

INTRODUCTION

Last week we tried to get our minds around one truth: ***The church is a living thing.*** It sounds kind of weird. What makes this organization of people a living creature in its own right? Well, it starts with this *first* component; it is made up of people who are who are *spiritually alive*. Ok, that sounds good; but what does it mean to be “spiritually alive?”

THE PLACE OF “RECONCILED”: SALVATION

Romans 10:10 tells us; if we confess with our mouth and believe in our heart that Christ is Lord, we will be **saved**. So “spiritually alive” starts with being “saved.” Let’s take a quick look at that. We are going to read a few verses, but you’re **not allowed to read the whole sentence, just yet**; ready?

2 Cor 5

18. Now all things are of God, who has **reconciled** us to Himself through Jesus Christ... (don’t read any further... just yet.)

The whole concept of salvation and spiritual life revolves around this word “reconciled.” What exactly is “reconciled?”

Let’s consult “Mr. Webster and see what he says:

1. To reestablish a close relationship.
2. To settle or resolve.
3. To bring (oneself) to accept: *He finally reconciled himself to the changes.*
4. To make compatible or consistent: *reconcile my way of thinking with God’s.*

What close relationship is Corinthians talking about?

2 Cor 5

19. that is, that God was in **Christ, reconciling the world to Himself**, not imputing their trespasses to them... (don’t read any further... just yet)

The close relationship is with God. At one time, humanity had a very close relationship. That “wiring” is still in us. It was so much a part of the human makeup that when we lost it, we continued to hunger for it. In fact, every human culture on the planet tried to find some way to approach God.

But our hunger has also been our failure; our religions have relied on our own efforts.

There is only one faith system where God has reached to us. It succeeds because it is God’s effort; **For God so loved the world that He gave...** (He reconciled.)

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

EXPLAIN RECONCILED TO GOD IN YOUR OWN WORDS

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF “RECONCILED”: PURPOSE

So far our verses have told us the **heartbeat of the living church is our reconciliation to God**. Now, let’s finish those sentences and see where it leads.

2 Cor 5

18. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and **has given us the ministry of reconciliation...**

2 Cor 5

19. that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and **has committed to us the word of reconciliation.**

There is an amazing pattern here that we see God use again and again:

The concept starts out; we personally, have been reconnected to God, by God. **So, it all points right to God.** (*It’s an intimate thing, you and God.*)

But then **God takes the concept and turns it 180 degrees back to us**. Now, because we have been reestablished in our relationship with God (“reconciled”) we are **given a new purpose:**

We are now committed to spread that word of reconciliation. “He has given us the **ministry of reconciliation.**”

Given the “ministry”; what exactly does that mean?

Ministry in the original Greek is **diakonia** (dee-ak-on-ee'-ah) *It’s where we get the word, “deacon.”*

It Means: (*as a servant, etc.*); *figuratively, giving charity or aid, (official) service, office, relief, serving.*

If you are spiritually alive, you have become a “minister”, everyone is a **deacon**. You are to offer relief. Being a servant is your *office* or job. Your calling is to help **reestablish a close relationship between other people and God.**

Unity becomes the purpose of your life- it’s your aim; you are characterized by it; you exude it; you nurture it; you serve it up daily... unity.

When God turns this concept of reconciliation back on us, **it goes from private to public**. It is what we are in the world; it’s what we do in the world.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

EXPLAIN SOME WAYS THAT YOU CAN CARRY OUT YOUR MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

HOW DOES THE CONCEPT OF LIVING CHURCH AND RECONCILIATION FIT TOGETHER?

THE LIVING CHURCH: INTENSELY HUMAN

Ok, so the concept of reconciliation says our spiritual life centers on serving; but serving who?

1 John 4

20. If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

21. And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

When the passage says "brother," who is it talking about?

Brother in the original language: **adelphos** (ad-el-fos')

It means: "a" (as a connective particle) and *delphus* (the womb); (literally or figuratively) near or remote.

It means your brother is any person who comes out of the womb!

So here is what the concepts of "reconciliation" teach us about God's "living church": it is **intensely human!** In fact it is proven or disproven by the nature and level of its "**human connectedness**."

We serve God through other people. To a major extent, we even **connect** with God through other people. The worship service should be intensely human in connection (*TV, radio, and the internet may offer good teaching, but they are not church.*) The church activities are human connection; the goals and visions involve human connection.

From the beginning, the connection with God has always traveled through other people:

Luke 2

10. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good **tidings of great joy which will be to all people**. (That was the claim by which God came into the world.)

Mark 10

1. Then He arose from there and came to the region of Judea by the other side of the Jordan. And the **people gathered to Him again**, and as He was accustomed, He taught them again.

2Cor 6

16. ... For **you are the temple of the living God**. As God has said: "**I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.**"

1 Peter 2

5. you also, as **living stones**, are being built up a spiritual house... (collectively)

At one time, the temple was a stone structure. Now it's a "**living temple**", **it is a temple of human lives**, just like the lives in here right now.

God's living church is made up of human lives. As we let that sink in, **consider some of the implications:**

1. The physical temple was made of hand hewn stones. Each would be a little bit different, **so they were placed with deliberation**; each one the **best fit**. Each one where it should be. God has deliberately placed you here, **for a reason**. He has placed others where they are for a reason. **It is part of our calling to learn that reason.**

2. Hand hewn stones are **imperfect**; they have **rough edges**. What happens when you put rough edges close together? They rub on each other. They polish down the rough edges. And when they do that; the structure is even stronger!

But you know what, having your rough edges ground down is **seldom a pleasant experience**. Learning hard lessons; learning to grow up and deal with others is seldom fun, but it **is** good for you. And even more importantly, it's good for the "temple." ... *Which brings us to another important implication...*

3. **Stones aren't meant to be mobile**. You may rearrange the furniture, but you don't rearrange the bricks in your wall! But we tend to do a lot of that in our western church. The "living stones" transplant themselves all the time. And here is the tragedy in that: When we move out when the rubbing gets too uncomfortable, we never really get polished!

When the refining process gets a little too uncomfortable, we **go somewhere else and start over**. And we might do fine there until we hit the **same lesson** in that place, and off we go again.

Learn what lessons? It might be growing in commitment; it might be a personal flaw that is keeping you back from the higher calling God has for you. It might be you have to learn to get along with certain other **types of "living stones."** It might be a hidden sin that isn't readily discovered, so you never have to be accountable. It may be in dealing with something unfair that's not even your fault.

Here's the thing: The power in Christianity is following Christ to the cross. There is such power in the cross, that it even conquered death. But here's a news flash; the cross of Christ was **not fair** or **comfortable**. It's just **eternal life**.

4. This one is a mystery to me: **God has given us incredible power on and in His most loved bride**, the church. Here's what I mean:

Gal 5

20. ... outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, **dissensions**, heresies,

21. envy, murders, drunkenness, ... **those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

Some of these sins are implied outside the church, such as murder; and some don't make sense unless we are speaking inside the church such as dissension. **What is dissension?** Here's a great dictionary description:

- "mean disagreement with the majority opinion"
- "not only strong dissatisfaction but a determined opposition"

Dissenters in the church are ranked with murderers. That's a powerful indictment! Now check out this verse:

Romans 12

4. Just as there are many parts to our bodies, so it is with Christ's body. We are all parts of it, and **it takes every one of us to make it complete**, for we each have different work to do. So we belong to each other, and **each needs all the others.**

What each of us can do isn't simply a nice thing, it is **needed**. That's a powerful exhortation! Put the two extremes together and you discover this:

A person; in their words, attitude, and action, **can cause great harm or great help to Christ's body**, the church. **Each of us wields a lot of power.** But with power comes **accountability**. If we tear others down; we will answer for it. And if we lift others up; we will be commended for it.

This is so important a truth in the living church, that **Christ says this:**

Matt 25

40. "And ... inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My **brethren, you did it to Me.**" (What you do to even the least person, you have done directly to Jesus. That's some pretty serious stuff!)

The point to take away today is this: The living church is intensely human.

Christ lives, or doesn't live, in the interaction between people. People are so inherent to the design that, what we do to people, **we are doing to Christ Himself!**

It would be really wise for us to take a moment: Think about how you've been treating people lately; fellow church members, those watching your faith, spouses, your children; has it been as if they were Christ? Putting it another way: Would you tell Christ to "shut up?" Would you complain behind His back? Would you attack Him verbally or even physically? Here's a scary news flash: **If that's your behavior, that's exactly what you are doing.**

One reason the church is a *living thing* is because it is *living people* who are *living spiritually* with the realization that *Christ does, and desires, to live in other people*. So, for the sake of our living church; **how have you been treating Jesus lately?** ...Let's pray about it.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

HOW DO THE "LIVING STONES" SOMETIMES TEAR EACH OTHER DOWN; BUILD EACH OTHER UP?

WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DON'T SEE THE POWER GOD HAS GIVEN US WITHIN HIS LIVING TEMPLE?

UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES SHOULD SOMEONE LEAVE A LOCAL CHURCH?
WHAT CHALLENGES WOULD YOU SAY, ARE NOT A BIBLICAL REASON FOR LEAVING?

WHAT ARE SOME OTHER IMPLICATIONS OF THE FACT THAT THE LIVING CHURCH IS INTENSELY HUMAN?