

## God's Benefit Package (2)

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Preached September 20, 2009 by Dr. Dwight Kilbourne

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 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. 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. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**Introduction.** On Highway 68 about midway between Ducktown and Tellico Plains, there is a National Forest sign pointing to Buck Bald. If you were to turn onto the gravel road, you would wind your way around the incline until the road comes to an end. There you would find something that initially looks rather unimpressive – a grassy knoll with a couple of picnic tables and the remains of a fire tower. But if you walked 30 yards to the top, you would discover one of the most unique and glorious sights in East Tennessee. On the top of the bald,

you would be able to turn 360° and have an unobstructed view of the landscape. There are no trees, hills or structures to obstruct the view. It is possible to take a camera and snap a picture of the mountains, hills and valleys in every direction. (Personally, I do not know another location in this region where that is possible.)

This morning, I want to give you a “bald” view of salvation (you might interpret that a couple of ways with me preaching). I want to you to see the 360° perspective of salvation by looking at snapshots in each direction. Last week, we looked at several views – forgiveness, redemption, adoption and sanctification. This morning we will look at new creation, reconciliation and justification.

**New Creation.** Many of you remember the President Jimmy Carter days and the press that came out regarding his personal Christian faith. The campaigning Carter spoke openly and plainly about being a “born-again” Christian. The words, “born-again,” were quickly known by both religious and secular persons alike.

In the years that have followed, the words “born-again” have become a label of many that identify a particular *experience* or *theological ideology* within the Christian community. Unfortunately, it has sometimes been used to identify who is “in” and who is not with the Christian faith. At times it has been used in exclusive ways that divide the Christian family.

As a result of this, some have a significant affinity to the idea of new birth and enjoy looking at its landscape while others would prefer not to acknowledge it. The latter group would probably prefer to strike the words from the Christian vocabulary. While it is clear the words have not always been used in constructive ways, to get rid of them would be throwing out the baby with the bath water. Let's take a moment to examine this perspective.

When our sons were small and played games, they often wanted “do-overs.” I know that many of us adults do not outgrow this and want “do-overs” or “mulligans” when we play games. Doesn't it sound inviting to think of having a “do-over” in life? What if we could relive that time when we made a costly mistake or made a bad decision? What if we could start over again as parents? In marriage? As a student?

New creation or new birth has a similar feel to a “do-over” except we are afforded the opportunity to relive a given moment or time in our lives. We are given a fresh start before God. That fresh start in the Bible is often spoken of in terms of a “new covenant.” Remember the words in communion spoken about the cup – *This cup is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood* (Luke 22.20). It is a new agreement where God forgives our sins in Christ, writes his desires on our hearts, and we claim the Lord as our God.

But understand, it is much more than a fresh start. The new creation brings substantive change into our lives.

Creation assumes a creator. New creation is an act of the Creator. It is not a result of the creature remaking him or herself. God acts in Christ to affect change. That change is both instantaneous and progressive. In the previous chapter, Paul speaks of our being “renewed day by day.” This change happens in the way we think – our minds are transformed (Romans 12:2) and we begin looking at the world differently. (Have you found that as you have grown as a Christian, your view of life, the world and others has changed?) There is also change in how we live, how we act and how we relate to others (Romans 6:4).

A simple description of this comes in the supposed words of a rural gospel preacher: “I know I am not what I want to be, I know I am not what I ought to be but thank God, I am not what I used to be.”

George Wallace was a four-time governor of Alabama and four-time candidate for President who was

paralyzed from the waist down by a would-be assassin's bullet. Governor Wallace was long known for his staunch segregationist views. In the late 1970's, he made the claim that he had experience being born again as a Christian. During his next run for governor he acknowledged he had been wrong and asked forgiveness. He said he had sought power and glory but he realized he needed to seek love and forgiveness. When he was elected in 1983, he appointed a record number of blacks to state positions. (<http://askville.amazon.com/famous-comebacks-political-history/AnswerViewer.do?requestId=25229316>)

**Reconciliation.** Let's change our perspective a bit and look at another snapshot of salvation.

During the height of the Promise Keeper Men's movement, I attended an event in Knoxville where Rev. E. V. Hill, a prominent black pastor, from Watts, LA spoke. He spoke from our text. With a cadence and annunciation that was electric and moving, he spoke the word, "**RECONCILIATION.**" Taken up by the power of the moment and the passion of this man of God, I was all for it. I did not know fully what it meant, but I wanted it and to be a part of it.

Paul wrote that we are reconciled to God through Christ, Christ acts to reconcile the world to God and God makes us ministers of reconciliation. From these words, I hope you hear reconciliation is both personal and corporate. We play an important role as God's agents in this.

To reconcile basically means to change from being enemies to being friends. We commonly use the term in talking about restoring a broken marriage where a couple is at odds with one another, separated and/or divorced. If they come back together, resolve the issues that have divided them, renew their relationship then they have been reconciled.

In Romans 5, Paul wrote of God's amazing grace of reaching out to us when we least deserved it – while we were powerless and sinful. (Reconciliation generally takes place

when one party makes the move toward the other. In divine reconciliation, God makes the initial move toward us.) In verse 10, Paul wrote: *For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.* God reconciles us – changing us from enemies to his friends.

This ministry of reconciliation is not only directed at our relationship with God but also our relationship with each other.

Paul lived his life in two worlds – the Jewish world of his birth and the Gentile world. He knew there was great hostility between these two. For the most part the Jews wanted little to do with non-Jewish folks and considered them unclean. Yet Paul knew that Jesus, the Messiah, was Jewish and had sent him on a mission to share salvation with people who were not Jewish. In Ephesians 2, he wrote about this and how God has acted to reconcile them. He wrote that Jesus had acted to create *one humanity in the place of two, thus making peace and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross and putting to death that hostility through it* (15-16). God desires to bring all of humanity together as one humanity. This is reconciliation.

During my life, I have tasted this on several occasions. During our recent mission trip to Costa Rica, our team experienced this. We stayed at the Costa Rican Methodist Center. The caretakers of the center, David Sardinas and his wife Doralbis, showed us genuine hospitality and befriended us. By the time we left, we were friends. David and Doralbis are missionaries from Cuba – a country where there is long-standing enmity with our nation. God's reconciliation breaks down those barriers that separate us.

**Justification.** The final snapshot we will examine in our 360° is *justification*. Paul wrote that Christ became "sin" so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. This act of being made righteous is justification. Justice, righteousness and justification all come from the same root.

Basically justification in the Bible is a term related to the court. One is justified when the court rules in her or his favor.

After the OJ Simpson trial ended, I spoke with a friend who was/is a criminal defense attorney. I asked him about the trial, "What do you think?" He responded, "OJ is innocent. That is what the jury decided." Initially I wanted to argue with his conclusion, but he was right. In the eyes of that court, he was innocent. The court ruled in his favor. While OJ may have committed the crime, he was not found guilty.

In view of justification, God acts as our judge and the jury. Our case is brought before God with Jesus being our attorney. God reviews the case in light of Jesus' actions – his death on the cross. He passes the judgment and acquits us. It is not that we have not sinned nor even that Jesus' sinlessness becomes ours. Rather God declares we are righteous. It is the status given by the court.

**Summary.** There is nothing more important to every human being and all of creation than salvation. To understand and experience it is life now and life forever. Let's take a quick scan of the 360° view of salvation that is made possible through Jesus Christ:

- God chooses to adopt us into his family as daughters and sons
- God forgives our sins – releasing us from the guilt and pardoning us fully
- God redeems our lives and the world – God releases us and the world from those forces that hold us back from being what He desires we be
- God makes us holy – sets us apart to live for the praise of his glory and to become all he desires
- Through Christ, we are a new creation – this is both instantaneous and progressive
- God reconciles us to himself and to each other
- God declares we are righteous before him

**Invitation.** The fullness of salvation is nearly too rich to fully appreciate. Yet it is something God enables us to fully appreciate. Have you received the full measure of salvation? If not, I would like to lead you in a prayer.

Father, thank you for the gift of salvation through Jesus. I ask you to save me to the fullest extent. Grant that I would receive the fullness of salvation through Jesus Christ. I give myself fully to you. Amen.