

2 Corinthians 5:18-21 ¹⁸ Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. ²⁰ Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

OUR DESPERATION

we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

Have you ever been willing to beg? Have you ever needed to beg? Normally we consider begging to be an act of humiliation. Many people in desperate need refuse to even ask for help much less beg because of their pride.

The NKJV translates Paul's writing here with the word "implore". It makes it sound a bit fancier a bit less humiliating. But in fact what Paul is talking about is nothing less humiliating than straight out begging! Let us consider some other examples of the use of this same word.

It is the same word that is used in Luke 5:12.

Luke 5:12 ¹² And it happened when He was in a certain city, that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus; and he fell on *his* face and **implored** Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."

And it is the same word used in Luke 9:38.

Luke 9:38-39 ³⁸ Suddenly a man from the multitude cried out, saying, "Teacher, I **implore** You, look on my son, for he is my only child. ³⁹ "And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out; it convulses him so that he foams *at the mouth*, and it departs from him with great difficulty, bruising him.

Consider the great desperation of these men that would motivate them to thus seek out the savior and in such a humiliating and public manner beg from him this favor. Consider the fervent confrontation between these men and the Lord, as they cry out to him with no real reason to believe that he will answer, perhaps not even sure if He can. Who would risk such a confrontation, and with it the very real possibility of an extremely public and shameful humiliation? It is only those with such a desperate need, that they count the humiliation to be an acceptable price for that one thing they desire.

Thus it is always with begging. We are generally not willing to beg because we have no need for which we are willing to pay such a price. And so I am guessing that most of you probably answered "no". You have not ever needed to beg, not really.

But here Paul uses the same word not in connection with food, or money, or sickness, but in connection with spreading the word of God.

I don't like the New King James translation of this verse, or the NIV. Both make it sound hypothetical, "as if", "as though". This language makes it sound like a metaphor, like a hypothetical. It makes it sound like Paul is saying "it seems" like this is happening, rather than saying this IS what is happening. But there is nothing hypothetical about Paul's statements.

Paul tells us God **IS** crying out through us, and we **ARE** begging men on behalf of Christ. We are in the work of evangelism, risking that same great confrontation, because we do have a great desperation. One that should motivate us to risk the public humiliation get down on knees and beg one another "be reconciled to Christ". It is this great desperation which we so often forget even exists that makes us into ambassadors for Christ. Without understanding the true nature of our desperation we would of course never risk the confrontation that exists between us and the world. But because of it, like the leprous man, or the man with the demon child, we do not hesitate to cry out, even to beg gladly humiliating ourselves for the sake of that desperate need of ourselves and others.

OUR DESPERATION: FOR GOOD THINGS

2 Corinthians 5:21 that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

This is our first desperate need: that we might receive, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

As a missionary I see lots of desperation. Naked children, families without food, men woman and children wasting away in pain with diseases that are easily curable if they only had \$100. I once went to a village where the entire village's food supply consisted in what rats they could catch from the nearby fields. But can any of them compare to the need to become righteous before God?

I had a friend in Africa, educated in Europe, who made some off-hand comment about how society is clearly progressing. Another friend challenged her, merely pointing out that you have to first figure out what your goals are before you can determine that you are indeed progressing. And the man was right of course. If your goals are technology and stuff, then obviously we are progressing. Yet if you define progress in other way it is not so obvious

We do have a desperate need for good things the problem is that we don't understand what good things are. What we need is not empty materialism of things, and when I talk about things I am not simply talking about things you buy in the store I am talking about everything that is of

this earth, friends, love, good food, skills, knowledge, prestige etc. What we need is to get our eyes fixed. What we need is to be reminded that good things don't come from our efforts, and that the things of this earth of seldom truly good things.

What we have is a desperate need for is the "righteousness of God." Because of the greatness of this need God cries through us and we beg others to see the vacant uselessness of this world, and the unsurpassable glory of the righteousness that He has given to us.

Even the work of ministry is not something we can accomplish. It is not we though our education, cunning, intelligence, or charm that will bring people to Christ. But rather all things are "of God". Thus even ministry is subject to Him.

OUR DESPERATION: RECONCILIATION

The second desperate need which Paul talks about is sin.

Let us look at another place where this word for begging is used:

Luke 21:36 ³⁶ "Watch therefore, and **pray** always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Pray = not simply speaking to God, but imploring, begging

Notice how earnest, how desperate the problem of sin is. Jesus himself takes it earnestly enough that he commands us to beg that we may avoid temptation.

As Lutherans we have a tendency to do two things with sin.

(1) We use it as an excuse to be extremely pompous and judgmental towards others. We build walls between ourselves and others because of the faults and sins we "perceive" in them. There is a desperate need for men to know their sins, but we do not approach them as if we are better. We approach them with the truth that we are in the same boat as they are. We have the same problem but we also have the only solution. We build walls not only between ourselves and those outsiders but also within the church. I'm certain that it isn't hard for any of you to think of someone whom you avoid because of some fault or sin you "perceive" in them. The need for reconciliation is just as great within the church as it is without. Our work as ambassadors starts with sharing Christ's love with each other.

(2) On the other hand, within ourselves and among our friends we tend to minimize it.

A famous Lutheran pastor named Deitrich Bonhoeffer used to talk about 'cheap grace'. How easy it is for people to think that sin isn't that big of deal. You sit in church year after year hearing, "God loves you" "God loves all people" It is easy to begin not really caring that much about sin, especially in your own life. We are blessed with pastors who understand and preach that the Grace of God, the forgiveness of all sins, is given to us freely. It is given to us freely but not free of cost for Christ.

Christ takes sin very seriously because He knows the cost. It is such a serious problem and such a desperate need that He instructs his disciples to "BEG" for the strength to avoid it. Not just pray but beg, and even then He sounds dubious as to whether or not we will avoid temptation. This is a desperate need. A need for which the church alone has the answer.

"God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself . . . and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

Consider this, it is through the word that God gives this forgiveness of sins the same word and power that created all things. Thus if the world exists your sins have been forgiven in Christ.

OUR DESPERATION: HIS WORD

The third desperate need that Paul talks about in our text, Is the need for His word.

and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

NKJ has "committed" but I prefer the translation that Prof Kuehne always taught us for this work "lay". **"and has LAID upon the word of reconciliation."**

As conservative Lutherans it may seem at times to us and/or to others that there really isn't that much difference between ourselves and other conservative churches. Perhaps we are getting caught up in petty little things that don't matter. And certainly sometimes we do. But one thing we have as Lutherans that simply doesn't exist elsewhere is an understanding of the Means of Grace.

There is one pastor that I really greatly admire. I was just reading one of his sermons online a few weeks ago. I read through it and much it was really very good. He isn't a Lutheran, but he still had very good law and gospel. He clearly understood our complete inability to comply with any of God's laws and our desperate need for his grace and gospel. He was completely focused on Christ, and his sermon was textual, with good exegesis. But there was one recurring problem over and over again. Whenever he talked about some spiritual problem, such as lack of faith, or lacking "joy" in Christ, his solution was pray harder.

Consider what Paul says in our text “God reconciled us to himself” then “laid upon us the word of reconciliation.” It is precisely for the sake of distributing the gifts won by that reconciliation that God laid that word upon us. It is through that Word that God fills us with His gifts. Certainly we should also pray about those things. But it not through prayer that we receive them. Nor is it dependent on how hard we pray. But we are filled with God’s grace from His word and sacraments. Further whenever and wherever we receive God’s grace we receive all the gifts of heaven. In his word’s and sacraments and no where else we receive sonship with God, forgiveness of sins, blessing from God, eternal life, and all the blessings of heaven. It is this word that gives us life and becomes for us like water in a desert and deep and urgent need from which we drink life.

A desperate need not for ourselves but for those we witness to as well.

I think that one of the biggest problems when it comes to witnessing is that we honestly don’t believe that God’s word is as capable and powerful as it claims to be. We hear in Church often enough that it is God’s power working through the Gospel that will turn the hearts of men and nothing else. Yet faced with an evolutionist we have trouble believing that simple law and gospel preaching are really going to accomplish anything. We feel like we must add some persuasive arguments of our own. And certainly there is a good time and use for apologetics. But what they really truly NEED is the power of God working through the gospel. We fail to speak because we don’t think we can convince them. But we forget that it is God who needs to speak.

Paul says it is “God . . . ***pleading*** through us” by “**laying upon us the word of reconciliation.**”

It is God’s word alone that will fill that desperate need

Therefore because of this great need, the Father CRIES through us and we BEG men to receive this saving word.

The final use of deomai we are going to look at today is

Matthew 9:38 "Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."

The need is so great and so desperate both for us and others that the Lord instructs to BEG to IMPLOR that men might be sent out, that the word might be sent out. That men might hear the word, recognize their great need for the good things of Christ and eagerly desire the reconciliation of their sins.