

Natalie W. Bell
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A New Creation in Christ—Ministers of Grace
2 Corinthians 5:16-21

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view;^[b] even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view,^[c] we no longer know him in that way. ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there^[d] is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being!^[e] ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us **the ministry of reconciliation**; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,^[f] not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ **So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God.** ²¹ For our sake God made the one who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we **might become the righteousness of God.**

I read a story about a couple who had been **married for 60 years**.

Throughout their life they had shared everything.

They loved each other deeply.

They had not kept any secrets from one another,

except for a **small shoebox** that the wife kept in the top shelf of her closet.

When they got married, she put the box there and asked her husband never to look inside and never to ask questions about its contents.

For 60 years the man honored his wife's request.

In fact, he forgot about the box until his wife grew gravely ill, and the doctors were sure she could not recover.

So putting his wife's affairs in order,

He remembered the box, got it down, and brought it to her at the hospital.

He asked her if perhaps now they might be able to open it together, and she agreed.

They opened the box, and inside were two crocheted dolls and a roll of money that totaled \$95,000.

The man was astonished!

The woman told her husband that the day before they married, her grandmother told her that if she and her husband were to get into an argument with one another, they should work to reconcile,

and when it was **hard to reconcile, she should crochet a little doll.**

The man was touched by this, because there were **only TWO** crocheted dolls in the box.

He was amazed that over 60 years of marriage, they apparently had only two times that it seemed they could not reconcile.

Tears came to his eyes, and he grew even more deeply in love with his wife.

Then he asked her about the very large *roll of money*. "What's this?" he asked.

His wife said, "Well, *every time I crocheted a doll,*

I sold it to a local craft fair *for five dollars.*" This is that money.

David Daniels, from his sermon "Mediation" at preachingtoday.com.

What does it mean to be a *NEW CREATION in Christ?*

It means we find ways to forgive, and reconcile.

According to Paul, we are *ministers of reconciliation*

That is our *message* as Christians!

But *what IS reconciliation?*

The Bible talks about it as restored relationship.

Especially a right relationship between God and us.

Paul wants us to know throughout his letters,

That we are *restored, or reconciled to God* through the *cross*.

How?

Well, on the cross Jesus took on sin, so that we might be free from it, and have this restored relationship with God.

THAT'S reconciliation.

But this message about the cross *is hard* to understand.

Some people think,

what kind of an angry God demands the blood of his own Son?

But in reality it was *GOD on that cross*, because Jesus IS God,

So *it was God taking on the sin and suffering* of this world,

to make things right between us,

And to make things right in this world.

To restore all relationships.

Our restored relationship, our reconciliation with God

is an *already and not yet* situation.

We have *already received* reconciliation with God through the cross,

But it is *not yet complete* until Christ comes again.

God is at work in this fallen world,
but God's work is ***not done*** until ALL creation is redeemed.

So what does this mean for ***us right now?***

Well, it's ***great news***---It means we get to start over again when we fail,
We get our sins washed away,
And we become ***NEW CREATIONS*** in Christ!
I wonder, is that something you need?

I feel like ***I need that*** every single day!

Sometimes every single hour!

I'm relieved to know that God's grace is there for me when I screw up...
What about you?

The cross is also great news because it ***changes our relationships*** with one another.
Christian faith is not just about my relationship with God—
it's also about my relationship with the people around me.
That's how we ***practically live out*** our faith.

So the reconciliation of the cross

Means I can have reconciliation ***with others***.

God's grace covers ME, and it's there for everyone ELSE TOO.

Do you have a ***relationship*** in need of some serious grace?

I know I do!

Could you use a little more reconciliation in your life?

More restored relationships?

Do you have a relationship where you ***long for forgiveness?***

I do.

And our ***whole world*** needs that grace, right?

Our world needs the reconciliation—that we've been asked to share!

This is why Paul says that we are ***ambassadors*** for Jesus Christ!

Our lives are ***designed to share*** the good news of reconciliation, grace, and forgiveness.

For some this sounds like "***church talk***".

It sounds good on Sunday, but tomorrow we go back to our lives,
and all this talk of grace gets put back on a shelf....

But it doesn't have to be that way.

What we *learn here can and should affect our lives out there*, right?

Isn't that what it means when we pray, "*on earth, as it is in heaven*"?

Isn't that the "*Good News of the Gospel*"?

On June 17, 2015, a 21 year old named **Dylan Roof** was welcomed into a Bible study at the Emmanuel AME church in Charleston, S.C., after asking to see the pastor.

After sharing Bible study and prayer, he shot nine people in that church.

It was a crime of hate, evidenced by his beliefs in white supremacy.

He gunned down innocent people in their church, over the color of their skin.

It was an *act of evil*, the very opposite of grace and reconciliation.

It echoed **September 15, 1963**, when four little girls were killed in the bombing of the 16th street Baptist Church in Birmingham,

even as the inspiring words of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, rang out from the Lincoln Memorial just weeks before.

The New York Times *described the courtroom* when Dylan was arraigned.

One by one, they looked to a screen in the corner of the courtroom....into the expressionless face of the young man charged with making them motherless, snuffing out the life of a promising son, taking away a loving wife for good, bringing a grandmother's life to a horrific end. And they answered him with....

FORGIVENESS!

"You took something very precious away from me," said Nadine Collier, daughter of 70-year-old Ethel Lance, ... "I will never talk to her ever again. I will never be able to hold her again. But I forgive you. And have mercy on your soul."

"We welcomed you...in our Bible study with open arms," said Felicia Sanders, the mother of 26-year old Tywanza Sanders, a poet who died after trying to save his aunt...

"You have killed some of the most beautiful people that I know," she said in a quivering voice. "Every fiber in my body hurts, and I will never be the same.But as we say in Bible study, we enjoyed you. May God have mercy on you." NYTimes.com, Nikita Stewart and RICHARD PÉREZ-PEÑA, In Charleston, Raw Emotion at Hearing for Suspect in Church Shooting, June 20, 2015.

How could these families *share God's GRACE*, and *reconciliation*?

They were overflowing with sorrow, and anger...

but they were also full of the grace of Jesus Christ.

What an *unbelievable witness* to that young man, and to the world.

The movie *Invictus* tells the story of how Nelson Mandela (portrayed by Morgan Freeman), in his first term as president of South Africa, showed unconditional support and enthusiasm for the nation's mostly white rugby team in an effort to ***bring about reconciliation in an apartheid-torn land.***

In one early scene, we see that Mandela's efforts at racial reconciliation did not stop with the rugby team.

He sought ***opportunities for reconciliation at every turn—*** even in the way he put together his OWN ***security team.....***

Mandela's security team is shocked when one day ***a group of white men arrive,*** men who had been members of special forces, who ***enforced apartheid,*** and they are invited to join Mandela's security team!

When his men ask about these additions to the security detail, Mandela says, ***"Ah, yes," "Well, these men have special training. They have lots of experience"***.

"Yes," Jason says, "but it doesn't mean that they have to—."
Mandela cuts him off, saying,
"When people see me in public, they see my bodyguards. You represent me directly. And reconciliation starts HERE."

"Reconciliation, sir?"

"Yes, reconciliation, Jason."

"Comrade President," Jason says, ***"not long ago, these guys tried to kill us. Maybe even these four guys....tried. And they often succeeded."***

"Yes, I know," Mandela calmly replies.

"Forgiveness starts here, too. Forgiveness liberates the soul. It removes fear.

That is why it is such a powerful weapon."

Invictus (Warner Brothers, 2009), directed by Clint Eastwood.

Have you ever had forgiveness ***liberate your soul?***

When have you seen the ***power of grace?***

It's humbling, isn't it?

Reconciliation is a human need of *all people*.
On January 26, 2001 Seiko Sakamoto,
 a plasterer working in a Tokyo subway station,
 fell into the path of an oncoming train.
 Lee Su Hyun, a Korean student in Japan for language studies,
 jumped down on the tracks to save him.
 But both men *were killed*.

This selfless act by a Korean student caused many people in Japan to *reconsider their long-held prejudice* toward Koreans, dating back to World War II.
 Many Japanese people, including the Prime Minister,
 openly expressed sorrow over their previously held stereotypes of Koreans
 and began to talk about reconciliation.
 David A. Slagle, at Preachingtoday.com.

Maybe YOU are NOT caught up in a dramatic need for grace and forgiveness.
 But aren't we all a part of *a situation* that needs God's grace?
 Where in *YOUR life* is there *strife*? Or *hatred*?
 Where are you *holding a grudge*, or seeking *revenge*?

Don't you need *reconciliation, somewhere*?
 Could these powerful words of Paul be *soothing to YOUR soul*?

Pastor Gordon MacDonald once said,
*"The world can do almost anything as well as or better than the church.
 You need not be a Christian to build houses, feed the hungry, or heal the sick.
 There is only one thing the world cannot do. It cannot offer GRACE."*
 Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) p. 15, 42.

Grace might just be our *most important contribution* to the world as Christians—
 and yet it is so often *lacking* in our lives.
 We are all too quick to judge and condemn.

But we have the power of *reconciliation*, because we have been forgiven!
 Paul says:..... *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ,
 and has given us the ministry of reconciliation...!*

We are called to *restore* relationships, not *destroy* them--
 To build *bridges*, not fences.
 And it starts with such simple things.

***Where can YOU offer grace, today?
How can YOU work toward restored relationships?***

Reconciliation is not only possible,
it is ***THE way of life in God's kingdom.***
It is the way of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Hear the ***Good News of the Gospel:***
Jesus has ***reconciled us to God.***
And we have been ***reconciled to one another,*** through God's amazing grace.

It is our job to ***share that*** reconciliation.
That IS our ***New Life*** in Christ.
May we all have the courage to live it.
And for God's grace, all God's people can say together, Amen.