

## **SUNDAY SCHOOL: Peace Begins with God**

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

Summary: God has called Christians to be messengers of peace to the lost world.

Sermon Text: Matthew 5:9

Sermon Summary: Being a peacemaker requires effort and involvement.

In this seventh week of “The Golden Chain”, our series on the Beatitudes, we focus on peacemakers, whom Jesus says shall be called the sons of God. In order for men to have peace with each other, they must have peace with God. We who have peace with God because of our faith in Christ should lead others to this same peace.

Context: This passage rests in the midst of a long discussion about Paul’s call by God to be an apostle. Paul is again refuting false charges against the genuine nature of his call. While the text for today specifically describes the mission Paul has accepted for his life, it can be applied to all who have been reconciled to God through the blood of Christ.

There’s a complementary, or if you will, “back and forth” nature to this passage, in that we see God’s reconciling, then our call, then God’s reconciling, then back to our call, then back to God’s reconciling work. For this reason the lesson today groups these two elements under two headings...

God the Reconciler (vv. 18a, 19a, 21): First and foremost, we must recognize that God is the initiator of reconciliation. He is the reconciler and those who heed His call are the reconciled. Reconciled from what? Open and aggressive warfare against God, which is also known as enmity. While mankind was still in active revolt against God, He acted to bring peace between Himself and man by giving His Son to die for our sin (Romans 5:8).

Within this work of reconciliation is an awe-inspiring transfer entirely dependent upon God’s mercy and love. Instead of “imputing” (reckoning, counting, assigning) our trespasses to us, which would be totally deserved, God forgives our sin. Those trespasses were put on Jesus on the cross – He became our substitute and bore the brunt of all our sin. Paul explains that Jesus, who knew no sin, who never once experienced personally the scourge of sin in His own life, was made by God the Father “to be sin for us.” That doesn’t mean Jesus sinned (Heb. 4:15; 1 John 3:5), or that He was merely our representative, but that He paid the penalty for our sin (Gal. 3:13). He took our place on the cross and suffered and bled and died for our sin. To complete the transfer, God imputed the righteousness of Christ (known as justification) on all who call on Him as Savior and Lord. Believers become the righteousness of God in (or through) Christ.

Why does mankind naturally fight and resist God? Why do you? (No one word answers).

How does it impact you knowing that Jesus bore your very own personal sins on the cross of Calvary?

Our Task (vv. 18b, 19b, 20): We've been given a ministry of reconciliation and the word of reconciliation. "Ministry" (*diakonia*: service) denotes an act or assignment that is done on behalf of another, in this case God. He, as the ultimate reconciler, requires those who have been reconciled to become reconcilers themselves. The beginning and source of this reconciling activity is the word of God, the word of reconciliation.

All who take up the ministry of reconciliation, under the authority of the word of reconciliation are considered ambassadors (*presbeuō*: elder, older man) for Christ. While the concept of ambassador is similar today to Paul's time, ancient ambassadors were sent by leaders to establish relationships, renew friendly relationships, make new alliances, and generally deliver goodwill. An ambassador speaks on behalf of the one who sends him, and in Paul's time to reject or offend an ambassador was to do the same to his superior (Luke 10:16).

Interestingly, Paul is writing to the church of Corinth, which would mainly be composed of believers. Because of sin, believers also have to be reconciled to God when they become carnal. There's not the same enmity experienced by the lost, but sin does lead to broken fellowship with God, and that needs mending through confession of sin. In any event, the work of the reconciler means pleading (*parakaleō*: to call alongside) with others, urging them in Jesus' name to make their relationship right with God.

Contextually speaking, this work is narrowly defined as leading others to faith in Jesus Christ. But the true godly reconciler works to bring peace between men as well as between God and man (consider Jesus' words in Matt. 5:23-24). David Garland writes, "The ministry of reconciliation therefore involves more than simply explaining to others what God has done in Christ. It requires that one become an active reconciler oneself. Like Christ, a minister of reconciliation plunges into the midst of human tumult to bring harmony out of chaos, reconciliation out of estrangement, and love in the place of hate."

How would you go about being a minister of reconciliation?

With what types of people might God want you to interact?

When was the last time you pleaded with or implored someone to be reconciled to God?

How important is it to you to see your family and friends come to know Jesus? What are you doing about it?

Challenge: Encourage the members of the class to write down the names of people they know who are either lost or who have conflicts with others. Instruct them to ask God's guidance in how they can be ambassadors for Christ in the lives of these people.