

July 26, 2020 AM
Pastor Ken Hepner

“Our Ministry of Reconciling Love:”
III. “Reconciling Love for One Another”
II Corinthians 5:16 – 21

Introduction:

As we turn our attention to the Word of the Lord this morning, we are looking at a passage of Scripture that has meant a great deal to our church historically. We are part of several beautiful streams of theology, two of which are Pietism and Anabaptism. These two wonderful streams of thought are part of what makes us the Brethren in Christ Church today!

This morning as we study this marvelous passage of Scripture in the book of II Corinthians. The central theme of this book, the Apostle Paul was writing to them, is their need to know the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in their individual lives and poured out among them when they gathered for worship.

It is God’s deep desire, the longing of His heart to know each of us in a deep and personal way. Paul’s wanted the people of the church at Corinth to understand this truth. God’s deep desire for each of them as individuals was increasing **Intimate Relationship** with them, as His sons and daughters who were redeemed by the blood of His Son Jesus.

Consequently, it is also God’s deep longing to make Himself known among His people when they gather in His Name to worship, praise, pray, and hear His Word proclaimed. The promise of Jesus to His people still stands today, and He desires to fulfill this promise to us here today: *“Where two or three come together in my Name, there am I with them.”* (Matthew 18:20)

Paul wrote them two other letters to correct errors that were among them. This letter we know as II Corinthians is written as a direct challenge to them to **Know Him** that is – the Lord Jesus Christ more deeply on a daily basis! Apart from this deep and profound walk with the Lord Jesus daily they would never be able to live pleasing to God, and they certainly wouldn’t be aware of their culture’s eroding of their spiritual passions.

Jesus said it this way in John 15:4, 5: *“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*

We are part of two wonderful streams of theology that assume the presence of the Holy Spirit has come to live in our lives, that the Holy Spirit is dwelling in us and His presence motivates us to walk in and express the reconciling heart of God! The two streams of thought are Pietism and Anabaptism, both of which stress seeking to be people of reconciling love in the world. They believed and sought to live four tenets, and they passed them on to us:

First, they held to the strong Biblical view that there are two kingdoms in this world that are constantly and irreconcilably in conflict with each other. They are the complete and polar opposite, spiritually speaking. **There is the kingdom of God** comprised of all of God's children, who are born of His Spirit and cleansed in their hearts by the precious blood of Jesus. **And there is the kingdom of this world system**, filled with unregenerate people who hurt and hate and wrong each other, as well as evil spirits in the world bent on destroying the Church of Jesus Christ, who seek to love Jesus and help others to be saved!

Second, they held to the belief **in an experience of salvation that resulted in a radically different person**, so people being saved should not be hurried through, but contemplated deeply as each person permitted the conviction of the Holy Spirit to guide them to repentance and a regenerated heart and spirit! They believed the witness to being born of the Spirit was to be baptized as believers!

Third, as converted believers **they held to a strong view of the literal interpretation of the Bible, the infallible Word of God**. So when they read in Scripture Jesus said: *"love one another as I have loved you, and love your neighbor as yourself, and love your enemies; do good to those who hate you and persecute you"* they took it to mean that Jesus meant what He said and that we should seek to live the truth we receive, which they called "Walking in the Light."

Fourth, flowing out of the previous three tenets of the faith, **they held to a strong viewpoint of Biblical, obedient, heart-searching discipleship for those who were truly made alive in Christ Jesus, in whom the Spirit of Jesus had come to live!**

We ended the message last week with what Paul told the readers at Corinth, and you and me, *"if any man (person) is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"* The Greek word for new creation is "ktisin" meaning, "the framing of something that has not existed before" or "creation of a creature." The root word indicates to call "something into being."

Paul's clear message in using this specific word here is that in Christ Jesus God is creating a new order of people, something that God is calling into existence in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We are new creations of God, recreated hearts and souls, who love Him and desire His will and ways. He weaves all of us together in His kingdom of the heart, taking us deeper into His heart and will as we appropriate by faith what He desires for us. Paul writes:

II Corinthians 5:18 – 20 *"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore, Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."*

The message Paul wanted the Corinthians and you and me to know is a foundational truth about God's reconciling heart of love for all humankind: The **message of the reconciling love of God has been committed to human vessels**. Paul goes about this in several ways, which bear a look as we think through this whole issue of giving reconciling love away.

Paul says we are given the “**ministry of reconciliation**” which denotes serving God and people by openly living as reconciled to God, then giving His reconciling love to others.

He says furthermore that we have been entrusted with “**the message of reconciliation.**” Here it is choosing to move beyond action. It is actually talking with people about what God is doing in us. This goes beyond living the message, to actually telling them for them in reconciling them to Himself, and that they must take the step of faith in order to receive Him.

Thirdly he says we are, “**Ambassadors for Christ as though God were making His appeal through us.**” We are people who have been given an authority and a commissioning from the King of glory to give to others what He has entrusted to our care, reconciling love. We are all called by God to get alone with Jesus each day, to engage in reading and contemplating Scripture, and heartfelt prayer, so that our heart beats with God’s heart and we live out His love in the ways we treat each other!

I. Family Affection:

Romans 12:9, 10 *“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.”*

I Thessalonians 4:9, 10 *“Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you brothers, to do so more and more.”*

I Peter 3:8, 9 *“Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.”*

Paul’s words to the Roman Christians are such a clear statement in the Greek text. His sentence that is rendered in the NIV *“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love,”* is just four words long in the Greek text. Paul writes, “*Philadelphia eis allelous philastorgoi.*” It could easily be rendered; “love as brothers and sisters with deep family affection for each other!”

The Greek words for brothers and sisters; adelphoi and adelphai – mean “from the same womb” and it occurs 230 times in the New Testament in relation to being brothers and sisters in Jesus, people who have become integrally related to one another because we are participants in the magnificent grace of God in Jesus our Lord!

We are a Christian family called to love each other deeply, to feel emotion and affection in the same way as a nuclear family would feel because they have the same mother and father. They care deeply for one another, hurt when their family member hurts, and they want the highest good for all of the members of their family.

But the concept of being made to be part of Pappa God’s family also has to do with our spiritual adoption. The New Testament carries with it numerous references to the fact that we have been

spiritually adopted into the family of God by Abba Father, through what Jesus has done for us, as it is applied to our lives by the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

Here are two of the clearer texts that speak to us about our having been adopted into God's family and what that means:

Romans 8:14 – 17 *“Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”*

Ephesians 1:5 – 8 *“In love He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.”*

Adopted sons and daughters of God are called to come into the family of believers and love one another deeply from the heart, to feel tender affection for one another, just the same as if we had been born into the family! The truth about being God's adopted sons and daughters is that He came to the orphanage of sin looking for us. He saw all of the others there, came to get us, chose us, and invited us to come home with Him and live with Him! His love, grace, and mercy are fundamental to our living in tender affection with one another!

II. Accepting One Another

Romans 15:5 – 9a *“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God.”*

Paul is such an anointed thinker as he writes this letter to the Romans. Right after he tells us to accept one another, he uses the word “then,” which points the reader back to the verses prior to these words. His point is to teach us that **Mutual Acceptance** is critical to what the Spirit of Jesus does in a local church in **Creating Unity**.

Paul writes such an incredible word about what true unity in the local church, consequently, our unity at Cedar Grove looks like when it is the fruit of His presence working in our midst. Paul wants them to open themselves up to the working of the Holy Spirit within them when he writes: “May God give you all...”

1. A **Spirit of Unity** among yourselves. He brings us together and makes such radically different people live together as one, united by His presence and His work in our hearts and lives.

2. **One Heart** and **Mouth** to glorify God.
3. The desire and the ability to **Accept** one another

To accept implies the following: “To admit or receive into a community, to agree to meet, to allow as being right or proper, and to take on something offered.” These meanings of the word accept have something to say about how we the attendees of Cedar Grove Church will respond to every person who comes through the door of our church. But then Paul really puts acceptance on steroids with his next words: “*Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you...*”

Well let’s think back to what our hearts and lives looked like when we were living apart from God, before we met Jesus as Savior and Lord and He began the process of transformation within us. How did Jesus accept you and me back then? We prayed, “O Lord please have mercy on me a sinner.” And He responded to me: “Ken you smell of cigarettes and Budweiser. Until you get rid of those two smells on your breath, I can’t do anything for you.”

It means that regardless of where people have been, regardless of what they have done, and regardless of how they have messed up in life, we will make some minimum guarantees to them if they want to walk together with us.

III. Acceptance: Refusing to Give Judgment of All Kinds

Romans 14:1 “*Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.*”

Paul says that acceptance means that we will refuse to pass all kinds of judgment on people. There are several types of judgment that we, the Church of Jesus, are called to reject making as we relate to one another. Jesus taught us that we were not to place judgment on people as a matter of how we choose to live with one another. If we judge others based on externals and human bias, we are actually welcoming God to judge us similarly. Not the wisest move I can think of!

Matthew 7:1, 2 “*Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure that you use, it will be measured to you.*”

Let’s just go ahead and address the three ways that judgment dwells in a church family that are the most glaringly obvious, which become accentuated when we walk in a health crisis like we are presently walking in:

#1 Rejection – This is a powerful tool in the Enemy, Satan’s toolkit for destroying emotional and spiritual health in people. Rejection is being turned away from, discarded by people we want and maybe even desperately need to embrace us. Rejection is the act of being refused love, forgiveness, and acceptance. It creates inner emotional prisons of feeling unlovable and devalued as a person. Why in the world would we want to participate in placing people in internalized and emotional prisons, regarding how they were treated by the members of a church?

#2 Legalistic Judgment – In every New Testament passage in which this sin of judgment shows up it is in relation to human beings in the church judging others on the basis of external standards like the clothes they wore or didn’t wear or the food that they ate or refused to eat. Paul’s word

in Romans 14 is to both the strong and the weak in faith. He tells both of them to stop judging on the basis of external standards – the weak judging the strong for eating meat that was sacrificed to an idol and the strong judging the weak for not eating it!

This teaching is so relevant because there is no end to legalism in the body of Christ today. Almost every group has its list of do and don't items. Some lists are long and some are short but the lists exist. What this does in practical terms is that it places the emphasis on the rules instead of on a deepening relationship with Jesus. It leads to extra-Biblical rules being used to judge the spirituality of another person or group.

It is true that there are character and conduct guidelines in the Bible in terms of pretty carefully defined behavioral expectations. Adultery, fornicating, lying, drunkenness, slandering and gossiping are always wrong. But it is also true that the Bible completely rejects the people of God granting acceptance or rejection to people based on external patterns of behavior beyond what the Bible describes, brothers and sisters dividing over whether or not we wear a mask to church.

#3 Partiality or Favoritism – Nearly every time these words about judgment show up in the New Testament, they refer to how the Church and often church leaders showed preference to people who showed up at church who were obviously rich. They were given the best seats in worship and at the church socials simply because they were wealthy. It was such a problem in the New Testament church that it was addressed by different writers;

Paul in Romans 12:16 *“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.”*

James adds in James 2:1 – 4 *“My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, ‘Here's a good seat for you,’ but say to the poor man, ‘You sit there,’ or ‘Sit on the floor by my feet,’ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”*

Here are some of the fruit that are left behind in the lives of others when they have experienced a church that is characterized by judgmentalism:

- Results in having unity destroyed because it creates **Superior** people and **Inferior** people
- People feel the deeply devaluing and demoralizing sense of **False Guilt**
- They have their sense of personal **Freedom** to follow Jesus **Destroyed**
- It creates a **Loyalty to the cause of the Judges** as opposed to creating genuine followers of Jesus

I can only speak for myself as the lead pastor on this team. I don't want any of those fleshy and human things to be left in the lives of people who attend our Church here at Cedar Grove because of the way that we treated them when they came to be with us!

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Introduction:

A four-part series of messages on two streams of our theological heritage, known as: Pietism and Anabaptism.

They were people who sincerely sought to live in reconciling love as they followed Jesus.

II Corinthians is written to encourage believers to walk in deepening intimacy with Jesus. Jesus said John 15:14, 15

Four foundational truths they believed:

1. There are two kingdoms being built simultaneously in the world ...
2. An experience of salvation in Christ that led to radical life-change
3. The Scriptures should be received literally as the Word of God
4. A strong view of radical discipleship to Jesus Christ

II Corinthians 5:18 – 20 ... In Jesus Christ we have been called to a life of ministering reconciliation!

Paul talks about us walking in reconciling love with each other using three terms: Ministers, Messengers, and Ambassadors for Christ! We are called to a life of peace with God and each other: Romans 5:1, 2; Isaiah 53:5, 6

I. Family Affection: Romans 12:9, 10; I Thess. 4:9, 10; I Peter 3:8, 9

II. Accepting Each Other: Romans 15:5 – 9a

III. Refusing All Types of Judgement: Romans 14:1; Matthew 7:1, 2

Concluding Questions ...

Discussion Starter Questions for Groups

1. What are some things you have witnessed in our culture, over the past five months, which have been unsettling, hurtful, and/or that created fear in your heart regarding the future?
2. Which of the four tenets of our Pietist and Anabaptist roots meant the most to you? Are there any of the four things we could do without? Why?
3. As you think about the three terms Paul uses to talk about being people known by reconciling love, which term means more to you personally?
4. What are some ways you personally cultivate knowing Jesus more deeply and personally in your own life?
5. Do you think the Christian Church in North America chooses to walk in reconciling love in our relationships with one another?
6. Could you explain to people who ask you to describe how you know you came to live in peace with God? What Scriptures could you point them to?
7. Why do you think we understand and more importantly choose to walk in family affection with each other at Cedar Grove? How about the issue of mutual acceptance in our body?
8. Read together aloud James 2:1 – 13 and discuss insights you have regarding the issue of judging one another as believers in Jesus.
9. Read together aloud Galatians Matthew 18:15 – 20 and discuss insights you have regarding what we are called to do, the process we are to follow when we are not walking in harmony and peace with a believer.
10. Share your thoughts with your group members about living out our ministry of reconciling love, being people who seek to demonstrate reconciling love ...