

# Fourth Sunday in Lent

## A Ministry of Reconciliation

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

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Analysis by Peter Kevel

<sup>17</sup> So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has; <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**Author's Note:** Given the plethora of fantastic analyses already done for Luke 15, the Epistle is analyzed instead.



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*God's righteousness does not depend on our decisions or our failings. It's based on God's unilateral decision to create something entirely new in us, on account of Christ's death and resurrection.*

## **DIAGNOSIS: Everything Old Must Pass Away**

### ***Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Ministry of the Self***

There's a lot of conflict in the world. At the macro scale, there is the current war, the previous war, the war before that, this disease, that disease, and limited resources to deal with

everything. At the personal level, there's also a lot of ill will. Conflicting ways of doing things, snubs, hurt feelings.

None of these has an easy fix. At a minimum, you need to look out for and protect yourself from being hurt, and hopefully do the same for your family, tribe, etc.

### ***Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Our Righteousness***

The problem is that this leads to "curving inwards on oneself." When we can't trust anything else, we rely on ourselves. That means we need to have a clear sense of what is righteous so that we can protect ourselves and our people. Maybe we officially say we believe in a particular standard of righteousness, perhaps even laid down in the Bible. The problem is even that standard is subjective. What does it really mean to love your neighbor as yourself? Isn't "tough love" sometimes justifiable? It's up to us to decide. But making such a decision puts us at odds with those are unrighteous or threaten us.

Now we're feeding into that cycle of conflict instead of exiting it, even if we're doing it in God's name.

### ***Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Separated from God***

Beyond perpetuating the cycle of conflict, we have a bigger problem. If we rely on ourselves for righteousness, and decide that we are the interpreters of what God said, it leaves no room for God. It means we are separated from God. And we can't fix it. The end result is that this "old" self must pass away.



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## **PROGNOSIS: There is a New Creation**

***Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): God Reconciled the World to Himself***

The good news is that God has a solution for us: “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.” Or if that isn’t entirely clear, Paul emphasizes that God “reconciled us to himself through Christ.” And, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin.” The end result of this event is what Paul leads with, the good news: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.”

God's righteousness does not depend on our decisions or our failings. It's based on God's unilateral decision to create something entirely new in us, on account of Christ's death and resurrection.

### ***Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): The Righteousness of God***

Paul tells us God is "entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" and that the effect is that we "become the righteousness of God." The new creation is trusted by God. Receiving that trust is the new faith created in us.

A message of reconciliation reframes our conflicts and our need to be the arbiters of righteousness. It is no longer about what must be done, but about what is trusted. We do not need to rely on our own righteousness (or lack thereof). We are trusted with God's righteousness.

### ***Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Ministry of Reconciliation***

Paul also lays out what this new creation means in more concrete terms. God has "given us the ministry of reconciliation," making us "ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us." That appeal we make on God's behalf is to "entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

We have new tools for resolving conflict, and a new way to let conflict die: reconciliation with God. This reconciliation doesn't require those with whom we are unreconciled to initiate reconciliation with us. Instead, they too are called to and receive God's reconciling work in Christ—which puts all of us on the same page with God.