

April 11, 2021

## 6. Living by New Standards

### 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

I can think of few things worse than church conflict. My most painful experiences are connected to broken relationships resulting from disagreements about scriptural interpretation within Christian community. Eventually, I left the faith home I had grown up in and found a different community of Christ with which to fellowship. (Thanks for the welcome, Anabaptists!) Others left the church and their faith in Jesus. Rejection or damage inflicted in God's name or by God's people can feel like rejection or harm done by God. Those wounds go deep.

Conflict seems to be an unavoidable element of human experience, even (perhaps especially?) for those of us who are in Christ. Passion and zeal can become weaponized when our dearly held understandings and interpretations clash. The apostle Paul was no stranger to the pain of church conflict, and 2 Corinthians gives us a glimpse into the grueling work that reconciliation can be. Yet, the work of reconciliation is one of the primary responsibilities for those who are in Christ.

We, in Christ, are part of the new creation that has begun in Christ's resurrection. "Paul does not attempt to hide the conflict between the old and new, but rather highlights the tension. Paul sees the struggles of the church in light of larger cosmic conflict between God and all anti-God powers."<sup>1</sup> It's easy to be discouraged and overwhelmed by the struggles. It's easier to break off into camps and rub shoulders only with those who see things the way I do than to do the hard work of reconciliation. (Trust me, I know by experience.) Yet reconciliation is what we are to do above all else! We are tasked with this ministry (5:19). Reconciliation is what makes us ambassadors who represent Christ to the world (5:20).

It can be easy to become overwhelmed by the immensity of this task.

"All this is from God" (5:18). Maybe that is what makes new creation seem so daunting. Maybe it's something God can pull off, but it lies beyond our reach, our abilities. But we hold onto such reservations only by ignoring the plain sense of the sentence—all this is from God. It's God's desire for us, God's way for us, God's love for us that brings the possibility of new creation before us. We are not asked to do it on our own based on our own abilities. The call comes to us simply to step into what God has already done and to let that move us forward where God would have us go. "[God] reconciled us to [God's self] through Christ" (5:18). That is where new creation and new journeys begin.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Carla Works, "Commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:16-21," Working Preacher, March 10, 2013, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-in-lent-3/commentary-on-2-corinthians-516-21-3>.

2. Frank L. Crouch, "Commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:16-21," Working Preacher, March 31, 2019, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revise-common-lectionary/fourth-sunday-in-lent-3/commentary-on-2-corinthians-516-21-4>.

The situation between Paul and the Corinthians reveals to us the time and effort reconciliation can take. This rings true in my experience. I recently became aware of several challenges facing the congregation I had left a few years ago after my evolving faith resulted in me being excluded from the leadership structures there. While I was very hurt and angry, particularly with the pastor, when I heard of these recent challenges I was moved with a sense of compassion for that same pastor as he and his congregation face some momentous challenges. I don't know what shifted in me that enabled me to feel compassion for him, but I let that compassion move me to action. I sent a quick note and a gift card for a restaurant, acknowledging the extra stress he was carrying in this difficult season. Are we reconciled? I don't think we are yet. But I think we are one step closer. And I think that's the direction God would have us go as co-participants in Christ's new creation.

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*Looking for participant guide page numbers in the leader guide? The page numbers in the leader guide work for both guides.*

## Resources for this session

- A [Salt & Light Reproducible](#) is available for use with session 6.
- **Salt & Light Videos**  
**Kevin Ressler** is the presenter for unit 2, New Creation. These teaching videos are great for leader preparation or introducing each weekly session. They are available on [MennoMedia's YouTube channel](#).