

We Are Christ's Ambassadors

2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2

Key Verse: 5:20

“We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.”

In the last passage we learned that God has given us a glorious hope of an eternal home in heaven, where there is no flooding, and a glorious spiritual body that never gets old or tired. And he has given us the Holy Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing this. Therefore we are always confident, living with a sense of victory. We live by faith, not by sight. Furthermore, we make it our goal to please God, for we must all appear before him to be judged. Today's passage teaches us what we should do to please God, as we hold on to the living hope in his kingdom, living in this troubled world.

I. A new creation in Christ (11-17)

In verses 11-15 we find what motivated Paul to preach the gospel. It was the fear of the Lord. Moreover, Christ's love compelled him. In verses 16-17 we learn to regard people as new creations in Christ.

First, we fear the Lord (11-12). Look at verse 11. "Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience." Paul said this to explain and defend himself. Some people criticized him, saying he used deceptive techniques to capture people by trickery (4:2; 12:16). Actually, this was the method of the false apostles. Paul was different. Paul tried to persuade men out of the fear of the Lord. He knew that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive what is due us. And Paul was always conscious of God's presence. He knew that God sees everything, and nothing is hidden from God's sight. Paul hoped that the Corinthians would recognize his pure heart and gospel faith and simply accept him as God's servant. Paul wanted them to know that what really matters in a servant of God is his inner motive to please God. Then they could be proud of him as their shepherd (12). Paul wanted them to discern spiritual reality and not be tossed around by the waves of people's ideas. Paul wanted them to stand firm in the gospel which Paul taught them.

Second, Christ's love compels us (13-15). Paul explained further his inner motive in preaching the gospel in Corinth. Look at verse 13. "If we are out of our mind, it

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is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you." Some people criticized Paul by saying, "He is out of his mind; he's crazy." Governor Festus once said, "You are out of your mind Paul!" (Ac 26:24). Paul admitted the possibility. But if he was crazy, he was crazy for Jesus. Actually, everyone is crazy for something. Some are crazy for sports, others for romance, and still others for money or political power. Then again some are crazy about their pets, video games, or drugs. One alcoholic decided not to drink anymore. He made it through one day. Then he was so happy that he celebrated by having a drink. What are we crazy for? We must be crazy for Jesus. In fact, the word "Christian" was first coined by unbelievers in Antioch who observed that the early Christians were crazy for Christ.

Paul explained why he was crazy for Jesus. Let's read verse 14. "For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died." Christ's love compelled Paul. What is Christ's love? It is that Christ died on the cross for our sins, once for all. Whoever believes in Christ participates in his death and resurrection and is liberated from the power of sin and death. They no longer live for themselves, but willingly live for Christ who died and rose for them (15). Before knowing Christ, we lived according to our own selfish purposes, as poet William Earnest Henley described: "I am the master of my fate, the captain of my soul." The motive of our words and deeds, and even religious activity, was to please ourselves. However, after accepting Christ who died for us, we die to ourselves and live for Jesus. The motive of our words and deeds is to please Jesus. Moved by Christ's love, Paul was passionate to love and serve God. Christ's love was his inner motivation. Some people are motivated by selfish ambition. They work hard. If they succeed, they become proud and useless. If they do poorly, they despair and give up. However, when Christ's love compels us to do God's work, we are never tired. We never despair. Our love does not dry up. We are continually motivated to do God's work with willingness and joy. What is your inner motive to serve God? May Christ's love compel us as it did Paul.

Third, a Christian view of people (16-17). Look at verse 16. "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer." Before meeting Christ, Paul saw him from a worldly point of view as a cult leader, and his followers as insane. However, after meeting Christ, Paul saw him as Savior and Lord, and his followers as holy saints. Before knowing Christ, we see others from a worldly point of view. We see their natural talent, education level, bank account, and house size. However, when we are in Christ, these things are insignificant.

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How then should we see people? Paul gives a general principle. Look at verse 17. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" What really matters is whether a person is in Christ. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! Before accepting Christ, we were under the power of sin and death. It was in our nature and we could not change it. No one, and nothing, could change us, not good ideas, noble education, keeping regulations, or religious activities. However, Christ makes us a new creation. He does not merely improve our old creation; Christ makes us a new creation.

Abraham Nial in India was a devout Hindu. He offered the sacrifices, kept the regulations, and recited mantras from memory. But his inner man did not change. He was fearful, thinking that he would be reincarnated as a pig or a rat. However, when he heard the message of Jesus' forgiveness, he accepted it and became a new creation. Now he is a fruitful gospel worker. Chuck Colson was a typical politician. He was loyal and hardworking, yet driven by selfish ambition. This blinded him and led to abuse of power, criminal behavior, and imprisonment in the Watergate scandal. He realized that nothing could change him, not a good Ivy League education, political power, knowledge of the law, money, or anything else. But when he accepted Christ in his heart, Christ changed him. Since then he has been an evangelist for prisoners and a national spiritual leader for America. At one time, Steve Stasinos was a candidate to lead a heavy metal rock band. He wore t-shirts with weird images, had hair down to his shoulders, and wore leather and chains. Mother Barry told him, "Your hairstyle is like Jesus. I like it." Later Steve accepted the gospel and was changed. Now he wears a suit and tie and looks so handsome. He is a loving husband, a responsible father, a compassionate shepherd, and an inspiring messenger, especially at UIC.

Here we learn that Christ has transforming power. So if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come! Everyone wants to live a new life, leaving their old life behind. But no one can change his life. If we really want to live a new life with new hope and new vision, we must be in Christ. When we are in Christ, Christ changes us into a new creation. He changes everything: our lifestyle, value system, inner desires, and the way we see others. And Christ gives us love and joy and peace in our hearts. Christ gives us eager desire to serve God. We can give thanks in all circumstances, we are joyful always, and we can be kind to others. Though the world does not change, those who accept Christ change inwardly and become a new creation. We must see ourselves and others in Christ. Then we can be truly discerning and positively encourage others in Christ.

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II. Be reconciled to God (5:18-6:2)

In this part we learn what God wants us to do as new creations in Christ: participate in the ministry of reconciliation. Look at verse 18. "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...." Here we find two things God has done for us.

First, God reconciled us to himself through Christ (18a). Reconciliation assumes that the relationship between God and us was broken, and as a result we were enemies of God. Israel and the PLO are always in conflict. They need reconciliation. They are comparable in size and strength. However, in the conflict between God and us, we are not so. God is the Creator and we are his creatures. God is holy and we are terrible sinners. God is the Judge and we are the objects of his wrath. So there is no way for us to reconcile to God. Because of this we always feel threatened; we are fearful of God's judgment. There is no peace in our hearts. When we had no way to go to God, God took the initiative to come to us. God had mercy on us and stretched out his hand to reconcile us to himself.

In the Old Testament, God provided a way of reconciliation. It was to offer animal sacrifices to atone for one's sins. However, this was temporary and its effect limited. It was only a shadow of what was to come. For true reconciliation, God sent Jesus Christ as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Christ is the Mediator between God and us. God needs Christ in order to relate to us. We need Christ in order to relate to God. We can come to God only through Jesus Christ. We can come to God in any place, at any time, just as we are. Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." As God's enemies we had no peace and no joy and no real happiness. We were like prisoners on death row who know they are destined to die as criminals. Fine food, designer clothes or luxury cars cannot really make us happy, for we are destined to die once and be condemned forever in the fiery lake of burning sulfur without hope. But when we are reconciled to God, we have a right relationship with God. We can enjoy true peace and freedom (Ro 5:1). We receive God's love, mercy, protection and provision. Finally we inherit God's kingdom. God reconciled us to himself eternally.

Second, God gave us the ministry of reconciliation (18b,19). Verses 18b,19 say, "...and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that 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." God has great faith. He trusts us to carry out the ministry of reconciliation. This is the most precious work in the world. The world

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is full of disharmony, conflict, division and war. The world needs reconciliation. The Nobel Peace Prize is given to those who contribute to world peace. Miss USA beauty pageant contestants always say they want world peace. Though people try in many ways to bring about reconciliation, they fail in the end. It is because the root problem is not the relationship between people or nations; it is the broken relationship with God the Creator. Yet God is reconciling the world to himself and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. When we lead people to God through one-to-one Bible study they can reconcile to God and the world. Several young people among us alienated themselves from their families and society through rebellious living as teenagers. Through one-to-one Bible study with a compassionate shepherd they were reconciled to God and others. Though we do win a Nobel Peace Prize, we are true peacemakers in the world.

Look at verse 20a. "We are therefore, Christ's ambassadors...." When we accept God's commissioning as ministers of reconciliation we have a new identity. We are Christ's ambassadors. Ambassadors represent their nation in relations with other nations. They are important and highly respected. As Christ's ambassadors we represent Christ. We must reflect Christ to the world in word and deed, in a way that wins others over to God. We need to represent Christ well. Otherwise, can make others stumble. Many people complain that Christians are all hypocrites, so they don't want to be one. But when we truly represent Christ, some will say, "Wow! You are different. You are always smiling. You are always thankful, even on the phone. You are very kind and never get angry. You are humble and meek. How is it possible?" Then we can say, "It is Christ living in me." This is good outreach. As Christ humbled himself, we should humble ourselves. As Christ forgave his enemies, prayed for them and blessed them, we should do the same. As Christ came not to be served, but to serve, we must serve others. As Christ lived a holy life, so must we. As Christ never complained and was always thankful, we must do the same. As Christ lived for the glory of God, so must we. As Christ pleased God, even in the midst of suffering, so must we.

We should be proud of being Christ's ambassadors. However, we must not be proud of ourselves. We must humble ourselves as Christ did. In verse 20b, Paul says, "We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." Our attitude must be both humble and urgent, with a great shepherd heart. The message is: "Be reconciled to God." There was an underlying conflict between Paul and the Corinthian believers. That is why he wrote this letter to them. But he did not say "Be reconciled to me." Rather, he said, "Be reconciled to God." Without being reconciled to God first, it was impossible for them to be reconciled to Paul. Most people think that their relationship problems are with another person. So they try to

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solve the problem with the other person and fail. It is because at the root, each one has a relationship problem with God. Without solving the relationship problem with God we cannot really solve our relationship problems with others. But when we are reconciled with God we can be reconciled with others as well. Sin against our brothers is sin against God. The prodigal son said, "I have sinned against heaven and against you" (Lk 15:18, 21). And King David said, "Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight..." (Ps 51:4a). Trying to reconcile with others before reconciling with God misses the mark. We must be reconciled with God to be truly reconciled with others. That is why Paul encouraged the Corinthians to be reconciled with God first.

In order to be reconciled to God, we must come to God, confess our sins sincerely, and ask God's forgiveness (1 Jn 1:9). God is faithful to keep his promise to forgive us. Christ's blood purifies us from all sin and we are reconciled to God. How is this possible? Look at verse 21. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." God made his holy and glorious Son Jesus to be sin for us. When Jesus hung on the cross, he became the murderer, the adulterer, the cheater, the greedy, the idolater, the liar, the drunkard, the thief, in our places, and tasted the full measure of God's wrath for us. Isaiah 53:6b says, "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." God did this to satisfy his justice. God did this to make us the righteousness of God. Now we can live before God without fear in holiness and righteousness. Now we can serve God with joy all our days. This is how we become Christ's ambassadors and ministers of reconciliation.

Let's read 6:1-2. "As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, 'In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of my salvation I helped you.' I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation." God's favor is deeper than the ocean. However, the opportunity to claim it will end. We don't know when Jesus will come again. We also don't know when we will leave this world. It is most urgent to receive God's grace. It is urgent for us to be reconciled to God.

God took the initiative to reconcile us to himself by sacrificing his one and only Son Jesus Christ for our sins. Not only did God reconcile us to himself through Christ, he also gave us the ministry of reconciliation. We are Christ's ambassadors. So we implore people on Christ's behalf: "Be reconciled to God." Now is the time of God's favor. Today is the day of salvation. Let's pray that we may carry out this glorious mission this fall semester with the love and humility of Christ. Let's pray

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that our nation may be reconciled to God and receive the message of reconciliation and spread it to the world as Christ's ambassadors.