

# The Servant of the Lord is Called 3) To Restore Peace

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 • 2021-01-24 • Series for Epiphany



It doesn't matter what your political views are, you'd have to agree that there have been more clashes with crowds, riots, and police in riot gear especially in just this past year than in recent history in our nation. For various reasons crowds of people have clashed with those trying to keep them under control. There has been increasing animosity, destruction, and hatred of opposing sides.

How would you like to be in charge of restoring the peace? That's what God is in the business of doing. And this morning we see how he calls his servants to carry out his peacemaking to the world. The Church isn't in the business of donning riot gear, toting guns as its tools, or enacting political platforms. It is the business of reconciliation – bringing peace where there was once hostility. I'm not talking about using force to stop the acts of violence but making the two opposing sides at peace with one another. How is that done? This morning we continue our series, "The Servant of the Lord is Called." We turn to 2 Corinthians 5 and find out how we are called to restore peace.

Paul begins this section of his letter by talking about what compels him to serve the Lord. He had once been compelled under false and wrong motives. He had been an agent of the law. He identified enemies and targeted them. He used force to arrest dissenters. He systematically went after all the opposition and tossed them in prison. Then he cast the vote for their death. It was the love of the law that once compelled Paul to action.

But before we can get on Paul's case for being an agent of hostility, we need to examine our motives. What motivates you each day? Do you sometimes find yourself doing something so that it will just make your life easier? Many people will be kind to a family member in the morning because they just want to get their coffee and move on. But if they can win an argument, they will jump at the chance to come ahead. A lot of people will obey the traffic laws as long as they fear getting caught. But even if they obey the laws, they are quick to label every other driver their enemy and in the way. People try to get along with their employers. But it's the paycheck which they are often really serving. If that isn't enough for the job, then the friendliness often disappears. If someone takes the extreme opposite response to a social issue or political stance don't you sometimes want to identify them as "the enemy"? I'm sure you recognize what motivates us according to the flesh. We are motivated by self-interest, self-preservation, and fear. We may not be starting riots and smashing things. But aren't we sometimes quick to identify an enemy and fight our battles?

Paul points out how the Christians' motivation is so strikingly different from the rest of this world. "*Christ's love compels us.*" Love motivated Christ into action for all people. It was his love for the person who made your drive miserable because they harassed or hindered you in some way. It was his love for the person who hates your guts at work. It was his love for the person who is on the opposite side of the spectrum that you are on regarding masks, vaccinations, and political agendas. It was his love for the person who you might label as your political adversary. His love for them motivated him to die for them. He died for all people. That includes "them" and it includes you.

Because he in love died for all, the Christian has a whole new outlook and purpose in life. We are no longer motivated by self-interest, self-preservation, and fear. "*He died for all, so that those who live would no longer live for themselves but for him, who died in their place and was raised again.*" We live for Christ who gave his life for us all and who now himself lives in glory as our Savior-God.

We no longer regard other people the same as we once did in sin. We once regarded people according to the flesh and viewed others as merely enemies and obstacles to us achieving our goals. But we no longer view people that way. Just as we no longer view Christ as a mere man, we no longer view the people around us as merely obstacles and enemies. In fact, the people around us have become our goal. We seek to love them as Christ did. Every Christian has this new mindset towards others because they no longer live for self, but for Christ. Their hearts are changed! "*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. The new has come!*"

To be "*in Christ*" means to be connected to him through faith. We believe he died for all and took our place so that we belong to him. His death is our death. His resurrection is ours. God reconciled us to himself in Christ. We were once enemies of God and an object of his wrath. We lived fighting against him and unable to restore the peace with him. But we are convinced that God sent his Son to take our place. He took away the sins of the world and brought us peace. Where there was once hostility between us and God there is now peace. That's what God is in the business of doing. He restores peace between himself and his world. God reconciled us to himself through Christ. He brought us to faith.

Though Christ died for all, not all are in Christ. Not all have faith in Christ. And that is why God called the apostle Paul to declare peace through the message of Jesus. And that is why God has sent Christian pastors and teachers in your life who were called to proclaim peace. And it is why every member of the body of Christ is a new creation now living for Christ to declare his message of peace. Paul describes the Christian's new calling as a peace maker in this world: "*And all these things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of*

*reconciliation. That is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. And he has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, inasmuch as God is making an appeal through us. We urge you, on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."*

Do those around you view you as someone who is there to restore peace? Do you adequately represent Christ? Or can that be lost by the way you sometimes revert back to viewing others according to the flesh? What do you do when someone offends you in some way? Maybe they said something which hit the hot button for you on social or political topics. Does the hatred begin to boil, and you decide to unfriend them or give them the silent treatment? Do you label them as "enemy" and treat them as such? There are so many hostile workplaces. There are so many unfriendly neighborhoods with racism, sexism, or self-serving ideologies. There are so many broken marriages and broken families in this world. There is so much strife between even the closest relationships. Should a Christian join in such attacks and in fostering such hostility? Do people see you as someone who is quick to make a comeback remark or someone who is quick to listen? Think about the last time that you had the chance to lay down the weapons and pursue peace instead. Did you do it? Or were you too afraid that you'd lose a battle and appear weak?

An ambassador doesn't live to carry out their own agenda and declare war against their own private enemies. An ambassador exists to carry out the agenda of those they represent. You have been called to be a servant of the Lord and to represent him in this world. At times you might feel you have the right to define who gets to be your enemy and who doesn't. But not if you are in Christ and died with him so that you now live for him.

And it is clear that our God desires to restore peace. His agenda didn't include winning the battle against us, but in laying down his arms to restore the peace. In order to restore peace with the world full of sinners he had to come to live in this world. He preached, "blessed are the peacemakers." But the very same people who were supposed to be restoring peace plotted to end his life. He sought to bring people back to God, but they cried out for further hostility. They beat him, whipped him, and hung him to die a horrible death.

But that was God's love for all people. He was restoring peace. He died for all. He didn't die for his own hostility. He died to take the place of sinners and restore peace. *"God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us."* The sinless and holy Son of God gave himself and his life to take all the justice that sinners deserved. Instead of placing that justice on our heads as his enemies, God placed it all on his Son. Instead of letting the warfare rage he gave us all the righteousness we lacked. *"he became sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him."*

Our God has sent us now on a mission of peace making. The job of restoring peace has already been accomplished by Christ. Our job now is to simply declare it on God's behalf: "Be reconciled to God." That means bringing hearts to Christ. All who turn from sin and hostility and all who repent of their sin find peace with God through Christ.

When you wake up in the morning and have something against one of your family members, view them differently than the world does. View them as one for whom Christ died. They are one more person for that day to restore peace. Forgive, be reconciled with them. And help them know what it means to be reconciled to God in Christ. If you are driving down the road and someone cuts you off or treats you poorly, don't get upset and curse them because they almost wrecked your car or made you die. View them as part of the world for whom Christ died. If your employer or your co-workers treat you with hostility and they are trying to destroy you as an enemy, give them the same measure of love which Christ gave them. Seek to be reconciled with them and let them know what it means to be reconciled with God in Christ. If someone has the opposite view of your favorite political party or the extreme opposite view of a social issue, don't just label them as your enemy. Label them as someone you desire to reach as an ambassador of Christ with peace from God. Christ has sent you to model and proclaim the message of reconciliation to them.

We have been called to be servants of him who died for us and was raised again. We no longer look at things the way the world does. Christ's love compels us. We no longer live for ourselves but for him. We no longer are motivated by self-preservation, self-comfort, and fear. We are motivated by his love for all.

A few years ago, a major soft drink company received backlash. They showed people protesting and clashing with riot police. They then showed their soft drink being handed out to both sides of the fight. Suddenly everyone began getting along as if they were instant friends. People rightly objected to the company trivializing the world's hostility. It takes more than a cool drink to bring peace between warring sides in this world. There are real people hurting. There are real threats of violence. There are real broken families that hurt. And people are separated from God and living as his enemies. Peace must come through something far greater. It comes by the blood of him who loved and died for all.

Servants of the Lord, you have been reconciled to God and called to be his own. He now calls on all who are in Christ to restore peace as they proclaim what Christ has done. Join with me and all servants of the Lord as we urge on behalf of Christ as though God were speaking through us, "Be reconciled to God."