

MISSION

Group Discussion Guide – Week 2

WARM-UP

1. Have you ever gotten into an argument over something that was silly? Later, how did you reconcile?
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TRUTH

Read 2 Corinthians 5

Last week we discussed how our missionary God makes us into missionary people. Missionary people are marked by joy, by endurance, by prayer, and by being sent on the mission. This week we'll consider what that mission is: namely, to be ministers of reconciliation – reconciliation to God and to each other.

More Difficult Than We Think

"For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him." (2 Corinthians 5:2-9).

Paul understood that the mission is hard. Preaching the gospel that reconciles people to God is not easy. Living the gospel that reconciles us to each other is not fast.

Slow and difficult. That is the nature of the work of reconciliation. In vv 3-4, Paul longs for what is mortal to be swallowed up by life. That is a very interesting way to describe the future, but it matches his description of resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, when he says, "Death is swallowed up in victory." In other words, while the world, and even our bodies, are wasting away, Paul has his hope fixed firmly on the resurrection. Why? Because the work of reconciliation is hard.

Therefore, we walk by faith, and not by sight. When we feel torn apart by the broken things we see in the world – a serial killer bombing people in Austin, another unarmed black man shot for no reason – we *must* walk by faith. When the pain of these things threatens to tear us out of the church, we must walk by faith. The work of reconciliation isn't easy. It wasn't for Paul, and it won't be for us. Faith, firmly fixed on the resurrected future, fills us with courage so that we can "make it our aim to please him," (5:9).

- ▶ Why, according to the text, does Paul say that “in this tent, we groan?”
- ▶ What does Paul fix his hope on resurrection? Why is it dangerous to fix our hope only on what we see?
- ▶ Why is Paul “of good courage?” Why should we be?

GRACE

More Important Than We Know

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. 12 We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. 13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 14 For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:10-21)

The ministry of reconciliation has two sides: reconciling people to God, and reconciling God’s people to each other. We don’t get to choose which one of these we do. If we try to reconcile people to each other apart from the cross, we will at best have a godless, momentary success. If we try to reconcile people to God without ever speaking or working for reconciliation between people, we will, at best, have a sub-Christian kind of success.

The mission of reconciliation is more important than we may think, for a few reasons, according to Paul:

- We Will be Judged.

This isn’t a thought we like to think, but it’s true. We will *all* be judged. If we call ourselves Christians but don’t embrace the call to reconciliation, we will be held accountable for that. Knowing that, Paul sought to persuade others (v11), and so should we.

- We are Loved.

Because God loves us and gave himself for us, we can love others and give ourselves for them. The logic of v15 is clear. Embracing the call to reconciliation shows how seriously we take God’s love for us (v14).

- We are More than our Flesh.

The ministry of reconciliation means that everyone is more than what they appear to be. Before Christ, maybe you were a racist. Maybe you didn't much like folks from other countries. Maybe you preferred people of your own class. And, maybe you have psychologically understandable reasons for feeling that way. But the Jesus story demonstrates that humans are more than bodies. In Christ, we are new creation. While we retain our ethnicity, our proclivities, and our stories, we gain something new and altogether more central – we gain identity in Christ.

- We are Ministers of Ambassadors.

To be an ambassador for Christ doesn't mean we preach division, but reconciliation. This is a gift from God, and not ancillary to the Christian life.

- Jesus Embodied Reconciliation

Consider 2 Corinthians 5:21. Jesus, in his own body, reconciled God to the world by taking on all the covenant curses. There's just no way to believe that, and then to opt out of embodying the same kind of reconciliation *in* the world.

CHANGE

Paul encourages us to live as ministers of reconciliation in a few ways. We are to be of good courage (vv6, 8), to make it our aim to please God (v9), to live for God (v15), to persuade others (v11), and to not regard others according to their flesh (v16)

The ministry of reconciliation is difficult, slow, and fraught with danger. And, it's the call of gospel on Jesus' people.

- ▶ Of these encouragements listed above, which ones do you need to embrace this week?
- ▶ Are you tired of the work of reconciliation? What would Paul say to you, given what you've just read?
- ▶ Who are the people on your Faith for Five list? How can you be mission-minded this week?

PRAYER

- ▶ Pray for each person on your Faith for Five card, that God would move on their hearts.
- ▶ Pray for boldness and a revelation of Jesus in mission.