

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 ¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view;¹ even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view,² we know him no longer in that way. ¹⁷ So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,¹ not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

“Friendship with God”

A few years back a new form of emotional therapy broke onto the scene and seemed to be revolutionary. No more would emotional therapy consist of lying on couches talking about your potty-training, if it ever was. Reality Therapy is very task oriented and invites a person to get on with their life and cross the problem bridges when you they arise. It starts with the question: if you were to wake up tomorrow morning and as the result of some sort of miracle everything in your life was perfect, what would be different? After the client begins to imagine the new reality and lists a few things, the therapist simply asks: what do you have to do now to make those things a reality? The work the client then sets about is to make that new life a reality and the therapist just coaches them through and gets the client to acknowledge their fears and childhood emotional barriers and face them as they arise. This Reality Therapy is a very functional approach. It really helps a person dive right into their lives through striving to bring about this vision of hope that they have begun to experience in their imagination. The downside of this type of therapy is that messed up people come up with messed up dreams and since we are all messed up with our visions of an ideal life for ourselves are unfortunately twisted. Nevertheless, I think this Reality Therapy stuff makes a good analogy of what God has done and is doing for us through Christ Jesus in the Holy Spirit.

Reality for us from the cosmic level right down to the personal level is plagued by a rift between ourselves and our loving Father, the Almighty Creator. God created us to live in joyful friendship with himself but for some reason we instinctively would rather do our own thing as if we were gods of our own little worlds. Even when we do our best not to be our own gods, things still remain fairly messed up. We can't seem to see past our own noses and doing what smells best to it. Even when we are simply trying to do what is right for all peoples considered, self-interest still lurks on the backsides of our motives.

This problem, which we call sin, mars our ability to know God and have the joyful, loving friendship with him he created us for and so it is with all our relationships. We have to work so hard and risk so much to truly get to know one another and enjoy the deep bond of friendship. God has revealed himself to us to be in the very least the true personal presence of non-self-interested love. If God does not know this self-indulging self-interest that plagues our existence and

if at our very cores this self-willedness is our prime motivator, it is no wonder that we cannot know God or even conceive of who or how he is unless he reveals himself to us. We just do not know God. Wouldn't know him if we saw him. The crucifixion of Jesus proves that.

Getting back to our analogy of Reality Therapy, if we were reality therapists and had nerve enough to ask God that if he were to wake up tomorrow and by some miracle overnight it was now a perfect world, what would be different? I think his answer would be, "My creation right down to the last sub-atomic particle would enjoy friendship with me as I intended it. There would be no more sin and death and sickness and disasters and people hurting people and people just plain hurting. They would love as I love for they would know me as I am." Playing the roll of the therapist a little more we would have to push God a bit further and ask him what he'd have to do to make this perfect world a reality. Well, if we take what Paul writes here seriously, God the Father's answer is not to keep making us miserable until we break and get ourselves right with God so that we can enjoy his blessing. God the Son's answer is, "I am going to become as they are, knowing sin and death, and by the power of my very being destroy it within myself and heal this cosmos by uniting it to me in the Holy Spirit and humans will enjoy the very relationship that my Father and I share in the Holy Spirit."

According to Paul this is exactly what God has done in Jesus Christ. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." In, through, and as Jesus of Nazareth God the Son became human. He took upon himself our self-willedness, indeed our wilderness but never acted out of it. Rather, in faith and obedience he took it to the cross for us as an innocent person wrongfully condemned to the death of the heinous. He died. God within himself suffered death. Well, death has no home within the loving communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The rift that human sin has brought about between God and humanity cannot exist in the loving communion of God. God raised Jesus from the dead vindicating him, proving his righteousness and faithfulness. In, through, as and by Jesus Christ the rift has been healed. God and humanity are in communion as God intended because Jesus in his ascension has taken humanity, indeed created matter back into God and by sending the Holy Spirit to be with and in us he has united us to God in himself. God has reconciled us to himself in Christ Jesus. To be reconciled means to be made friends, to be put into friendship. In this new creation in Christ God has made himself to be our friend and us to be his.

God the Son's, uniting our sin-laden humanity with himself in and as Jesus of Nazareth and dying with it has forever changed things for the whole of the creation. Paul says a few verses earlier, "...we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died." In, through, and as Jesus Christ all of humanity has died and the new life of his resurrection has been given to us. All who are in Christ indeed are a new creation. We are new creation. This is Reality therapy for us. When Jesus rose from the dead reality changed and began to change. This sets before us the task of being the new creation.

The first thing to say about that is that God has not left us to ourselves to figure this out. The Holy Spirit begins the work of grace in us that makes us become more and more like Jesus sharing more and more deeply in his joyful and loving relationship with the Father over the course of our lives. As Jesus lived his earthly life with the struggle of two wills within him—the human and the divine, so also we live now. And as he enjoyed friendship with his Father so do we enjoy the friendship of God and it is truly forever and this is all God’s doing, not our own. It is a free gift.

Lent is the time that we talk about the wilderness. The dry, thirsty, hungry, hurting side of life that makes us say, “if that new creation business is reality why don’t I feel like I am in a joyful, loving friendship with God?” That is a very good question. It is the side of faith that we call doubt. Without doubt there can be no true faith, if that makes any kind of sense. Relationships go through dry spells. If you have ever been in a relationship where you don’t feel like you know your friend and for some reason the relationship is strained, then you know what doubt is and you know that if you bear with it and talk through it in time the deep loving and joyful bond of friendship returns. So, it is with the wilderness. In the wilderness sooner or later we begin to hunger and thirst for God and begin to pray and simply begin to realize that time is time spent with God and gradually the deep loving and joyful bond of friendship with God gets real...new creation.

This new creation effects all our relationships for once we know the love and joy of friendship with God we naturally begin to regard ourselves and others a new. This is the heart of what Paul means by being entrusted with the message ministry of reconciliation. We know hope, real hope, a kind of hope that is more than a wish. We are those who live according to hope. We want others to know they are new creation, that God is their friend, that there is more to life than the misery and emptiness of self-interested, self-absorbed, self-indulgent, indeed self-pitying, sin-rifted isolation that is more than just loneliness. We have the message and the credibility of saying to our neighbour and indeed to ourselves, Jesus has taken all that self-stuff and died with it so that we don’t have to live with it. We are alive in him. That message creates doubt and God himself will create faith from it. Friends, you are in a relationship with God whether you want to be or not, a relationship that can be deeply loving and joyful and indeed will be that in time. We just have to keep bringing our self-absorbed selves back to God and in prayer lay our burdens down until they are dead as he has died with them...and then...and take my word on it...new creation. Amen