

Assignment Title: Interpretive/exegetical Paper on 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2

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## **Introduction**

### **Thesis**

The passage of ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2) is extracted from the letter written by Paul to the Corinthians, arguing God initiated the reconciliation between sinners and Himself through Christ. Paul and apostles were commissioned to persuade others to be reconciled to God.

### **The Literary Genre of 2 Corinthians**

The genre of 2 Corinthians is a Greco-Roman period letter. It differs from common personal letters as it is addressed to a Christian community, and is written by one claiming apostolic authority. However, the letter follows the broad structure of ancient letters with the traditional address and greeting, followed by a thanksgiving section, the body of the letter, and concludes with greetings.

### **Background**

Corinth lays at the crossroads of two important trade routes. By Paul's time, the location of Corinth and the opportunities to prosper as a result of the control of the trade routes attracted many people of different nationalities to the new city. It became a center for the worship of the old Greco-Roman gods (Kruse 24-28).

Paul wrote this apologia letter to the Corinthians to defend his apostleship and persuade them to be reconciled with God (Martin 166-67). Challenges to Paul included the intruding apostles (2:17-3:1; 5:11-13; 11:13-23) criticized Paul's apostolate, unskilled in speaking (11:5-6), lacked apostolic signs (12:11-12), and attacked Paul's integrity in financial matters (Barnett, 317 & 183).

## **Commentary and Interpretation**

### **NRSV II Corinthians 5:11-6:2 (NRSV-New Revised Standard Version)**

5:11 Keener (183) stated that the knowledge of future judgment provided the fear of the Lord to carry out Paul's apostolic mission. Fearing God is a prominent Old Testament basis

for Jewish people. However, Kruse stated that although Paul is not afraid of the Lord, he has a ‘reverential awe’ of God and knowing that his ministry will come under God’s scrutiny. Most likely, this is Paul’s apologetic statement to the Corinthians: “*Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others.*” That is why Paul can be so forceful and intense to persuade others. Kruse listed two possible ways to understand Paul’s reference to persuade others. First, the awareness of his accountability to God motivates him to be diligent in his efforts to bring about in them the obedience of faith. Second, Paul assures his persuasion does not sacrifice the truth to please his hearer; that is, his persuasion carried out with a proper fear of the Lord. The second understanding receives support from the words that follow: “*but we ourselves are well known to God.*” Paul’s motives and actions lie open before God, who sees there is no deception involved in his attempts to persuade people.

” *and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences.*” Here Paul appeals to the consciences of the Corinthians (cf. 4:2) in the hope that they will recognize his integrity when they listen, not to the criticism of others, but the testimony of their conscience (Kruse, 163). For Paul, conscience is a human faculty whereby people either approve or disapprove of their activities and those of others (Thrall, *Syneidesis*, 118-125). On the one hand, Paul is very sensitive about self-commendation (cf. 3:1; 10:18), and some of the criticism directed against him was likely related to this. He is responding to objections and appeals for them to see him as God does. On the other hand, Paul’s polemic against the intruders engaged in self-commendation (Keener, 162). A Christian’s conscience is the norm of God’s past and present revelation (Kruse, 99). The Lord, who would judge them, knew their hearts (5:11b), and it was that invisible heart rather than the appearance that mattered (5:12; cf. 4:18). The Corinthians, too, should know Paul’s heart (5:11b), for it is open wide to them (6:11; 7:3). However, the final judgment belongs only to God (cf. 1 Cor. 4:2-5).

5:12 “*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.*” Paul is aware that some people in Corinth are critical of his motives and methods. He is defending his integrity so that his converts may be able to deal with the criticisms of those people. “the servants of Christ ought to be concerned for their own reputation only is so

far as it is for the advantage of the Church” (Calvin 72). Paul is not reintroducing himself to the Corinthians as an apostle. He is merely allowing his audience to boast about their founder, Paul, as he has bragged about them to the Macedonians (1:14; 7:14; 9:2-3) (Garland, 273). Had they defended his honor as they should have, he would not be compelled to do so (12:11)! If he boasts, then, it is for their good only (10:8), and only within limits (10:13-17; 11:30; 12:5-6) (Keener, 183).

In both Chapters 1-7 and 10-13, we can see these intruding apostles prided of their outward matters. These included the letters of recommendation they carried (3:1), their rhetorical prowess (11:5-6), Jewish ancestry (11:22), ecstatic visionary experiences (12:1), and the apostolic signs they performed (12:11-13). Polemically, Paul implies that for these intruding apostles, such outward matters were more important than the condition of a person’s heart, which is what God sees (Kruse, 163-164).

5:13     *“For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.”* The intruding apostle may be accusing Paul of some kind of mental instability or madness. Or those in Corinth who thought highly and confidently of their outward status could have regarded Paul as abnormal. In Acts 26:24-25, the Roman governor, Festus, accuses Paul of madness, and Paul responds that he is in the right mind (Garland 275-276). Paul is not insane; he is only saying the truth and fact. At the same time, Paul affirms that all he does is for God, or the Corinthians, and not for himself. According to Barrett, the verb *existemi* can be referred to as “ecstasy” (Acts 10:10; 11:5; and 22:17) and is used in Acts 22:17 to describe a vision Paul had in Jerusalem (Garland 274-275). Here, Paul is alluding to religious ecstasy expressed in mystical experiences and speaking in tongues. Paul distinguishes the rare moments of spiritual rapture when he is in special communion with God from his normal, rational state when he communicates to humans. Paul makes such a distinction in 1 Cor. 14:2-4 too. Neither Paul’s ecstatic experiences nor his rational experiences are for his benefit or glory, but *“it is for you,”* the believers in the Corinth (Barrett 166-67).

In response to criticism that Paul lacked supernatural power, especially the gift of tongues. He responds, “if we do experience ecstasy, that is something between God and us, not

something to be displayed before others as proof of the spiritual character.” (1 Cor. 12). It is not something to brag about in support of the validity of his ministry. Paul states that even if we are mad, that is the result of our faithfulness to God in preaching a pure gospel. But if we are in our right mind (and use reasonable, intelligible speech), that is for your sake (Kruse 165). Paul says that he regretted sending off the strong language letter (2 Cor. 7:8). But between himself and God, this vigorous rebuke is a well-intentioned attempt to reconcile them not only to Paul but also to God (Garland 275-276).

5:14 *“For the loves of Christ urges us on,”* What drives Paul to dedicate himself to God and others? It is not his agenda or need for power, but Christ’s love and death for all. While Christ’s love came first in giving his life for others, Paul responds to this divine compassion with his own life and love (Garland, 277). Humans did not select Christ to die for us; God did. Therefore, Christ’s submission to God’s will is a supreme act of self-giving love (Kruse, 279). It is the exceptional character of Christ’s love that moved Him to die in our place, which also empowered Paul’s ministry work. (cf. Gal. 2:20 “and it is no longer I who live, but is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”) (Kruse, 278-279). The source of love can be constructed either as Paul’s love for Christ, or Christ’s love for Paul. In light of what follows (14b-15 where Paul speaks of Christ’s death for all), the second option is to be preferred. It is Christ’s love shown in His death for all which so profoundly influenced Paul and motivated him to give his whole life in the tireless zeal to his ministry (Kruse 165).

Paul states, *“because we are convinced that one has died for (hyper) all,”* which means Christ died instead of all. This interpretation preserves the logical connection with what follows: *“therefore, all have died.”* Only the death of Christ could redeem us from the curse of the law; the death of a mere human being could never achieve this. R.V.G. Tasker in his *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 86 argued that “Christ’s death was the death of all in the sense that they should have died; the penalty of their sins was borne by Him (1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:20); he died in their place.” The human race is liable to death because of their sin and that God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to deal with sin and to restore sinner (Rom. 8:3). “Christ

died, therefore all died” only makes sense if Christ died as the proxy or substitute for all humanity. The context suggests that it has a substitutionary meaning.

“We can say that one died as a representative of all and brought benefits to all because that one died instead of all.” (Garland 279). **J.D.G. Dunn**, in his *Understanding of the Death of Jesus as Sacrifice* “further elaborates the representative view of Jesus’ death. He contends that “substitution” tells only half the story: “There is, of course, an important element of Jesus taking the place of others—that, after all, is at the heart of the sacrificial metaphor...It is rather that Christ’s sharing their death makes it possible for them to share his death. The sense of a continuing identification with Christ in and beyond his death.” The essence of the gospel comes from the truth that in Christ, God became one with the human race, that he died for all, and his resurrection breaks the stranglehold of death (Garland 278-279). The next question is whether Paul sees Christ’s death as representative (“on behalf of us,” “for our benefit”) or substitutionary (“in our place”). Hooker (“Interchange in Christ,” 358) argues for the representative position: “It is a man’s *representative*, rather than as his substitute. Christ suffers only as one who is fully human that he can do anything effective for humanity, by lifting man, as it were, into an obedient relationship with God (Garland 301). McLean (*The Cursed Christ: Mediterranean Expulsion Rituals and Pauline Soteriology*, 112) argues that “Christ does not become human to stand in solidarity with humanity but to stand in its place and to participate in a twofold imputation. He receives the burden of humanity’s sin, while humanity receives God’s justification (Garland 301). McLean claimed that the substitutionary idea fits widespread apotropaic rituals in the Mediterranean. He concludes that “Christ becomes a transgressor through an act of substitution.” (McLean, 112).

5:15 “*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.*” This restatement of 5:14 suggests that Paul refers to all believers who die to themselves with Christ. Paul implies death here to be more than the forensic definition. When we accept by faith the message of reconciliation that Jesus’s death proclaims, we die with Christ, and we escape the law’s judgment and the clutches of death. “You should no longer live for yourself and thereby shifts the debate from its turbulent you-versus-me to Christ-versus-us axis” (Minear. “Some Thoughts on Dying.” 101-2). Christian live only for

Christ. Thereby, Christians give up their rights for the good of others and do not insist on having their way. Accordingly, Christ controls Paul's life so that he is driven to serve others, particularly, the Corinthians (Garland 280-281).

5:16 *"From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view;"* The Corinthians assessed Paul's ministry according to the Greco-Romanic view that they were accustomed to. Paul confesses that viewing reality and persons from a human perspective are superficial criteria, which led to misjudgment. As the Corinthians now misjudged Paul, so he once misjudged Christ too. Paul now sees others according to his new understanding of Christ (Rom. 14:8-12) and therefore acknowledges that all his previous judgments of Jesus were wrong (Garland, 281).

*"even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way."* This statement has generated several different interpretations. One prominent view that Paul had no interest in the historical Jesus he only interested in the exalted Christ of heaven. However, some considerations make this view weak. Paul has cited the tradition of what Jesus said about divorce in his advice on marriage and divorce (1 Cor. 7:12). He also mentioned the tradition of Jesus' last supper (1 Cor. 11:23-25). The tradition of what the earthly Jesus said and did was important and authoritative and not an insignificant part of Paul's preaching (Garland, 282). Christ cannot be considered apart from the historical Jesus." (Fraser, *Paul's knowledge of Jesus*, 299). Paul does not reject the understanding of "Christ after the flesh," just an "according to the flesh" view of Christ (Garland 283).

Paul realized the significance of the death of Christ – *"one has died for all; therefore, all have died"* (v. 14) – the love of Christ expressed in his death for all was not only the motivating force in his life but also changed his whole outlook (cf. Phil. 3:4-8). Before his conversion, Paul would have regarded Jesus as a false Messiah from a Jewish perspective that whose followers should be stamped out. After conversion, he knew Jesus was God's Messiah and to whom all people must be called to respond in the obedience of faith (Kruse, 168). In conclusion, Paul simply rejected his pre-conversion understanding of Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 15:9).

5:17 “*So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:*” Paul assumes that being in Christ should bring about a radical change in a person’s life. “*there is,*” implies that a new situation has come into being. In this context, Paul is talking about changing one’s way of looking at things. Later-rabbinic texts (*Joseph and Asenath* 15:4) refer to proselytes becoming new creatures, and a similar idea may have been part of Paul’s thinking. The concept of a new creation appears prominently in Jewish apocalyptic texts that picture the new age as a new heaven and a new earth. The translation of “*there is a new creation*” would mean that the new creation does not merely involve the personal transformation of individuals but includes the eschatological act of recreating humans and nature in Christ. Christians see the world in a new way and become new when they are joined to Christ. Beasley-Murray (*2 Corinthians*, 42) comments, “United to the risen Lord, the believer participates in the new creation of which Christ is the fount and the life.”

Paul declared that Christians are being transformed (3:16, 18; 4:16-17) and becomes a new creation “*The old has gone.*” Again, this phrase can be interpreted to refer to the “old order” or to everything that controlled the individual’s pre-Christian existence. Both are true. The old order is passing off the stage (1 Cor. 7:31). The individual’s whole being, value system, and behavior are also changed through conversion. We are dead to sin but alive to God in Christ (Rom. 6:11) (Garland 286-287). Paul was not interested in a human perspective on Christ or Christians (5:16), but the hidden, eschatological reality of resurrection life that had begun in Christ’s resurrection (Keener 185). The great significance of Christ’s work is to live in the sphere of Christ’s power, to be united to Christ, and to be a member of the Christian community through baptism. Paul stresses its significance: the person in Christ is a new creation, so that it may be said, “*everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!*” When people are in Christ, Paul stressed that they have the newness of life in Christ now, rather than the limitations and the tension involved in participating in the new creation while still living as part of the old. (Kruse, 168)

5:18 “*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ,*” Paul’s appeal to the Corinthians. *All this* new creation (5:17) comes from God and is the result of a reconciliation effected by Christ’s death (5:14-15; Rom. 5:10), and actualized by embracing the

apostolic proclamation. God's wrath against the wickedness of humanity had to be dealt with (cf. Rom. 1:18; 5:9-11). What is stressed in the passage is the amazing grace of God, who initiates to took action in Christ to remove the obstacle to reconcile with humanity.

*“and has given us the ministry of reconciliation;”* Paul's ministry of reconciliation is the life-giving ministry of the new covenant (3:6-9; 6:3). Through Christ, God has already reconciled us to Himself. However, the preaching of reconciliation has to be carried out, and people must hear the call to be reconciled to God. Unless they respond to that call, they cannot experience reconciliation (Kruse 169-170). In Roman politics and ancient Mediterranean culture in general, friendship included accepting the friend's friends as one's friends and his enemies as one's enemies (e.g., *Iamblichus Pyth Life* 35-248-49). Humanity was estranged from God because of its sin. God is the one who initiates the reconciling activity (cf. Rom. 5:10-11; 11:15; Cor. 5:18-20; Col. 1:19-22). Reconciliation involves the restoration of friendly relationships after estrangement. To reconcile with God, the Corinthians must trust God's agent Jesus Christ (cf. 6:14-16; Matt 10:40; Ex. 16:8), and respond with faith on Him.

5:19 *“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.”* Paul is reiterating God's role in initiating and through the agency of Christ that God reconciled humanity to Himself and effective only in those who respond positively to the message of reconciliation. The reconciling plan of God is manifested in two movements: the first is His reconciliation of the world in Christ, and the second is his call to people to be reconciled on that basis through his messengers, Paul, and apostles. This blessing, Paul further explains, is not restricted to Jew, but is pronounced over all who believe, including Gentile (Rom. 4:9-12).

5:20 *“So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us;”* In Greco-Roman time, ambassadors had complete immunity from adverse treatment. Envoys in ancient times usually functioned to establish goodwill and positive relationship. Very often, ambassadors worked to gain the goodwill of a more powerful figure like the Roman emperor. Those selected to go on embassies usually were not career diplomats but people of status in the

community who often served at their own expense. Therefore, many did not want to be an ambassador (Garland, 295).

In contrast to the Greco-Roman world's concept of ambassador, God does not wait for humanity to make their appeals to Him but sends out ambassadors, Paul, and apostles, to make appeals to humanity. Although Paul suffers a lot as the ambassador of God, he does not consider being an ambassador of Christ a problematic task. He finds it as an enormous privilege to become part of God's saving enterprise in the world (Garland, 296-297). Similar to the Greco-Roman period understanding of ambassador, Paul wants to appeal the Corinthians to see him as an ambassador of Christ, or Christ's spokesman. Paul does not act on his own authority but under the commission of a higher power and authority. He spoke in God's name and with His authority (cf. 10:8; 13:10; 1 Thess. 2:6; 4:2), so that when he preached the gospel, people experienced the word of God at work in their heart through the ministry of the Spirit (1 Thess. 1:4; 2:13). He is entrusted with establishing goodwill and building a positive relationship between Humanity and God. If the Corinthians fail to note Paul's remonstrations with them, they turn their backs not just on Paul but on God. This implication is a crucial issue in this section. Paul, therefore, understands himself to be divinely authorized to announce to the world God's terms for peace (Garland 295).

*“we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”* Paul is calling the Christians in Corinth to be reconciled to God (6:1; 13:5). Remind them not to straddle the fence between the world and God's agent (6:14-7:1). Like a good rhetorician, Paul intends to appeal the Corinthians to see him as the ambassador of God. (Keener 187). God takes the initiative to reconcile the world to Himself through the death of his Son. Paul appealed to people, through his ambassador, to be reconciled to God.

5:21 *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin,”* The New Testament proclaims that Christ was without sin. Galatians 3:13 offers a similar parallel: Paul asserts that Christ became a curse so that blessing might come to others. This statement matches what Paul says here: Christ became sin so that others might become the righteousness of God. Paul depicts Christ's death as a kind of cultic sacrifice in Rom 3:25 and 1 Cor. 5:7. There are problems with

this view here. The word *hamartia* does not have the meaning “sin offering” elsewhere in the New Testament. If Paul intends that meaning here, then he uses the word with two entirely different meanings in the same sentence. Paul, therefore, wants to say that Christ is made a sinner here (Garland 300-1). Paul describes Christ as one *who had no sin*. There are consistent witnesses of the New Testament that Jesus did not sin (cf. Matt. 27:4, 24; Luke 23:47; John 8:46; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:22). Only a sinless one could, through his death, be the agent of reconciliation (cf. I Pet. 1:19). What Paul stresses is that God made the sinless one be sin for our sake.

“so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” In seeking to understand what it means to become the righteousness of God, we receive assistance from other passages where Paul touches upon the same subject (Rom. 3:21-26; Phil. 3:7-9). The righteousness of God can be understood as a right relationship with God because of the death of Christ in sinners’ place. God has adjudicated humanity in their favor by refusing to take account of their sins (Kruse, 173). What is credited or given the believer is not “moral righteousness” but a “right standing and a justified or acquitted status” before God (N.T. Wright, *Justification*, 92).

Piper (*Counted Righteous*, 99) argues that “Adam’s sin is imputed to all of his heirs as the basis for their condemnation, so Christ’s righteousness is imputed to all believers as the basis for their justification.” There are two flaws with this argument: 1. Paul does not explicitly say sin imputed to all humanity. 2. Adam and Christ have impacted humanity in different ways, not the mechanics of how the impact was expressed (Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 269-95).

Paul in 2 Corinthians 3:9 contrasts the ministry based on the Mosaic Covenant/Law, which brought condemnation (*katakrisis*) with the ministry based on Christ/the Spirit, which brings justification/acquittal (*dikasiosunē*). It suggested that Paul uses (*dikasiosunē*) to described the justified status which we received as a gift from God. Also, Paul uses (*dikasiosunē*) in Romans 5:17, Galatians 2:21, and Philippians 3:9 to describe the gift/justified status received through faith in Christ. Gordon Fee (*Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 326) also concluded what is given the believer as a gift is a soteriological status/a right standing and a justified or acquitted status, not moral righteousness.

Genesis 15:6 Abraham was justified by faith before being circumcised. God responded to Abraham's faith by crediting him with the gift of a soteriological status, i.e., justification. Paul says that this was written for us so that "it will be credited to us who believe in Him who raised Jesus from the dead. In Romans 4:4: "But to the one who does not work but believes the one who justifies *dikaioō* the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for *dikasiosunē*," which means God responds to a person's faith with the gift of a justified or acquitted status. Within this context, the verb *dikaioō* and noun *dikasiosunē* refer to justification/acquittal. Nothing suggests that the verb refers to forensic justification, while the noun refers to imputed moral righteousness, which is the basis for justification. Moo (*Romans*, 88) also takes the view that all uses of *dikasiosunē* in Romans 4 have a soteriological (forensic) status in view. In 5:19, Paul says that God reconciles the world to Himself, and this is done by "*not counting their trespasses against them.*" Likewise, in Roman 4:4, God responds to the person's faith with the gift of a justified or acquitted status. In conclusion, the noun *dikasiosunē* consistently refers to the gift of a soteriological status, and the contextual evidence suggests that this status is one of being justified or acquitted. The gift of a justified status is given to the person who has faith in Jesus (Shellrude, *Imputation in Pauline Theology: Christ's Righteousness or a Justified Status?*).

6:1 "As we work together with Him." Most translations assume that (*synergountes*) is referred to as "working together" with God. Paul in here could have referred to his human coworkers, but since this phrase follows: 5:20, where Paul asserts that God gave him a ministry of reconciliation and that God makes his appeal through him, then Paul surely has in mind working with God. This statement reminds the Corinthians of Paul's divine commission and authority while also asserting that what he does is God's work, not his. (Garland 304)

"we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain." Paul appeals to the believers in Corinth to reconciled to God. He does not want the lives of those who responded positively to the gospel to disconnect from Christ and even losing their salvation (Kruse, 176). Therefore, he pleads his converts not to accept the grace of God in vain (6:1-13), but to open their hearts to their apostle (6:11-13; 7:2-4) (Kruse,176). Paul is saying, in effect, "You have been caught up in God's eschatological and saving purposes; do not let that have been in vain." (Paul Barnett, 316).

6:2 “For he says, “At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.” See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation.” Plummer (*The second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 190-91) suggests that Paul turned to the passage in Isaiah 49:8 maybe because Isaiah’s case resembled his own. “Although men despise him, God will honor him by confirming his message, and God who has had compassion on Israel despite their sins will have compassion on all the nations.” Danker thinks that Paul understands himself to be like the servant as Isaiah. God has raised Paul as a mouthpiece to comfort and reprimand the Corinthians. A.T. Hanson (*The Paradox of the Cross in the Thought of St. Paul*, 56) argues that Paul applies the citation to the Corinthians because he wishes to assure “the Corinthians that share in the sufferings of Christ, so they are also to share in his vindication.” But the purpose of the passage seems more on the defense of Paul than assurance for the Corinthians. Paul introduces a quotation from Isaiah 49:8a “*Thus says the Lord: In a time of favor I have answered you, on a day of salvation I have helped you;*” Paul makes his application: “*See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation.*” If the time of the exiles’ return was a day of salvation, then the time when God acted in Christ to reconcile the world to Himself is the day of salvation too. When the Corinthians heard the gospel, that was the day of salvation for them. For Paul and other New Testament writers, the idea of salvation means looked forward to the return of Christ as the day on which salvation would be consummated (cf. Rom. 13:11, 1 Thess. 5:8-9; Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 1:5).

### **Conclusion**

Paul speaks of two things that motivated him in his ministry: (1) The fear of the Lord. (2) The love of Christ. Paul was convinced that if Christ died for all, then *all died*, which means Christ died in all sinners’ places. God regards Christ's death as the punishment that sinners deserved, and in this way, Christ effected their salvation (5:14). Because Christ has died for all, Christians can no longer regard others from a worldly point of view (5:16). Christ’s death for them demonstrated the high value placed upon them by God. Those who respond positively to the gospel becoming part of “the new creation” and begin experiencing its blessings (5:17). As a result, God can now decide in their favor, granting them a right standing in His sight (5:18-21). Paul was commissioned as an ambassador of Christ. Through his ministry, God made His appeal

for others to be reconciled to Him (5:20). Paul's role as ambassador of Christ is for the benefit of his audience so that their relationship with God can be fully restored. Finally, he urges the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God in vain (1-2).

The possibility that those who have benefited from Christ's death and resurrection return to living for themselves was the path taken by many Paul's associates (Phil. 2:21; 2 Tim. 4:10). What kept Paul on the right path, and will keep us there too, is an awareness of the exceptional character of Christ's love for us. We love Him and desire to live for Him as we realized that He loved us and gave Himself for us (cf. Gal. 2:20) (Kruse 167). God makes his appeal through apostles still valid for two millennia after he sent these words to the Corinthians through Paul. His words remain forceful and convincing and can be ignored only at a high price (Garland 298). God uses ambassadors like Paul to continue that agenda: to call people to be reconciled to God, to make known that God does not count their sins against them, and that God loves them and yearns for them to repent (Garland 304).

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