

# Christian Life: Resurrection, Regeneration, Reconciliation

2 Corinthians 4:14 - 5:21

Time constraint because of Communion, T. Leg, MCF 17.07.2016,

## Introduction – Religion, the opiate of the masses?

We have just had the privilege of sharing in the bread of Christ's broken body and the cup of his shed blood for the forgiveness of many. Jesus himself said that by celebrating communion in this way, we are declaring his death until he comes again in glory. Communion is a graphic declaration of the Christian gospel, which Paul defined in very simple words in 2Ti 2:8ff.

2Ti 2:8-14 Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, (10) Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. (11) Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; ... (14) Keep reminding them of these things.

The Gospel is not just for non-believers. As Christians, we need to be reminded of it often, we must live by it. In the rest of our worship service today, I want us to look at how the Gospel helps us to the Christian life with integrity. Please open your Bibles to 2 Cor. 4:14ff.

I am sure most of you are familiar with Karl Marx' famous quote: "**Religion is the opiate of the masses**". "Religion is the opiate of the masses" has come to mean that if you cannot cope with reality you turn to religion as a drug to suppress the pain of life. This is how religion is often viewed and understood today. It is seen as a way of escapism, a way of refusing to deal with life as it is. This quote, taken out of context, suggests that Marx had no sympathy with religion, but that's not the case. He seems to have seen religion as a sincere but pitiful and illusory attempt to cope with life. Let me give you **the full quote** from Marx in his "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: "Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature [i.e. economically!!! Oppressed – vs. cosmos], the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusion about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions."

Marx recognized that life was hard and often unfair. He even acknowledged that religion was the heart of a heartless world, a sincere sigh, a groaning, one way of coping with life in the here and now. He was wrong, however, in concluding, that giving up the illusion of happiness, by giving up religion itself, would make people really happy. The last 150 years of world history have proven him wrong if we admit that "real happiness" isn't just running about pretending that there are no problems in life, and smiling all day long. Many Christians may give you the impression that that is what it means to be a Christian; once you become a Christian everything will be hunky dory forever after. If that is what we believe, we are headed for trouble sooner or later. I am a Christian and Marx was not, but I agree with Marx in saying that being realistic about life is better than following empty illusions, be they religious or otherwise. As Christians we are to be realists, we must base our lives on the facts, as much as they can be established. But as Christians, we would also insist that there are facts that go beyond what we can see with our mere eyes, facts which Marx did not or could not acknowledge: revealed facts, indeed, the ultimate fact in human history – the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Whether you are an optimist or a pessimist in life simply reflects the natural temperament that God has given you. As Christians we must not let our outlook on life be controlled by our temperament but we must bring our temperament in contact with spiritual realities. Our Christian lives must be controlled by the

heavenly realities. They must be controlled by the Spirit of God dwelling in us. This is what the apostle Paul tells us in 2 Cor. 4:14-18.

Before I read the end of chapter 4, I want us to see how Paul describes himself in 2 Cor. 1:8-9:

**2Co 1:8-9 MSG** We don't want you in the dark, friends, about how hard it was when all this came down on us in Asia province. It was so bad we didn't think we were going to make it. (9) We felt like we'd been sent to death row, that it was all over for us. As it turned out, it was the best thing that could have happened. Instead of trusting in our own strength or wits to get out of it, we were forced to trust God totally--not a bad idea since he's the God who raises the dead!

## The life of an apostle – the life of every Christian believer

**2Co 4:14-5:21 (The Message!!!)** ... **what we believe** is that the One who raised up the Master Jesus will just as certainly raise us up with you, alive. (15) Every detail works to your advantage and to God's glory: more and more grace, more and more people, more and more praise! (16) So we're not giving up. How could we! **Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace.** (17) These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. (18) There's far more here than meets the eye. **The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever.**

You see, the apostle Paul did not try to escape life by turning to empty religious illusions, he turned to higher realities. He faced the hard times in his life and evaluated them in the light of eternal glory, firmly trusting in God's grace to carry him through in the here and now. This gave him a sense of lasting peace, patient endurance, joyful perseverance and sure victory. Not being of this world, he was better able to live in it, to rise above it, and to fulfil his high calling – not with an illusory happiness, but with a relaxed joyfulness in Christ. He could sit loosely with regard to the things of this world because he knew that his foundations were rock-solid. Christ in him was to live, to die was gain (Php. 1:21). What about you and me?

In Chapter 5, Paul describes how the Christian life is controlled by heavenly realities. He portrays it as a life characterized by faith, hope and love. In this beautiful passage, Paul gives us an intensely personal insight into the Christian life, he tells us what motivates him to live up to his high calling in Christ. I will read this passage in several sections from the Message translation, a modern paraphrase by Eugene Petersen. Please follow along in your own Bibles: 2 Corinthians, Chapter 5. Here, Paul reveals to us three important foundations for the life of every Christian believer. I have called them the 3 R's of the Christians life – not Read, Write, Arithmetic – but Resurrection, Regeneration and Reconciliation.

## The 3 R's of the Christian life: Resurrection, Regeneration, Reconciliation

### Resurrection Bodies: Heavenly Realities (v. 1-9)

[...The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever. ] **2Co 5:1-21 MSG** (1) For instance, we know that when these bodies of ours are taken down like tents and folded away, they will be replaced by **resurrection bodies in heaven**--God-made, not handmade-- (2) and we'll never have to relocate our "tents" again. Sometimes we can hardly wait to move--and so we cry out in frustration. Compared to what's coming, living conditions around here seem like a stopover in an unfurnished shack, and we're tired of it! **We've been given a glimpse of the real thing, our true home, our resurrection bodies!** (5) **The Spirit of God whets our appetite by giving us a taste of what's ahead. He puts a little of heaven in our hearts so that we'll never settle for less.** [Note: grace = a foretaste of glory] (6) That's why we live with such good cheer. You won't see us drooping our heads or dragging our

feet! Cramped conditions here don't get us down. They only remind us of the spacious living conditions ahead. (7) **It's what we trust in but don't yet see that keeps us going.** [i.e., our faith in the risen Christ] (8) Do you suppose a few ruts in the road or rocks in the path are going to stop us? **When the time comes, we'll be plenty ready to exchange exile for homecoming.**

A fallen world that does not know God and is heading for destruction tries to force us into its mould. It tries to make us believe that the world we see around us is all there is. Through Paul, God clearly tells us that that is a lie, and he uses our present physical bodies to prove that it is a lie. Our bodies of humiliation, which ache and hurt, and sometimes don't function as they should, are like tents, barely sufficient as a temporary accommodation, and certainly not fit as an eternal home for the Holy Spirit of God who has come to live in our earthly tabernacles; but still this is what God has chosen as his temple while we roam this earth. Amazing, isn't it? Treasures in jars of clay! Our fragile bodies are here to remind us that we are not at home in this world, we live in exile, and the best, our homecoming, is yet to come. Now, we are seated in Christ in the heavenlies and the Holy Spirit within us testifies with our resurrected spirits that we are God's children. The riches of God's grace are real, a foretaste of the glory to come. His grace and our faith in the unseen realities keep us going, but we cannot help but sensing the tension: our spirits are redeemed, but our bodies are still waiting to be redeemed. There will be a time when our resurrected spirits will be covered or clothed upon with their perfect, eternal home, our resurrection bodies in heaven. What a glorious homecoming that will be. This is the hope that every Christian has.

**Heb 11:1 NLT** Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.

Because Christ was raised, those who believe in him can be confident that they will also be raised. Faith, which is a gift from God, gives us that confidence. Christ's resurrection is the only true basis for all Christian hope. Do you have this hope? Do you believe that Christ was raised from death to life. Are you confident that you will be raised with him? If not, why not? If you have this hope, you will also find a new motivation for living. Your priorities will change. Other things will become important. Finally, only one thing will matter: You will want to please God in all you say and do.

### **What matters: Pleasing God (v. 10-14)**

**MSG (9) But neither exile nor homecoming is the main thing. Cheerfully pleasing God is the main thing, and that's what we aim to do, regardless of our conditions. (10) Sooner or later we'll all have to face God, regardless of our conditions. We will appear before Christ** and take what's coming to us as a result of our actions, either good or bad. **(11) That keeps us vigilant, you can be sure. It's no light thing to know that we'll all one day stand in that place of Judgment. That's why** we work urgently with everyone we meet to get them ready to face God. God alone knows how well we do this, but I hope you realize how much and deeply we care. **(12) We're not saying this to make ourselves look good to you. We just thought it would make you feel good, proud even, that we're on your side and not just nice to your face as so many people are. (13) If I acted crazy, I did it for God; if I acted overly serious, I did it for you. (14) Christ's love** has moved me to such extremes. His love has the first and last word in everything we do. **Our firm decision is to work from this focused center: One man died for everyone.** That puts everyone in the same boat.

In these verses, Paul reveals the true motivation for his life and his ministry as an apostle. It is **his own personal experience of the Gospel: Christ died for him – Paul is overwhelmed by God's love.** How can it be that God would give his only Son to die for a man like him who persecuted the church of God? What kind of love was this? What a savior is this who would lay down his life for the one who persecuted his bride, this chief of sinners? The NIV translates v.14 as „God's love controls us“, the King James translates it as „God's love constrains us“, and the Message aptly paraphrases it as „Christ's love has

moved me to such extremes. His love has the first and the last word in everything we do. Our firm decision is to work from this focused center: one man died for everyone. That puts everyone in the same boat." In this verse, we see God's love at Calvary as the first and foremost controlling or constraining motivation for all true Christian ministry.

But Christ did not only die for Paul, he also rose again and is now seated at the Father's right hand, from where he will judge the living and the dead. And Paul realizes that **every creature will have to stand before Christ the Judge one day**, and that motivates him to plead with people to escape the judgment to come. Any mention of the word judgment usually strikes fear into us. That is probably why any mention of judgement is often avoided by Christians in evangelism because we are afraid to offend people. Like Corrie Ten Boom, Paul understood that the fire of God's wrath against sin had once and for all been extinguished on the cross of Calvary. All who put their trust in Jesus' atoning sacrifice for them have already passed through that judgment. For those who refuse to believe, their own worst fears of the judgment will come true on that day; for those who believe, it will be a day of rejoicing in their Savior.

**Joh 12:44-50 NIV** Then Jesus cried out, "When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. (45) When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me. (46) I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. (47) "As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. (48) There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. (49) For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. (50) I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."

In these tremendous words, Jesus himself tells us how to escape the judgment to come. By believing his own words about himself, which really are his father's. By believing God's testimony about Jesus, we have eternal life and will escape the judgment. By believing the Gospel, we judge ourselves in the here and now, trusting in the name and the character of the perfect man Jesus, whose name means „Jehovah is salvation“. As Christians, we are to constantly judge ourselves in the light of the gospel. Judge, not in the sense of condemn but in the sense of discerning whether our actions are right or wrong in God's sight.

In heaven, we will be given resurrection bodies. In the here and now, we are given hearts of flesh to replace our hearts of stone, we are regenerated in the image of God, we are made new creatures, born again, given a fresh start. **Regeneration** is God's doing, **conversion** is man's part in it, consisting of repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ, died and risen. The result of regeneration is a new life, a resurrection life, a life lived in resurrection power, characterized by Gospel-based faith, hope and love.

### **Regeneration: A new creation, a fresh start for everyone and anyone (v. 15-17)**

**MSG (15)** He included everyone in his death so that everyone could also be included in his life, a **resurrection life**, a far better life than people ever lived on their own. **(16)** Because of this decision we don't evaluate people by what they have or how they look. We looked at the Messiah that way once and got it all wrong, as you know. We certainly don't look at him that way anymore. **(17)** Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons! Look at it!

What I find truly amazing is that we are not only given a new life but also an entirely different outlook on life itself. Like Jesus, we are no longer in the business of judging other people by their outward appearances, their wealth, their power, and so on and so forth. All of a sudden, we are truly concerned for their welfare. We see them in the light of their need of a savior. We see in them with the tremendous potential that is theirs in Jesus Christ. We realize that they are without God and without hope in the world, alienated and estranged

from God, no different from what we once used to be ourselves. We realize that the Gospel is the only thing that can put them right with God, the only thing that can make peace between them and God, and between one man and another, just like it did for us. It does that by giving them both the same life and the same outlook on life, by creating true unity, by making one out of two through Christ's broken body on the cross (see Eph. 2:11ff. for a beautiful description of this). It begins to dawn us, like it did on Paul, what a great message God has given us, and we realize that God has called us to a ministry of peace-making, a ministry of reconciliation in a broken world.

## Reconciliation

**2Co 5:18-21 MSG** All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other. (19) **God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins.** God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. (20) We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you. (21) How? you say. In Christ. God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God.

The NIV translates v.19 as „**2Co 5:19 NIV** ... God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.“ And the Greek word for „world“ is cosmos. Karl Marx' analysis of man's problem was based on his observations of economic injustices at the beginning of the world's industrialization. He came to the conclusion that economic oppression was man's problem, but God's Word says that our real problem is **estrangement and alienation on a cosmic scale**, and what we need is cosmic reconciliation in Christ (e.g., NT examples: Onesimus slave+ his master, Lydia + Roman parents in the Hollywood movie „Quo Vadis“). I want to close with reading **Eph. 2:10-22**, which describes this **cosmic reconciliation in Christ's body being broken for us on the Cross of Calvary**:

**Eph 2:10-22 MSG** No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing. (11) But don't take any of this for granted. It was only yesterday that you outsiders to God's ways (12) had no idea of any of this, didn't know the first thing about the way God works, hadn't the faintest idea of Christ. You knew nothing of that rich history of God's covenants and promises in Israel, hadn't a clue about what God was doing in the world at large. (13) Now because of Christ--dying that death, shedding that blood--you who were once out of it altogether are in on everything. (14) The Messiah has made things up between us so that we're now together on this, both non-Jewish outsiders and Jewish insiders. He tore down the wall we used to keep each other at a distance. (15) He repealed the law code that had become so clogged with fine print and footnotes that it hindered more than it helped. Then he started over. Instead of continuing with two groups of people separated by centuries of animosity and suspicion, he created a new kind of human being, a fresh start for everybody. (16) Christ brought us together through his death on the Cross. The Cross got us to embrace, and that was the end of the hostility. (17) Christ came and preached peace to you outsiders and peace to us insiders. (18) He treated us as equals, and so made us equals. Through him we both share the same Spirit and have equal access to the Father. (19) That's plain enough, isn't it? You're no longer wandering exiles. This kingdom of faith is now your home country. You're no longer strangers or outsiders. You belong here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone. God is building a home. He's using us all--irrespective of how we got here--in what he is building. (20) He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now he's using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone (21) that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day--a holy temple built by God, (22) all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home.

Amen. Pray!