

**Sermon Study Guide Based on  
Pastor Glen Weber's Message of February 1, 2009  
"Reconciled to Christ"**

**[Today's message sets the spiritual foundation for our reconciliation theme for February by discussing the core foundation of all reconciliation – that Jesus has first reconciled us and then given us this message of reconciliation to share with others.]**

**[Topics: Reconciliation, Christ's Ambassadors, Community]**

**Excerpt:** As you know this month is "Reconciliation Month" for our congregation. And of course many people are celebrating the month of February as "Black History Month." It's a time to honor the heritage of the African-American people. It's so good that our nation is doing that. It probably has greater significance this year because America has elected its first African-American president. Here at New Hope, our congregation is made up of many different cultures and ethnicities so we celebrate reconciliation month.

The apostle Paul talked a lot about reconciliation. In **2 Corinthians 5**, Paul is writing about his love/hate relationship that he had with the Corinthian congregation. In essence, he loved them and they hated him – it wasn't quite that bad. The first letter was very corrective. Now in this letter, Paul is trying to encourage them as well as challenge them to be reconciled to Christ and then to be reconciled to him.

Now let's break into Paul's letter beginning with **verse 14**. **"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died."** Paul is writing that we're in this all together. Christ died once for everyone and that we were all brought into his death. Christ died on all our behalf.

**15) "And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."** Christ not only died for us but he also came back to life to live for us and to bring us into a living relationship with him and the Father. Now all mankind has been brought into that relationship, but they all don't know that yet. That's why we need to tell them about this reconciliation.

**16) "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer."** So Paul said that we originally saw people differently. But now because of the reconciliation of Christ, we don't anymore. We see that Christ died for all humanity and reconciled all of them. Christians should look at others differently now. It doesn't matter what color they are; it doesn't matter what background they come from or what religion they are. We shouldn't look at them as people cut off from God. But they need to come to that understanding.

**17) "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"** So, as Jesus brought us into this relationship, we became a new creation. But we must enter into this relationship. Here's an analogy that illustrates what we mean. We could buy you a winning million-dollar lottery ticket and bring you the check, telling you of what you won.

This is in essence what God is telling us. "You have won the lottery. I have redeemed you." We just sang the song a few minutes ago with the lyrics, "I call you Savior, you call me redeemed."

Now the check has no value unless you accept it and put it in the bank. It's the same with Jesus. We must enter into that amazing relationship and experience Jesus. We need to then live our life accordingly. We need to ask ourselves, "If he did all that for me, what am I doing for him?"

**18) "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:"** This verse says that God HAS (past tense) reconciled us to himself through Christ. God did it. It wasn't anything we did. It wasn't any decision we made. Now we must choose to accept what God has done for us and to live accordingly.

Since Jesus has reconciled us how much more should we be reconciled to one another? Now over the next three weeks, at New Hope we're going to focus on the Latino/Hispanic population, the female population and the African-American population. We simply don't have enough weeks to focus on everybody. But we're very aware we have Asians, for example, in our congregation and even white males. But the bottom line is that all of us should be reconciled to everyone, because God is reconciled to all and loves everyone.

**19) "that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them."** Please notice that God has reconciled the world to himself – not just the church. And God has taken care of humanity's sins through Jesus. God is not counting sins against anyone. People need to realize that they are already forgiven by Jesus Christ.

For example, we need to remember the parable of the "Prodigal Father" often times referred to as the "Prodigal Son." The younger son takes his inheritance early, leaves home, blows all the money and then returns home. The Bible says that before the son could repent the father went and met him.

You see it's not about our repentance. It's about what God did for us. And our repentance flows out of that. There's a big difference. One is – I'm earning it. The other is – God's offering it.

Now the rest of verse 19, "**And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.**" God has committed us the message of reconciliation not a message of repentance, not a message of telling them they are cut off from God or unless they turn they will burn. No, it's a message of reconciliation.

It's a message telling others that God already loves them, that God has already reconciled them through Jesus Christ, that God has already invited them into a caring relationship. And then we need to ask them, "Would you receive that?" What an easy message!! **John 3:16** says that Jesus came so that ALL might be saved – not a few, not some. It's very clear.

Paul tells the church, that's you and me, to take the message to everyone that they have been reconciled to God. **20) "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God**

**were making his appeal through us."** So God is asking us to go and invite others into this marvelous relationship with God. Jesus said, as you're going, make disciples out of them and let them know what He did for them. Tell them that Jesus and the Father already loves them and has forgiven them. We can ask them to experience that and begin to walk with God. God is asking us to make His appeal through us. That puts some pressure on us, doesn't it? God wants us to be excited about what He's offered humanity. And so we should sow the seed.

**"We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."** So that's our appeal. We implore people to accept God reconciliation. So we're going to do this in February as we focus on different aspects of culture. Perhaps we still have some stuff inside us that needs removed. Unfortunately, racism exists. We need to be reconciled, not because it's a nice warm thing to do, but because we need to be reconciled to each other because God has reconciled all to himself through Jesus Christ.

**21) "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."** So when Jesus became our sin, he took everyone's sin – every man, woman and child and gave us his righteousness in return. Now we must receive it and walk in it. God doesn't force any one to be saved. We do have a say in the matter. We have to choose to follow God and respond to his gracious offer by saying, "Yes please, thank you Lord."

**2 Corinthians 6:1, As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.** So Paul is saying that we shouldn't take God's grace lightly. **2) "For he says, 'In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation."**

The door is now open. We have been sent out as God's workers to invite them in. To do that, we need to be reconciled to one another and to them because of what God has done. In the next 7 verses Paul talks about his hardships and difficulties he's experienced because of the Gospel. Then he writes about the challenges for the Corinthians beginning in verse 11.

**11) "We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you."** Paul is saying that he reaching out to the Corinthians like the Father has reached out to the world. **12) "We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us."** It takes a response back to Paul in this case, just like it takes with us in our walk with God. As we invite others to take God's offer, they have to respond, just like we had to. In fact, we must continue to respond to God day by day or else our love will wax cold, as the Bible says.

**13) "As a fair exchange – I speak as to my children – open wide your hearts also."** Paul challenges them to open their hearts to him and to come into that relationship with him.

During this month of February we want to focus on our reconciliation with others, regardless of their color, culture or gender. We want to reach out to people. At this point in his message Pastor Glen asked a male and female from each designated group to assemble in various locations of the sanctuary. The groups consisted of African Americans, Latino/Hispanics, Caucasians, and Native Americans and /Asians.

This represents how we used to live life – as separate entities. But as we become reconciled to Jesus, we come closer together. As we get closer to the Father, we also get closer to each other!! But until we talk with one another, we're still separated and not reconciled to each other. But once we start talking with one another, we enter into that wonderful relationship of reconciliation.

Where would Jesus be color wise? Would he be closer to the African-American couple or the Caucasian couple? He would be closer to skin color of the African-American couple, which most of us probably wouldn't assume.

Jesus had at least 3 dark complexioned women in his lineage. What color was Naomi? What color was Ruth? Jesus wasn't a Caucasian. He was a Mediterranean in color if not darker because of his heritage. Too often we open up a Bible and see a picture of Jesus and think that is what he must have been like. Knowing this may help us get closer together.

The final part of today's message is that Jesus brings us to the table. None of the elements of communion is cultural so to speak. Jesus used things that were commonly available in virtually every place on the planet. Almost every culture depends upon bread for sustenance. And almost every culture has wine.

If Jesus picked sweet potatoes and okra, for example, all you Southerners would have said, "That's my God!" But no one else would have. Instead, Jesus chose things that nearly every culture could relate to and has meaning to all of us. Jesus didn't want to set us apart. He wanted to bring us together. He wanted us to come into community with each other and to connect with one another. And so as we will come to the table today we need to be reminded of that.

In **1 Corinthians 10:16**, Paul writes, "**Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?**" This is us participating together as the body of Christ. This is us coming together in relationship with one another in the body of Christ. In doing this, we honor his body as well.

**17) "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf."** We're all one loaf. We're all in this together. As Jesus brings us to the table, he says – listen, my body was broken for you so that all of you can become one body healed and brought together. Jesus heals us emotionally, spiritually and physically.

And Jesus also said that he shed his blood so that we could come and participate in the thanksgiving, the Eucharist. We are thankful that we are reconciled to God through Jesus blood. We are thankful that the first Adam was completely overcome by the second Adam. We get to come and be a part of that together.

So we're going to invite you to come forward in just a minute and you can bring your offering as you come. And after you take the elements, please gather together in groups of about 8 to 10 all around the room. And then if we could have one person pray for the bread and then for the wine or grape juice, and take the elements together in

small groups because it's a community meal. It's a community meal with all of us together with Jesus Christ.

**Key Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:18, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation."**

**General Group Question:** What is Christ's message of reconciliation?

**Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.**

1. Who has God reconciled to himself, the church or the whole world? What difference does this make?
2. Are the sins of Christians still counted against us? How about the sins of the people in the world? Briefly explain.
3. Because Jesus has reconciled the whole world to God the Father with his sacrifice, how are we to view people who don't know Jesus yet?
4. What message are we to take to the world – one of condemnation or reconciliation? Briefly explain the difference.
5. Can we take the message of reconciliation to others if we aren't reconciled to each other whether it involves race, culture or gender? Why or why not?
6. Does the partaking of communion connect with the ministry of reconciliation? Why or why not?
7. What does a person have to do to participate in the reconciliation that God is offering?
8. What can you do to become a better ambassador for Christ?