

2 Cor. 5:16-6:2

I. Everything has changed (16-17)

A. Our view of everything has changed (16)

1. The result is that from now on, we know no one according to flesh (16a)

Paul begins this passage with “The result is...” or “Therefore...” (depending on the translation). This is a marker that the following information is a direct result of what had been previously stated. In the previous verses, Paul wrote that Christ died, and so, this fact had consequences for everything and everyone. One of those results is that we should no longer live for ourselves, but for Him (Jesus), Who died for us and was raised again. The cross and resurrection changed everything, and this passage continues to elaborate on the consequences of Christ’s death and resurrection.

“From now on” means from the time that we heard and believed in Christ. Once we realize the truth about Christ, we cannot ever think the same way again, because our entire outlook should rightly change. As he wrote in v. 14, “because we are convinced that [Christ] died, the love of Christ compels us.” But the ultimate referent of “from now on” is the death and resurrection of Christ. Because of what Christ accomplished, the world is no longer the same. And therefore, we cannot look at the world the same way ever again.

“According to flesh” means that we no longer know anyone according to the standards, mindset, and standpoint of the flesh. We no longer look through those eyes and from that perspective, in all our knowledge and interaction with anyone.

And “flesh” is the shorthand term that Paul typically used to talk about the entire realm of life apart from Christ. This term does not refer to our physical nature per se, but rather the limitations and failures inherent in living apart from and in rebellion to God. Flesh is characterized by weakness and inability. But, because fallen humanity is at enmity with God, “flesh” also signifies sinfulness and rebellion and depravity.

Once we have been changed by Christ, we no longer look at people from a selfish perspective. We no longer primarily think in terms of “what can this person do for me?” Rather, we think about how we can help them, especially by influencing them toward belief in Christ and finding new life in Him. As C. S. Lewis famously wrote “It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another.... There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.” (The Weight of Glory, pp. 18-19, emphasis original.). So, according to Paul, we can no longer consider and interact with people from the same merely this-worldly temporal standpoint. We now must approach all people from an eternal, God-centered mindset and worldview. And the details of how that looks are elaborated in the following verses.

2. Our knowledge of Christ has been completely changed (16b-c)

This section is both an acknowledgement that we used to know things from a merely human standpoint, but also an affirmation that our standpoint has dramatically changed

a Neg: Although we have known Christ according to flesh (16b)

Paul confessed that he used to think about Christ from a merely worldly point of view. Before his Damascus road experience (see Acts ch. 9), Paul thought that Jesus was a pretender – a false Messiah. Because Paul probably shared the common expectation that the Messiah would defeat the Romans. And Paul emphasized that because Christ was crucified, that meant He was cursed, according to the Law (Deut. 21:23, see also Gal. 3:13). And therefore, Paul concluded that Jesus was a deceiver who had received His just reward. And he therefore, thought the early Christians were blasphemers for worshipping a false Messiah. And so, Paul persecuted and tried to punish them. All of these are understandable, logical conclusions if approached from the standpoint of merely human, fleshly assumptions. In a similar manner, many people in our day consider Jesus to be merely a good human teacher or just a social revolutionary. These are comfortable, understandable positions (if you just ignore all the Biblical testimony about Jesus). And we all had similar low views of the importance of Jesus, before we came to see the truth. So, we cannot look down on people who only think from the assumptions that we used to share. We acknowledge that we know how they are thinking because we used to think the same way ourselves, from the same human-centered, self-centered perspective.

b Pos: But now we are no longer knowing [Him in this way] (16c)

However, for those who are genuine believers, we can no longer share the mindset, worldview, assumptions, and conclusions about Christ which we used to have in common with the unbelieving world. Our eyes have been opened to the truth of Christ, and we can no longer hold those same convictions. By the revelation of Jesus in the Bible, applied to our lives by His Holy Spirit, we can now see Christ from God's point of view. He is more than a human teacher; He is God incarnate. His death on the cross is not evidence that He is cursed, but rather proof that He bore our curse on our behalf (see Gal. 3:13-14). And His resurrection from the dead proved Him to be the Son of God and Messiah in a greater sense than the people of His day expected. And consequently, our view of every part of the world has changed, because the entire world has changed as a result of what Christ has accomplished. That is what Paul will proclaim in the following verses.

B. Therefore, for everyone in Christ, absolutely everything has changed (17)

This is the result and/or implication of what was stated earlier. It is possibly connected with v. 16, meaning, "because we think in a new way, our new thinking includes a realization that everything has changed." But more likely, this verse is parallel with v. 16, and also refers back to the earlier verses. This would mean "Just like our mindset has changed, so, likewise, absolutely everything has changed." This emphasizes, not just our subjective realization of the change Christ has made, but primarily, the objective reality that absolutely everything has indeed changed.

1. The result is that if someone is in Christ (17a)

This proposition is a conditional requirement for the following propositions to be true. In one sense, Christ has changed everything for everyone. The universe has objectively changed because of what Christ accomplished. But in the sense Paul is addressing in this passage (reconciliation, as will be described in later verses), those without Christ do not experience the change of status and reconciliation. They are still in their sins, and still at enmity with God. And what Christ has accomplished has only heightened their estrangement and impending punishment. And the condition is whether or not someone is "in Christ." This phrase, for Paul, is a shorthand for being in a saving relationship with Christ, by trusting in Him, and therefore, experiencing all the benefits of being in legal and spiritual union with Him. If a person is unified with Christ by trusting Him for salvation, then all that is listed in the following propositions is true of that person.

2. Everything has changed from old to new (17b-d)

a He/she is a new creature/creation (17b)

This proposition consists of only two words, “new creation.” Therefore, translators have to either supply the subject from the previous proposition, i.e. “He/she is a new creation.” or supply some words to make a general statement about the new creation such as “everything is a new creation.” or make the point of the proposition to be that the adjective “new” describes “creation” as in “creation has been made new.” I have chosen the first option because it connects most closely with the previous proposition. And if Paul’s point was just that creation is renewed, then that would also apply to those who are not in Christ. Because Paul qualified this only to those in Christ, it probably means that they in some sense participate in the new creation. And in light of the rest of the NT teaching about the new birth, and in light of the following verses about reconciliation, it makes the best sense that the emphasis would be on the change of life and status for those who believe in Christ and are reconciled to Him.

The term “new” means something that had not been experienced before, and obviously is different from the old. But it also has the connotation of being superior to what was old. And “creature/creation” just means the product of some creative act. – that which was created. In this context, it is assumed that it is the result of God’s creative work in the lives of His new people, as elaborated in the following verses. So, in this context, there is no real difference between the English terms “creature” and “creation” because they both emphasize that those in Christ were made by God in a new way that had not been known before (see Gal. 6:15).

b Old is gone, everything is new (17c-d)

Like in the previous proposition, in these two propositions, Paul’s wording is sparse, and so translators must flesh out what Paul was describing. The meaning is fairly clear, but it could be stated in a variety of ways in English. Paul states this truth by declaring both sides of the same coin – the negative truth about the old things, and the positive truth about the new things.

1) Neg: the old things have come to an end (17c)

First, Paul wrote that the old things had come to an end. He used a generic expression, literally “the old things.” But in this context, that must refer to the old way of life, the way the universe was before Christ – humanity living only under condemnation because the payment for their sins and the means of reconciliation with God had not yet been enacted in history. This also means all of the old way of the flesh – living life as if God does not exist or matter. All of this has ceased to exist in any meaningful, effective way, because Christ has indeed come and made atonement and reconciliation. We can never go back to a time when Christ has not died and risen from the grave. That universe no longer exists, and it never will exist again. And for those in Christ, their personal lives have irrevocably changed. They have been changed by God’s Spirit, and their old lives are no longer a viable option, even if it seems tempting at times.

2) Pos: Behold, new things have come to be (17d)

This is the positive side of the new reality which Paul was asserting. He began with the word translated “behold.” This word is a prompter of attention, which serves to emphasize whatever follows. It is as if Paul said, “pay attention, because what I am about to say is especially important!”

And what Paul said was that new things had come to be. Like in the previous proposition, Paul used a simple, ambiguous adjective as a substantive – “new things,” which could be translated in a number of ways. It could mean that new things have come into being, or that things (meaning all things mentioned in this context) have become new. In the context of what Paul was saying, both of these ideas are true. It is just a question of what Paul was intending to state. His emphasis in the context is that for those in Christ, everything has changed. So in a sense, everything has become a new thing, a new reality. And “new” is the same word that he used earlier in the verse to say “new creature.”

For the Christian, upon conversion, our lives are completely changed, because our relation to God has completely changed. And even our nature is changed by the new birth. And so, consequently, our relation to everything else in creation has changed. So, in a sense, everything is new to us, and we can interact with everything in a new way, because everything has changed for us, even if, in a strict sense, the things and people around us did not change when we were converted. And the reason is that at our conversion, we came to realize and experience the fact that the entire universe changed because of the work of Christ. And the life of the next age has invaded this age, which we began to live when we were united with Christ.

II. Everything has changed, because God has changed everything by reconciliation (18-6:2)

For the rest of this passage, Paul connected his assertion that everything has changed to the things that God has done to transform everything. He explained that the reason everything has changed is that God has changed everything, and then elaborates on the specific things that God has done that resulted in such a monumental transformation of the universe.

A. Paul’s ministry comes from God’s accomplishment (18-21)

This entire passage is near the end of the larger section of this epistle (2:14-7:4) in which Paul was defending his own ministry by describing its effectiveness. And throughout the larger section he described his own ministry in terms of God’s accomplishment and commission. In other words, Paul’s ministry was effective because it was an extension of God’s own working and was faithful to what God had already been doing. This dynamic continued in this passage as well, where Paul clearly located his own ministry as flowing out of what God had already done in Christ, and God’s plan to apply Christ’s accomplishment to His people through emissaries like Paul.

1. God made reconciliation and gave the message of reconciliation (18)

a All these things are from God (18a)

“All things” points back to all that had been written in verses 16-17. God is the source and cause of all the tremendous changes that the believer has experienced. And the way God caused these changes is communicated in the following propositions.

b God reconciled and gave the ministry of reconciliation (18b-c)

These two propositions technically are relative clauses describing something about God and what He has done. But they also function to clearly emphasize what God has done as the key ideas of this section. And these two things serve as the outline for the rest of this section. Paul stated that God did two things: First, He provided salvation by reconciling people to Himself by the death of His Son. And second, He provided the means for people to hear of and share in this salvation by sending messengers out with the good news. Both of these ideas will be explained in the rest of the passage.

1) The One Who reconciled us to Himself through Christ (18b)

In the New Testament, the concept of reconciliation, and the act of reconciling, implies a story with these four events: 1) There was some sort of existing relationship between the parties, which was accurately described as friendly, or, at minimum, not adversarial. 2) One of the parties did something that was offensive and/or harmful to the other party, thus breaking the previously good relationship and causing the resulting state of enmity, where there once had been friendly relations. 3) One of the parties then took the initiative and did something to take away, pay back, fix, or otherwise cover and/or remove the original cause for enmity. And 4) because the cause of enmity had been removed, the relationship was restored at least to its original standing. There was no longer any enmity hindering the relationship and peace had been restored.

In this verse, God is said to be the One Who has done the activity of reconciling, and has so restored the relationship between Him and us through Christ. We had broken the relationship by our sin. But Christ had atoned for our sin, and so, taken away the cause of offense and enmity, and so, had restored the relationship between God and His people. God had restored the relationship between Himself and his people. We did not restore the broken relationship, but God had taken the initiative on His own and has made peace where there once was enmity by the covering of our sins which Christ accomplished on the cross.

2) And the One giving to us the ministry of reconciliation (18c)

Not only has God reconciled His people to Himself, but He is also the One Who has given the ministry of reconciliation. This means that God has made provision, as will be elaborated in the following verses, for this reconciliation to be actualized in the lives of more and more people throughout history, and around the world. Paul first applied this reality to explaining and validating his own ministry. That is – Paul was doing what he did because God was the One Who initiated the ministry of reconciliation and called Paul to play his part in this ministry. But this also applies, in various ways, to every faithful evangelist and pastor throughout history. The faithful proclamation ministry of the church exists and does effective work only because God has planned and initiated the ministry of reconciliation.

2. Elaboration: God made reconciliation and sent message of reconciliation (19-21)

This section obviously elaborates and explains the two things that Paul had just stated about God: that He made reconciliation, and that He gave the ministry of reconciliation.

a God provided reconciliation and sent appeals for you to be reconciled (19-20)

1) God reconciled and sent the message of reconciliation (19)

a) In Christ, God was reconciling by taking care of transgressions (19a-b)

(1) **As that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (19a)**

God Himself was doing the activity of reconciling (See above on 18b for a definition of the concept of reconciliation). Reconciliation is the action and activity of God. We do not reconcile ourselves to God, He does it.

And this proposition says that God was reconciling the world to Himself. This does not mean that every individual in the world is reconciled. Rather, the focus is on the world as that which is opposed to God – that which is at enmity with God. Often in the New Testament, the word “world” means humanity as those in opposition to God, rejecting and hating God. It is those kind of people (like us) that God reconciled to Himself. God did not reconcile friends, but His enemies to Himself.

And God did this “in Christ.” This is probably marking an agency relationship – that God reconciled “by/through Christ” (see Rom. 3:24). But also, because Christ is God, God was actively working in everything Christ did. God was literally in Christ as He was paying the penalty of sin, thereby taking away the cause of the enmity which God justly had against humanity, and thereby effecting reconciliation, as stated in the next proposition.

(2) **Not reckoning their transgressions against them (19b)**

This gives the means by which God reconciled us to Him. “Reckoning” is an accounting term. It means to keep a record and apply that accurate accounting to making a decision or taking an action. Our “accounts” were negative because of all of our transgressions, which we have committed against God. God rightly could have held these against us and continued to be rightfully angry and justly wrathful against us. But God chose not to call in our accounts. Rather, He chose to take our spiritual debt upon Himself, and reckon that debt to Himself in Christ on the cross. Christ paid the moral debt of our transgressions, and so, they were all reckoned to Him. And therefore, our transgressions are no longer reckoned to us. So, they are no longer a roadblock to relationship with God. And so, that relationship can be reconciled. That is how God was reconciling the world to Himself, by not reckoning our transgressions against us, but rather reckoning them against Christ on the cross.

b) **And assigning to us the message of reconciliation (19c)**

God has given to humans the “message of reconciliation.” This means that somehow (to be explained later in this passage), people can experience this reconciliation with God by hearing and heeding this message that God has given. The message of reconciliation was assigned (literally “placed”) among us. God intentionally appointed the task and stewardship of this message to His people for the benefit of those who have not yet heard. Therefore, those assigned this valuable commission have the responsibility to spread the truth of reconciliation so that people can receive and experience this peace that has already been supplied. In this context, when Paul wrote “to us,” he was primarily referring to himself and the other apostles as those specifically commissioned to proclaim the message about Jesus. But this also applies to all Christians in some sense, as we are all called to be witnesses. And it especially applies to those called to the vocation of proclamation ministry. We have been appointed and entrusted with this message of reconciliation. Paul will elaborate on this, using himself as an example for the rest of this passage.

2) Therefore, God is appealing for you to be reconciled (20)

a) Therefore, we work as ambassadors on behalf of Christ (20a)

Paul then spelled out the implications for his own ministry based on the fact that God had assigned and entrusted to him the message of reconciliation. This meant that Paul's mission was to act like an ambassador – communicating the official message from the King that he represented. Paul was not giving his own message, but was just faithfully passing on the official message from God. Therefore, whenever someone heard Paul proclaiming the good news about Christ, they were not just hearing Paul's opinion or insight. They were hearing the message to them from God through God's ambassador. That is why Paul could write in the book of First Thessalonians (2:13) that when they received the message from Paul, they did not just receive the word of men, but they received the Word of God. This means that Paul needed to remain faithful to the message entrusted to him. This also means that Paul's message had the authority and power of God Himself. In the same way, modern preachers need to zealously remain faithful to the message entrusted into their care. And in that way, they can expect the same authority and power in their ministry that Paul enjoyed. And consequently, the way someone responds to the genuine message of reconciliation entrusted to God's ambassadors is the way that they are responding to God Himself.

b) God appeals through us for you to be reconciled (20b-d)

(1) As God is making His appeal through us (20b)

This proposition explains and elaborates on the previous one by means of comparison. Paul explained that his calling to be an ambassador for God is like God was making His appeal to people through the words of His representative proclaimers and ambassadors. This is more than just an illustration and comparison. This is what is actually taking place. Whenever one of God's people faithfully tells the message of reconciliation through Christ, God is at that moment, by His Holy Spirit, making the same appeal in His own way through the words of the human spokesman. "Making His appeal" is a word that can mean to urge or encourage or exhort. It means that at bare minimum, the words of appeal to be reconciled, which are inherent in the message of reconciliation, should be heard as the message from God Himself. And often, in some way, God is working His influence in the heart of the hearer, so that they will hear and heed this appeal as from God Himself. In some cases, God makes His appeal to be an effective encouragement in the heart and life of someone.

(2) We plead for you to be reconciled to God (20c-d)

Because Paul knew of his own commission and the message entrusted to him and the other apostles, and because he knew of the possibility of experiencing reconciliation with God inherent in the message of reconciliation, he consciously pressed the need and opportunity for his hearers to hear and believe the message, and thereby actually be reconciled to God.

(a) We are pleading on behalf of Christ (20c)

As Christ's ambassador, speaking for Christ, Paul urgently pressed and asked his hearers to respond with faith. He was not just called to disinterestedly communicate the message. He also aimed to passionately press the implications and application of the message and to encourage the hearers to respond appropriately. And as an ambassador, he was doing this on behalf of Christ, carrying out the stewardship of the message given to him for the cause of Christ and His Kingdom. Again, the implication is that whenever Paul or another of God's messengers tells the message of reconciliation, a part of that message is an appeal from Christ Himself, through his messengers speaking for Him, to hear and believe, and so, be reconciled, as stated in the next proposition.

(b) Be reconciled to God (20d)

This proposition summarizes the appeal to respond and apply the message of reconciliation. It asks and demands that the hearer actually be reconciled to God by believing the message of reconciliation and responding with faith to the saving offer of restored relationship to God through what Christ has accomplished on our behalf. We sinful humans can be reconciled to the God Who made us and Who died to secure our pardon and reconciliation. And so, the message of reconciliation includes this appeal to rightly respond and to experience this restored relationship with our Creator.

b The means of reconciliation: Our sin to Him, His righteousness to us (21)

Up to this point in the passage, Paul had only hinted at how this reconciliation could be possible, but he had not yet spelled it out. Now, in this verse, Paul explained how it happened. He told the means by which God reconciled the world to Himself. That is the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ on the cross as an atoning exchange whereby our status is changed by Him taking our status and giving us His.

This verse is often called "the Great Exchange." This is a very fitting title because it described the exchange of atonement: Christ takes our sin and its punishment, and we receive His righteousness and all of its benefits. This is a direct transfer of something that is rightly ours onto Him, and something that is properly His onto us. And it is called "Great" because it is the greatest deal imaginable! For us sinners estranged from God and under His wrath, there is no greater trade than having our sin and punishment taken away in exchange for His righteousness, reconciliation and peace. That is so one-sided in our favor that people often think it is too good to be true. They are correct that it is too good. It is totally unfair in our favor. God, in His abundant mercy and grace, absorbs all our bad desert upon Himself, and freely gives us undeserved favor and blessing, solely because He is a loving Father and gracious redeemer. But they are incorrect to think that it is not true. It is too good, but it is also true. He has exchanged our bad for His good. And the two sides of this exchange are stated in the following two propositions.

1) God made the One Who did not know sin, to be sin on our behalf (21a)

There are four profound ideas packed into this one theologically loaded proposition: 1) Jesus knew no sin, 2) God acted to make Jesus to be and/or experience something, 3) Jesus was made to be/experience sin (or possibly a sin offering), and 4) He did this on our behalf.

First, Jesus is described as “the One not knowing sin,” or “the One Who did not know any sin.” The clear implication is that Jesus was completely sinless – He never sinned at all. Hebrews 4:15 says that He was tempted in every way, just like we are, yet He was without sin. He experienced temptation, and He obviously knew what sin is. But He never experienced sin in the sense of committing sin or even having the desire to sin. He did not have a natural bent toward sin and selfishness that is standard for the rest of humanity. He knew no sin at all, and therefore, was not under the punishment of sin, and had no liability to death and God’s wrath.

But God made Him to be something that was not the natural consequence of Who He was or what He had done. Paul specifically highlighted God’s action in this. God undertook, on His own initiative to bring about a change of state for Christ. He caused Christ to become something and/or experience something that He was not and/or had not yet experienced. It was God’s intention and plan to transfer something to Christ (from us) that was not His. This is one part of the great exchange.

And what God made Christ to be and/or experience is “sin.” This passage is somewhat elliptical, and can be stated in a few different ways. But the point is that somehow Christ was equated with sin. It means that Christ was considered and treated as the sinful, guilty One (even though He wasn’t by nature). It means that Christ suffered the effects and punishment of sin (which He did not deserve). It means that Christ identified with our sin when He gave Himself as a sin offering. Like Paul wrote in Romans 8:3, “God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.” Similarly, in Galatians 3:13, Paul wrote that Christ became a curse for us.

And all of this was done “on our behalf.” It was for us, and for our benefit that Christ took on our sin. That means that our sin was taken away from us. And the punishment and guilt of our sin was taken away from us. And therefore, those who are united with Christ by faith are no longer under the guilt and punishment of our sin, because He has taken it all away in this great exchange. And the further benefit for us is stated in the other side of the great exchange, which is related in the next proposition.

2) Purpose: in order that we may be the righteousness of God in Him (21b)

This proposition tells the (partial) purpose for the previous one. The intention behind Jesus becoming sin on our behalf is so that we would become the righteousness of God. These two ideas go together as the two connected parts of the great exchange. They are inseparable, and no one can genuinely experience the one without the other. One without the other would be incomplete and unfinished.

And the result in the lives of God's people, when this purpose is fulfilled, is that we actually become the righteousness of God. This is more than just a legal fiction or outward status. It is a change of actual status and character and legal relationship with God. And it is so much more than just returning to a neutral state of no longer having our sins counted against us. It is the positive state of being in the same legal/relational status with God that Christ rightly has. It is not just the forgiveness of past sins, but the status of righteousness that permanently covers past, present, and future sins. In the great exchange, we actually become righteous.

And what we become is the "righteousness of God." "Righteousness" is a legal word which means to be in right relationship with a standard of right and wrong. Because of our sin, we are not righteous on our own – just the opposite. But because of the great exchange, the righteousness of Christ, Who knew no sin, is imputed to us. That is, we are given His righteousness – His right standing before God's moral standards. This does not mean that our behavior is perfectly righteous after we are reconciled to God. God's work of sanctification consistently works to make us act more in line with His character, with the actual righteousness which we have. But we never perfectly reach God's standard of righteous behavior in this life. God's work of sanctification, whereby He transforms us to live more and more in a righteous manner, is connected with His making us positionally righteous by His work of justification. These two works are closely connected, but they are distinct. Justification is a change of our status by being given the status of Christ's righteousness, the righteousness of God, which, by nature, is foreign to us. Like Paul wrote in Romans 8:4, "...He condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us."

And this new status of becoming the righteousness of God only happens "in Him." We are never righteous independent from Christ, because it is His righteousness that is imputed to us. As we are united with Christ by faith, we experience the great exchange. It is similar to a marriage union, in that when a marriage takes place, the two people become one legal entity. The debts of one are now the debts of both, and the assets of one are now the assets of both. In a similar way, when we are in Christ, He takes the penalty for our sin, and we receive His righteousness and all the benefits that go with it. That is the great exchange. And it truly is great.

B. Summary: Our mission is for you to be reconciled, so you should be reconciled (1-2)

In the final two verses of this passage, Paul makes the application of the truths he had just written personal to himself in explaining his own ministry and personal to each of his readers in how they should respond to these truths.

1. Our mission is for you to be reconciled, backed up by God's promise (1-2c)
 - a Our mission is to urge you to be reconciled (1)

1) [We are] ones working together (1a)

This proposition is one short idea, literally, “being workers together.” In First Corinthians (16:16) this word was used to describe the people who were working together to serve the churches. But in this context, the point seems to be that Paul is claiming to be working with God, to be taking part in the ministry of reconciliation that he had written about. Paul was claiming that he was working along with what God was doing in the ministry of reconciliation. And this is the setup for the next verses, where Paul will command his readers to respond in a certain way, based on the fact that the command from Paul is not just from Paul. But because Paul is working with God, being sent as an ambassador, and minister of reconciliation, the command is coming from God Himself, through Paul.

2) And we are encouraging you to take advantage of the reconciliation (1b-c)

a) And we are encouraging you (1b)

Because Paul is an ambassador working for God, in the ministry of reconciliation, he is encouraging his readers. This word “encouraging” is the same word used in verse 20 above, where Paul said that “God is encouraging through us.” Again, this stresses that the motivating command and encouragement which Paul is about to give in the next proposition should be received by his readers as if it was coming from God Himself, because, according to Paul, it is coming from God Himself, through His authorized spokesman.

And Paul was exhorting and encouraging his readers. He truly wanted them to receive and obey God’s command through him, because he truly cared for their spiritual well-being. Paul did all he could to influence his readers to experience the fullness of what God had done on their behalf.

b) Not to receive the grace of God to no effect (1c)

Paul encouraged them to truly and fully receive the grace that God had given in His provision both of reconciliation through Christ’s sacrifice, and through His sending of ambassadors like Paul with the ministry of reconciliation. But Paul said this in a negative way, warning them what *not* to do. This is similar to a modern sales pitch of “Don’t miss out on this incredible opportunity!” They were to react properly to the prior actions of God, and the proclamation about God’s provision, which they had heard. It was possible that they could have responded to this with no lasting effect whatsoever. They could have responded in vain. That is, Paul’s readers can respond in such a way that the message and all of God’s provision has no result in their life. Paul could also be making reference to the kind of thing Jesus mentioned in the parable of the soils (Luke 8:13) where people receive the word when they hear it, but they don’t have sufficient root, and so fall away. However it might happen, Paul was urging his readers not to miss out on all that God had done in providing reconciliation. And this negative way of saying it had the positive point that his readers should be reconciled to God, which Paul will press in the rest of this passage.

b Because there is a Scripture promise to help at the opportune time (2a-c)

In this section, Paul backed up his exhortation with a Scripture promise that points both to the reality of God's provision, and also to the urgency of the need for response.

1) For He says: (2a)

This could possibly be translated as "Scripture says" because the subject of the verb is ambiguous, "He/it says." But in light of the fact that God is the One speaking in the Old Testament passage Paul was quoting, it is best to understand this phrase as referring to God directly speaking in the Old Testament passage, and thereby continuing to speak to Paul's contemporary readers through his quote of the earlier writing.

2) I heard and helped at the right time (2b-c)

In each of these two propositions (both quoted from Isaiah 49:8), there are two parts of the sentence: First there is a mention of God listening or helping. And second, there is an emphasis on the time in which this would take place. In Isaiah, these statements were given in a difficult time as a promise and proclamation of salvation that will soon arrive when God moves to rescue His people. Paul quoted these phrases to introduce his point that these promises had come true in Jesus, and so, now is the time of salvation. And therefore, now is the time for Paul's readers to respond to God's salvation.

a) At the favorable time, I listened to you (2b)

"Favorable" has the connotation of the proper, appropriate, and fitting time. God's salvation has come at just the right time (Gal. 4:4). And at that time, God listened to His people. This means more than just that He heard them. Rather, the implication is that He concentrated His attention on them for good purposes. This is similar to expressions in the Old Testament where it says that "God remembered His people." God never forgot His people. But there were specific times when He undertook to manifest His attention and care in ways that were not as easily seen in other times. The reasons why God seems to be more active at certain times in history and less active in other times is often beyond our ability to understand. But we are assured that God has perfect timing and manifests His activity at just the right time, according to His perfect, sovereign plan. God brought salvation in Christ at just the right time. And this was now a reality available to Paul's first readers. And it is still a reality for Paul's modern readers.

b) And I helped you in the day of salvation (2c)

God's "hearing" of His people was more than just noticing them, but rather, He was paying close attention in order to act on their behalf. This is proved in this next statement, which is parallel to the previous one. God's hearing with attention is connected with His helping His people. He rendered assistance where we most needed it, as defined by all that Paul had written previously in this passage. And this happened in the "day of salvation." This also has the connotation of the proper, fitting time when salvation happens. Because God has heard and helped on the fitting day of salvation, Paul made the application, in the rest of this verse, that his readers were also being called to salvation and reconciliation, and that the present time was the proper time to rightly respond.

2. Therefore, now is the time to be reconciled (2d-e)

These last two propositions in this passage are the final push for the readers to apply all that they have learned about God's great act of reconciliation. They were to respond to the message and to Paul's urging by being reconciled, because, as was seen in the quote from Isaiah, the time to be reconciled is the present. Therefore, all of Paul's readers are urged to be reconciled to God through Christ. And they are to do it right now!

a Behold, now is the favorable time (2d)

Paul began each of these last two propositions with the word "behold." This is the same prompter of attention and marker of emphasis that we saw earlier (17d). Paul is highlighting these last two sentences as an urgent command for application. And the emphasis is that "now" is the time for his command to be heeded and obeyed. "Now" is the time to be reconciled to God. Here, he equated the promised favorable time mentioned in the Isaiah quote (2b) with the present time when his readers were hearing his command. That which was spoken of centuries earlier as promise had now come to pass climactically in Christ. And so, now is the time to take advantage of it. In this proposition, Paul used a different word for "favorable" than he used in 2b. But the two different words are basically synonymous.

b Behold, now is the day of salvation (2e)

This proposition is parallel to the previous one. It is saying the same thing – urging an immediate response because the promised time has now come to pass. This second statement echoes the wording of the second part of the Isaiah quote (2c). And again, Paul urged that the day of salvation is **NOW!** And therefore, his readers should immediately make the proper response by being reconciled to God.