

Weekly Scripture and Sermon Study: History & Context Guide
2 Corinthians 5:17-21

History, Culture, & Context

This section of 2 Corinthians discusses the ministry of reconciliation (God bringing us back to Himself), and how we are transformed to be a new creation with our faith in Christ.

Verse 17 says, “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being!” The Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible explains, “Although later teachers sometimes applied it to proselytes, the most common use of new creation language in Jewish sources from this period addresses the age to come...Paul recognizes that the promised resurrection has begun in Jesus, so that believers have already begun to experience some of the life of the promised age.”



Verses 18-19 read, “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.” The Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible says, “Harmony and thus reconciliation were frequent topics of public discussion” during this time period.

Verse 20 reads, “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.” Being an “ambassador” is being in a role to represent one country to another. Here, we are ambassadors for Christ going forth with a message of reconciliation for the world!

Verse 21 says, “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.” This is a key verse, in that it explains that when we have faith in Christ, our sin is taken away from us, and we are made right with God. In other words, our sinful nature is substituted for Christ’s sinless and perfect nature. The righteousness of Christ is given to us at our conversion, and God sees this in us rather than our old sinful nature.

Questions to Consider

1. What does it mean that we become a *new creation* in Christ? How does this differ from being “reformed”, “reeducated”, or “turning over a new leaf”? In what ways has this happened in your life?
2. What does it mean for God to reconcile us to Himself? How does having faith in Christ play into this?
3. What does it mean to be an “ambassador for Christ”?