



YEAR 3—The God Who Pursues Relationship: A Story of God's People

Module 6—Jesus and His Church

Lesson 5: The Role of the Church in the World Today—2 Corinthians 5:11-21

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

(A theological and biblical reflection on today's Scripture passage.)

In this particular passage Paul is calling himself and others to immediate acts of responsibility that come with being a Christian and being a part of the Church. If one claims to be a Christian and desires that heaven truly find its way to earth as Jesus prayed and instructed us to pray, then sinful and indolent activity is not an option.

At one time, each of us were lost and undone. We were living in death and ruined for works of righteousness. We were slaves to sin, having no power to deliver ourselves. In this state, as described, we would have remained miserable forever. That is, as if Jesus had not died. Therefore, as new creations, we should no longer make ourselves the priority in life, but Christ. The mission and message of Jesus ought to be both the beginning and the end of all our living and all of our actions. In other words, a Christian's life should be devoted first to Jesus. How many of us show the irrelevance and insignificance of our professed faith and love by living for self instead of living like Jesus for the sake of the world?

The renewed person, or new creation that Paul speaks of, lives out of newly discovered principles, by new rules and with new realization of the end goal. Along with the new end goal, the new creation lives in new company, no longer living with the world, but in the fellowship of the Church. This believer is created over; his or her heart is not merely reset, but completely made new. The believer is the workmanship of God, created in Christ Jesus for the purpose of doing good works. Though he or she is the same person, the believer is changed in both character and behavior.

These truths must and do mean more than an outward change in behavior. The person who previously saw no beauty or purpose in Jesus now desires Him with his or her whole heart. The believer is no longer filled with ambivalence toward God, or even hostility and downright hatred. Instead, a ministry of reconciliation has taken charge. Our formerly insulted God has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ's work on the cross.

By the creativeness of God, the Scriptures were written. The Scriptures are the word of reconciliation; showing that peace has been made by Jesus' action on the cross. Throughout the biblical narrative, we see God's desire to bring peace between humanity and God, humanity and themselves, humanity and others and humanity and the world.

We have been justified freely by the grace of God through the redemption, which is in Christ Jesus, and it is through this grace that the Church offers a participative aspect of the ministry of reconciliation. The Church's role in the world, therefore, is to live as a community of people set out to display its newly-created self cooperatively and act as an agent of God's plan of reconciliation.

GOD'S STORY

There is a noticeable distinction between the Creator of the universe and the false gods of people. The one and only living God, the Father of Jesus, is relational. Idols that people establish for their own purpose of worship are not and cannot be relational. The God of Christianity is jealous for our love. In God's love for us, God created us with the ability to love God in return. This is a desire for personal relationship.

God's love and interest in humanity is remarkable because normally beings of great power and authority are the least welcoming and sociable. God, on the other hand, who is above everything, longs for us to be reconciled to Himself. God desires that all of His creation be in loving relationship with Him. How incredible it is that God gives us a second chance so we might experience God's love for us and choose to love God back.

God created us, not only to want and need relationship with other human beings, but with the capacity to love God along with other human beings. This is a core aspect of the Church. We love God back, together, sharing God's vision for a restored world, not just a devout church consisting of spiritual persons. It is under this reality, that God desires a relationship with us, that God provides the opportunity for us to be new creations.

OUR STORY

The new creation is described as this: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old is gone, the new is here!" (5:17). As I have always taught, whenever you see the word "therefore" in the Bible you have to ask, What is the therefore there for? In this case, the word "therefore" refers to verses 14-16 where Paul tells the church in Corinth that all believers have died with Christ and no longer live for themselves. This is the definition of a new creation. We no longer live our own lives in a worldly fashion. Instead we are now driven by spiritual motives. This old nature was also buried with Him.

Just as Jesus was raised to a new, resurrected life, the Father too, raises us up so that we might experience a new life and walk with Jesus in that new life. The new creation is an incredible thing, formed out of the missionary heart of God, created by God's grace and power and designed exclusively to bring God glory.

So what does it look like to live as a new creation? Well, to be a new creation in Christ is to be fully human. This means to live in this world as God originally intended for humans to live. To live fully human is to embrace the image of God in which we have been created and engage in obedience. The biblical mandates and the commandments of God are not designed to keep us from enjoying our lives. Instead, they are a way for us to live into the image in which we have been created. It is in this image that we find our real humanity and role in humanity as one who serves God and others.

The new way of living as a new creation in Christ means that as residents of a new society or kingdom we choose to live differently than the people of the various kingdoms and nations of this world. Turning our will over to God and living in obedience is the described way of life for citizens of the kingdom of God. It is as this new creation or citizen that we seek Jesus to be the Lord of our life and the Lord over all of heaven and earth.

OTHERS' STORY

We are all ministers of God's reconciliation. We are agents that God calls to participate with Him in this ministry of reconciliation. Each of us in the Church has unique contributions that we can make to engage this ministry role.

Some of us in the Church have a passion for acts of mercy and compassion; some of us love to serve in practical ways such as teaching Sunday school or serving in the nursery. Others still are called to be teachers, preachers, and evangelists. Some of us have administrative gifts that help churches stay organized. Leadership is another key gift that people have that helps the church cast vision, set direction and make hard decisions. Finally, some have the gift of hospitality and provide a warm welcome for all.

The bottom line is this: we have unique gifts to contribute to the church so that the church can function in its role to be ministers of reconciliation. Ministers of reconciliation, therefore, are people who go to where others are instead of waiting for them to come to the church, teach and train others in the theology and practices of the church, give their time for the greater good of all and the mission of God as a whole and seek ways to nurture the ongoing spiritual discovery and growth of others.

THE WORLD'S STORY

The world is lost. Without the Church serving in its role, the world will not be made whole, as is God's intention. To best serve the world, we must understand the people we are trying to reach. We must understand to whom we are bringing the gospel and contextualize it so the world can know how much God loves them and that God has not forgotten them.

You might be surprised, but here is a list of 10 common misconceptions of non-religious people. This list can be helpful in understanding just whom it is we are trying to reach with the gospel as we fulfill our role as ministers of reconciliation.

1. Non-religious people are miserable. This is not always the case. Some people are having the time of their life.
2. Non-religious people know their options. Not everyone knows he or she is not in good standing with God and that there is a possibility of new life.
3. Non-religious people have made a choice to be non-religious. Again, like #2, not everyone has made a conscious decision to be non-religious. Some have never even been invited into experiencing a relationship with God.
4. Non-religious people must be forced to admit they are in need of Jesus. We don't need to push people, the Holy Spirit is at work all the time, let Him do His job.
5. Non-religious people's choice to remain non-religious is unintelligent. People are not idiots, they are very smart and sometimes it is in their intelligence and thoughtfulness that they remain skeptics.
6. Non-religious people should automatically trust Christians. For many of us, we have not given people a good reason to trust us. Maybe we should start there?
7. Non-religious people have heard of Jesus and know about the Church. I meet people all the time who don't know anything about religion in general let alone Christianity and the Church.
8. Non-religious people just don't have enough faith. It isn't always about the faith of people. It can also be about knowing where to put that faith to work.
9. Non-religious people have no idea what it means to do and be good. Some of the most helpful people I know who do the most good for others (charity work, etc.) are non-religious people.
10. Non-religious people would be disappointed if the Church went away. Because many non-religious people have no idea what the Church is about they are completely indifferent to the nature, work and role of the Church.