world of men made co-workers with God (v. 20).
- IV. A message of redemption: a world reconciled by a substitution for sin (v. 21).
- V. A message that demands a decision (Ch. 6:1-2).

### **I. 2 Corinthians 05:17 *Regeneration: New Creature, New Man, New Person***

The message is one of regeneration, the making of a “new creation.”

1. What does it mean for a man to become a “new creation”? Very simply, it means just what the Scripture says: the man actually becomes a *new creation* — his whole being, nature, life and behaviour changes:
    - => Whereas a man was dead to God, as a new creation he becomes alive to God.
    - => Whereas a man had no relationship with God, as a new creature he is given a relationship with God.
    - => Whereas a man was not sure about God, as a new creature he is absolutely certain about God.
    - => Whereas a man never fellowshiped and communed with God, as a new creation he fellowshiped and communes with God all the time.
    - => Whereas a man was living in sin and immorality, as a new creature he lives in righteousness and holiness.
    - => Whereas a man had to face death, as a new creature he never has to die.
    - => Whereas a man was doomed to judgment and eternal separation from God, as a new creature he is destined to live eternally in the presence of God.
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2. How does a person become a new creation? Note the words of this Scripture: “If any man be *in Christ*, he is a new creation.” It is being “in Christ” that makes a person a new creation. When a person *truly believes in Christ*, God *places and positions* him *in Christ*, in all that Christ is. Christ lived and died and arose, so to be in Christ means that a person lives, dies and arises in Christ. The person who believes in Jesus Christ is identified with Christ: that is, he is counted and considered to be “in Christ,” reckoned and credited as “in Christ.”

Spelled out in a little more detail, when a person believes *in Christ*, God places and positions the believer “in” Christ. The believer’s faith actually causes God to identify the believer *with Christ*...

- to count the believer as having lived *in Christ* when Christ lived upon earth. Therefore, the believer is counted sinless and righteous because Christ was sinless and righteous.
- to count the believer as having died *in Christ*. Therefore, the believer never has to die (Jn. 3:16). The penalty and condemnation of his sins are already paid for in the death of Christ.
- to count the believer as having been raised *in Christ*. Therefore, the believer has received the “*new life*” of Christ. Just as Christ had a new life after His resurrection, even so the believer receives the “new life” of Christ when he believes in Christ. (See Rom. 6:3-5. Also see *Credited*, Rom. 4:22; *Justification, Faith, Righteousness*, Rom. 4:22; 5:1; 6:14-15.)

To be *in Christ* means that a believer walks and lives in Christ day by day. It means that he does not “live according to the sinful nature [flesh] but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:1, 4).” It means saying ‘no’ “to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age” (Tit. 2:12). It means that he bears the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). It means that he abides *in Christ*, that he becomes as connected and attached to Christ...

- as the branch is connected and attached to the vine (Jn. 15:4-7).
- as parts of the body are connected and attached to each other (1 Cor. 12:12-27).

From this, it is clearly seen that a person who is “in Christ” is a new creation. This is what is meant by such Scriptural terms as being “born again” and becoming a “new man.” However, no better words describe the experience than the words of this verse: “the old has gone, the new has come!” This is the message of the Christian ministry: a man can start life all over, no matter how corrupt he has become or how far down he has fallen. God longs to make a new creation out of him.

**John 3:3** *In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”*

*2 Cor 5:17* Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

*Eph 4:22-24* You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

*Col 3:9-10* Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

## II. 2 Corinthians 05:18–19 Reconciliation

The message is one of reconciliation — a world of men can be brought back to God. Reconciliation means to change thoroughly, to change from enmity to friendship, to bring together, to restore. The idea is that two persons who should have been together all along are brought together; two persons who had allowed something to come between them are restored and reunited.

The thing that broke the relationship between God and man was sin. Men are said to be enemies of God (Rom. 5:10), and the word “enemies” refers back to the fact that men had become sinners and ungodly (Rom. 5:6, 8). The “enemies” of God are the sinners and ungodly of this world. This simply means that every man is an enemy of God, for every man is a sinner and ungodly. This may seem unkind and harsh, but it is exactly what Scripture is saying. The fact is clearly seen by thinking about the matter for a moment.

The sinner cannot be said to be a friend of God. He is antagonistic toward God, opposing what God stands for. The sinner is...

- rebelling against God
- rejecting God
- cursing God
- ignoring God
- disobeying God
- fighting against God
- denying God
- refusing to live for God

When any of us sin, we work against God and promote evil by word and example.

=> When the sinner lives for himself, he becomes an enemy of God. Why? Because God does not live for Himself. God gave Himself up in the most supreme way possible: He gave His only Son to die *for* us.

=> When the sinner lives for the world and worldly things, he becomes an enemy of God. Why? Because he chooses the temporal over God. He chooses that which passes away over God. He chooses it when God has provided eternal life for him through the death of His Son.

This is the point of God's great love or reconciliation. He did not reconcile and save us when we were righteous and good. He reconciled and saved us when we were enemies, ignoring and rejecting Him. As stated above, it is because we are sinners and enemies that we need to be reconciled.

1. There are three persons involved in reconciliation.
  - a. God Himself is the first person involved in reconciliation. God is the One who reconciles us. Note the words, "All this is from God." If the time ever comes when a person wishes to be reconciled to God and to change his life and become a new creation, he has to come to God. God alone has the power to change a man; God alone can give a man a new birth and make a new creation out of him. No man has the power to change enough to make himself acceptable to God. Men just do not reconcile themselves to God. They cannot do enough work or enough good to become perfectly acceptable to God. Reconciliation is the act of God and of God alone. God is the One who reaches out to man and reconciles him. Man does not earn reconciliation; he *receives* the reconciliation of God.
  - b. Jesus Christ is the second person involved in reconciliation. God reconciles us to Himself *by the death of Jesus Christ*. Very simply stated, when a man believes that Jesus Christ died for him...
    - God accepts the death of Jesus Christ *for* the death of the man.
    - God accepts the sins borne by Christ as the sins committed by the man.
    - God accepts the condemnation borne by Christ as the condemnation due to the man.

Therefore, the man is freed from his sins and the punishment due his sins. Christ bore both the sins and the punishment for the man. The man who truly believes that God loves that much — enough to give His only begotten Son — becomes acceptable to God, reconciled forever and ever.

*2 Cor 5:21* God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

*Eph 2:16* And in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

*Col 1:20* And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

*Heb 2:17* For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

- c. Ministers are the third persons involved in reconciliation. God reconciled us to Himself by committing the ministry of reconciliation to men. The only way the world

can ever hear about the great ministry of reconciliation is through believers. Believers must proclaim the message of reconciliation or it will never be heard.

**Rom 10:4** *Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.*

**Eph 2:16** *And in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.*

2. Note how God worked out reconciliation. God did three things to make reconciliation possible.
  - a. First, God came to earth “in Christ,” that is, in the person of Christ. As this verse says. “God was in Christ.” This is a phenomenal statement. This means that...
    - when Jesus Christ came to earth, God Himself came to earth.
    - when Jesus Christ bore sin for man, God Himself was bearing sin for man.
    - when Jesus Christ died for man, God Himself was dying for man.

This means that God Himself was in the person of Jesus Christ reaching out to man — that God himself had come to earth to reconcile man. This means that God Himself loved man so much that He came to earth to seek and to save that which was lost. The truth is so glorious that Jesus Christ Himself pounded the truth home to the hearts of people.

**John 10:15** *“Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father - and I lay down my life for the sheep.”*

**John 10:30** *“I and the Father are one.”*

**John 10:37-38** *“Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father.”*

**John 14:10** *“Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.”*

- b. Second, God does not count sin to men. The word “count” (logizomenos) means to reckon and credit, impute. It means to charge or put to a person’s account. If God does not impute or charge sin against men, then it means that He forgives their sins. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, God was in Christ dying for the sins of men. God was making it possible for men to be freed from the guilt and condemnation of their sins.

Picture the scene: hanging there on the cross, God in Christ was not charging men with sin. He was dying for the sins of men. God was not there upon the cross to impute sin against men; He was there making it possible for men to be forgiven their sins.

**Mat 26:28** “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

**Acts 2:38** Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

**Heb 9:22** In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

- c. Third, God has committed the message of reconciliation to ministers. God has not left the message of reconciliation up to men. God has taken the initiative. God calls and equips ministers of God to proclaim the word of reconciliation. He has done everything possible to reconcile men.

**Col 1:25** I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness.

**Luke 24:47** “And repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”

**1 Tim 1:11** That conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

**Titus 1:2-3** A faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Saviour.

### III. 2 Corinthians 05:20 *Ministers of the Message*

The message of reconciliation is committed to ambassadors. This is a great passage for ministers of the gospel. Note two striking points.

1. Ministers are given the highest of titles: they are “ambassadors for Christ.” The “ambassadors” (presbeuomen) are persons who are sent forth as official envoys to represent the Sender and to announce the message of the Sender. Four things are always true about the ambassador.
  - => The ambassador belongs to the One who sent him out.
  - => The ambassador is commissioned to be sent out. He exists only for the purpose for which he was sent.
  - => The ambassador possesses all the authority and power of the One who sent him out.
  - => The ambassador is sent forth with the message of the Sender.

**John 15:16** “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”

*1 Tim 1:12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.*

*2 Tim 1:9-11 Who has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.*

2. Ministers are given the greatest of messages: “Be reconciled to God.” The message is so critical that ministers are to “implore” (*deometha*) men: beg, entreat, cry, and plead with them to be reconciled to God.

Note that it is “for Christ’s sake” that we are to plead with men. Christ has paid the ultimate price to make reconciliation available to men: He has taken the sins of men upon Himself and borne the condemnation for them. Because He has done so much, every man owes his life to Christ — every man owes it to Christ to be reconciled to God. For Christ’s sake, a man should give himself to God.

*1 Cor 6:20 You were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.*

#### **IV. 2 Corinthians 05:21 The Death of Jesus Christ**

The message is unbelievable — a message of redemption, that is, of a substitution for sin. This is one of the great verses proclaiming the unbelievable love of God. It is a verse that has so much compacted in it that even a lifetime of study could not fathom its depths. It is impossible for man to grasp how God could make Christ become sin for us. Yet, this is exactly what Scripture declares: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us.” How was it possible for Christ to be made sin for us? Note the three points that are declared.

1. Christ “had no sin.” One of the very reasons Jesus Christ came to earth was to live a sinless and perfect life. As Man He never broke the law of God; He never went contrary to the will of God. He never sinned, not even once. He lived a perfect life. Therefore, He stood before God as the Perfect, Ideal Man. He was the Ideal, the Pattern of what a man should be. He had secured the ideal, perfect righteousness; therefore, His righteousness could stand as the ideal righteousness for man. His righteousness could embrace and cover man. As the Ideal Pattern, the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ could be counted as righteousness for man.

*John 8:46 “Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me?”*

*2 Cor 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

**Heb 1:9** “You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.”

**Heb 4:15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin.

**Heb 7:26** Such a high priest meets our need — one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens.

**Heb 9:14** How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

**1 Pet 1:18-19** For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

**1 Pet 2:22** “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

**1 John 3:5** But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.

2. God “made him who had no sin to be sin for us.” This was absolutely *necessary*. Why? Because man needs more than just righteousness to stand perfect before God. To stand righteous before God is not enough, for man has already sinned. Man already stands guilty of breaking God’s law, and the judgment and condemnation of death has already taken effect upon man. Man is dying both spiritually and physically, and the fact is clearly witnessed by the dying of people throughout every community of the world. Therefore, the condemnation and judgment against sin had to be taken care of. This, too, God did. God did it by laying all the sins of man upon Christ — all the guilt and condemnation of sin. God placed all sin upon Christ and let Him bear it all Himself. Christ became sin for us. How was Christ able to do this for us?

He was the Ideal, Perfect Man. Therefore, He could become the Ideal, Perfect Sin-Bearer. He could die the Ideal death, the death that would satisfy the justice of God’s eternal court and holy nature.

**2 Cor 5:21** God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**Gal 3:13** Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us [the same as saying made sin for us], for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”



**Heb 2:9** *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*

**Heb 9:28** *So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*

**1 Pet 2:24** *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

**1 Pet 3:18** *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.*

**1 John 3:5** *But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.*

**Psa 69:9** *For zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me.*

**Isa 53:5** *But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*

3. God's purpose was that we might be made the righteousness of God in Christ. What does this mean? Very simply, when a person believes in Jesus Christ — really believes — God takes that man's faith and counts it as righteousness. The man is not righteous, but God *considers and credits* the man's faith as righteousness. Why is God willing to do this?
  - a. God is willing to justify man because He loves man that much. God loves man so much that He sent His Son into the world and sacrificed Him in order to justify man (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8).
  - b. God is willing to justify man because of what His Son Jesus Christ has done for man.
    - => Jesus Christ has secured the *Ideal* righteousness for man. He came to earth to live a sinless and perfect life. As Man He never broke the law of God; He never went contrary to the will of God, not even once. Therefore, He stood before God and before the world as the *Ideal Man*, the *Perfect Man*, the *Representative Man*, the *Perfect Righteousness* that could stand for the righteousness of every man.
    - => Jesus Christ came into the world to *die* for man. As the *Ideal Man* He could take all the sins of the world upon Himself and die for every man. His death *could stand* for every man. He exchanged places with man by becoming the sinner (2 Cor. 5:19). He bore the wrath of God against sin, bearing the condemnation for every man. Again, He was able to do this because He was the *Ideal Man*, and as the *Ideal Man* His death could stand for the death of every man.

=> Jesus Christ came into the world to *arise from the dead* and thereby to conquer death for man. As the *Ideal Man* His resurrection and exaltation into the presence of God *could stand* for every man's desperate need to conquer death and to be acceptable to God. His resurrected life could stand for the resurrected life of the believer.

Now, as stated above, when a man believes in Jesus Christ — really believes — God takes that man's belief and...

- counts it as the righteousness (perfection) of Christ. The man is counted as *righteous in Christ*.
- counts it as the death of Christ. The man is counted as already having *died in Christ*.
- counts it as the resurrection of Christ. The man is counted as already having been *resurrected in Christ*.

Very simply, God loves His Son Jesus Christ so much that He honours any man who honours His Son by *believing in Him*. He honours the man by taking the man's faith and counting (crediting) it as righteousness and by giving him the glorious privilege of living with Christ forever in the presence of God. This is what is called justification. The word justify (diakioun) is a legal word taken from the courts. It pictures man on trial before God. Man is seen as having committed the most heinous of crimes; he has rebelled against God and broken his relationship with God. How can he restore that relationship? Within human courts if a man is acquitted, he is declared innocent, but this is not true within the Divine Court. When a man appears before God, he is anything but innocent; he is utterly guilty and condemned accordingly.

But when a man sincerely trusts Christ, then God takes that man's faith and counts it as righteousness. God counts the man — judges him, treats him — as if he was innocent. The man is not made innocent; he is guilty. He knows it and God knows it, but God treats him as innocent. "God justifies the ungodly" — an incredible mercy, a wondrous grace. (See Rom. 4:1-3; *Jews, the Seed of Abraham*, Rom. 4:1-25; *Credited*, Rom. 4:22; *Justification, Faith, Righteousness*, Rom. 4:22.)

How do we know this? How can we know for sure that God is like this? Because Jesus said so. He said that God loves us. We are sinners, yes; but Christ said that we are very, very dear to God.

**Gen 15:6** *Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*

**Acts 13:39** *Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.*

**Rom 3:23-24** *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

**Rom 4:3** *What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”*

**Rom 5:1** *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

**Rom 5:9** *Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!*

**Rom 6:7** *Because anyone who has died [counted dead, justified] has been freed from sin.*

**Rom 8:33** *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.*

**1 Cor 6:11** *And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

**Gal 2:16** *Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.*

**Gal 3:6** *Consider Abraham: “He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”*

**Gal 3:24** *So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.*

**Phil 3:9** *And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.*

**Thought 1.** The message of God’s ministry is an unbelievable yet glorious message. It is the only message that can truly save a sinful, dying person – the message of redemption, of a substitution for sin.

## **V. 2 Corinthians 06: 01–02 Making a Decision**

The message demands a decision. Note three facts.

1. Ministers are co-workers with God. They actually have the great privilege of working together with God. What is the work that they do with God? The minister who works with God does exactly what Scripture says: he urges, begs and pleads with men to receive the wonderful grace of God. What is that grace? It is the glorious truth...
  - that God has provided salvation through Christ and proclaimed that salvation through Christ.

2. The message of redemption is not to be received in vain. A person must not hear the message with empty, deaf ears. Redemption and salvation are available. God has made it possible — He even begs and pleads with men — to be saved; but a person can receive the message with empty ears and heart. He can either do nothing about the message or deliberately reject it. In either case he refuses...
- to let the grace of God take effect in his life.
  - to let God's grace work in his heart through regeneration.
  - to let the death and righteousness of Christ be counted as his death and righteousness.

A person must not receive the grace of God in vain. God's grace is much too wonderful — it is the only hope and way of redemption and salvation.

3. The decision to be saved is to be made now. Now is the only reasonable time to be saved. There may be no tomorrow; in fact, there may not even be one hour left for any of us. Any person's life can be snatched away any moment of any day by accident, disease or heart attack. Verse two declares two significant facts (note that this is an Old Testament quotation and God Himself is the spokesman, Isa. 49:8):
- a. This is the time of God's favour when God has heard the cries of men. This is the day of salvation when God has helped men.
  - b. Paul, the minister, cries out: "I tell you, *now* is the time of God's favour; behold, *now* is the day of salvation." Note the forceful implication: the day is coming when the day of salvation will no longer be present.

**Deu 30:15** *See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction.*

**Deu 30:19** *This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.*

**Mark 10:21** *Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*

**John 6:66-67** *From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the twelve.*

**Josh 24:15** *But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."*

**1 Kng 18:21** *Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing. ■*