

(34) THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH: 2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-21

Focus Idea: Human society is marked by conflict. Division is everywhere. The Church, as a counteracting agent, works to bridge broken relationships between people and, in Christ, between persons and God.

The Context: The great city of Corinth, a melting pot of commerce and communication, was a pivotal venue for the gospel. As previously noted, the Apostle Paul lived and worked in the city; he may have written as many as four different letters to the believers there. Chapter 5 of 2 Corinthians follows an extended section of encouragement in light of the resurrection of Jesus (Chapter 4). The hope of eternal union with Christ holds out great implications for believers (5:1-10); they urge others to be reconciled to God as well.

The Characters: 2 Corinthians was written by the Apostle Paul, described in detail in previous Core40 studies.

The Core: It is beyond dispute that the Christian Church owes much of its form and doctrine to the Apostle Paul. His letters comprise about one third of the New Testament. His articulation of the faith underpins much of Christian orthodoxy. Paul's pioneering work around the Mediterranean catapulted the faith from a small Jewish sect in Palestine to a global movement that would remake Roman society.

Such a towering figure cannot be boiled down into a few paragraphs of text. That said, 2 Corinthians 5 provides a compelling window into the motives and aims of this extraordinary missionary.

Paul acknowledges that his zeal for the gospel makes some people think he's crazy (vs. 13). Others wonder why he does what he does, and there is a sense that the Corinthians may have more reason for embarrassment in Paul's actions than pride (vs. 12).

But his passion, Paul says, is not senseless. If he is "out of his mind", it is out of zeal for the Church. His vigor arises from Christ's love at work in his life (vs. 14). Having been changed, Paul has sold out his own motives and now lives for Jesus (vs. 15). The love of Jesus is a flywheel that drives him forward.

Paul's work orbits a new perspective on the world and the people who live in it (vs. 16). In Christ, all things have become new. Men and women are new creations in him. The old way of thinking about people and about society will not work anymore (vs. 17).

Paul understands that *reconciliation* is at the beating heart of his ministry. Sin separates people from God and from each other, but the atoning work of Jesus has provided a causeway for reconnection. Because men and women are in Christ, and because God loves Christ, the old things are over and done. Sins no longer count against them. Jesus became the sin of the world, took on the punishment of the Father, and made us the righteousness of God (vs 21).

Paul identifies himself as an *ambassador* of Christ. He is a representative on behalf of the King. When the Corinthians (and others) hear his preaching, they are to hear the voice of God calling to them (vs. 20). Paul makes this claim not out of arrogance but out of urgency.

Importantly, reconciliation implies both vertical and horizontal dimensions. Because people can be rejoined to God through the love of Jesus, they are to seek reconciliation with each other. No one is to be regarded in a worldly way anymore; all people are loved by God and have eternal destinies.