

Who Am I? *Finding Our Identity in Christ*
Allen Snapp
Grace Community Church
June 26, 2016

Who Am I? An Ambassador for Christ

2 Cor. 5:14-6:1 (pray)

Next week we'll be finishing up our series on Identity by looking at Phil 3:20-21 where Paul reminds us that we are citizens of heaven. This is not our home, this is not our country - we look forward to a better country. But while we're here, the Bible says that we are ambassadors for Christ. An ambassador is one who represents their home country while living and working in a foreign country. God has called us as ambassadors for Christ:

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Cor. 5:20)

Every believer is an ambassador for Christ and is called to represent Christ in a way that both appeals and impacts this world, both unbelievers and believers for Christ. God wants to use you to help people - believers and unbelievers alike - be impacted for Christ to the glory of God. Paul Tripp writes this:

This lifestyle [of an ambassador] is not simply for the few who are privileged to minister as a career. God's kingdom work involves every member of the body of Christ. Whether you are a child, a spouse, a neighbor, a relative, a pastor, an employer or employee, a teacher, a student, or a friend, all of your relationships must reflect your ambassadorial calling...God sends unfinished people to unfinished people with the message of His grace so that He can reclaim every heart for His glory.

I love that last line: *God sends unfinished people to unfinished people with the message of His grace so that He can reclaim every heart for His glory.* If God waited until His work in people was finished before He sent them to others with the message of His grace, there would be no message of grace. None of us are finished. We are all in process. You may feel like you're nowhere near finished, nowhere near ready to be Christ's ambassador to others, but God wants to use you to help others experience Christ and real change in their lives. If you get that, it'll change the way you live!

But an ambassador isn't free to do or say whatever they want. They are charged with the responsibility of accurately representing their country and the president or king of their country. As ambassadors for Christ we can't do whatever we want and say whatever we want and then slap a Jesus verse on it to make it "Christian". Believers can do great damage to the cause of Christ if they bring the wrong message or even the right message in the wrong spirit. Paul says that as ambassadors, God is making His appeal through us and this passage gives us three qualities of what that appeal looks and sounds like.

I. The appeal of an ambassador is motivated by the love of Christ (vv. 14-15)

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. 2 Cor. 5:14-15 (ESV)

Jesus died for the lost out of love for the lost. God sent His Son because He loved this world so much. As ambassadors it is the love of Christ that should control us. Love for Christ, and the love of Christ should be what motivates our appeal.

Who Am I? *Finding Our Identity in Christ*

Allen Snapp

Grace Community Church

June 26, 2016

There's a saying people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. It's true. Before we can try to help people come to Christ, or help them grow in Christ we need to ask ourselves why we want to help them change. What spirit are we coming to them in? People can sense it if, no matter what our words are, there is a spirit that isn't the love of Christ.

- If we want to “help people change” because we are self-righteous and judgmental people are going to run as far away from us as they can get.
- If we're trying to help people change because they annoy us the way they are, don't expect people to respond well. I can testify to this because in my early years of being a pastor people's stupid problems and their stubborn inability to see their stupid problems and just stop really bugged me! I remember writing to one young woman in our church who was clearly going down a very wrong road, but I loaded the letter with my impatience and annoyance and I'm sure it didn't help her see Christ.
- If we're trying to help people change because we want to impress people with how spiritual we are, that icky spirit will ooze off of us and people will pick up on it.

What I'm talking about is more than just the words we say. People can feel the spirit that we're coming to them in. If there's irritation, spiritual superiority, or an agenda, we aren't representing Christ accurately. The gospel connects a lost world to a loving God, and as ambassadors of Christ we need to make sure that, to the degree that we can, what people feel in our spirit is love.

As you consider who God has placed in your life, non-Christian or Christian, who you know are struggling with sins and needs to know Christ in a deeper way, stop and ask God to fill your heart with the love of Christ for them as you seek to represent Christ to them. The appeal of an ambassador is motivated by the love of Christ.

I. The appeal of an ambassador brings the message of reconciliation

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. [and what is the message?] We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Cor. 5:20 (ESV)

Paul writes in verse 18 that we have been given the ministry of reconciliation, and in verse 19 that we've been entrusted with the message of reconciliation. Our ministry is inseparably tied to a message. An ambassador is not free to say whatever he or she wants – nor are we free to make it up as we go. We are entrusted with a message which we are to deliver faithfully.

Jesus died to reconcile sinners who have been alienated from God back to God. The cross put away the hostility between sinful man and holy God so that we could be reconciled to God as friends, not enemies. The way God did this was by making him to be sin who knew no sin (Jesus). Our sin was literally nailed to the cross of Christ as he became the sum of all our sin in God's sight, so that we might become the sum of all Christ's righteousness in God's sight. All of that was done to restore a deep and intimate relationship between sinful mankind and a holy God. That is the message God has given us: be reconciled to God! God has made a way for you to be His friend! Come to Christ and be reconciled!

Ultimately it is only that message of reconciliation to God that can bring the inside out change that people need. It is an amazing privilege that God has called each of us as ambassadors of Christ, to help people come to God, and to experience lasting change in their lives. As Paul Tripp puts it in his book *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands, God uses people in need of change to help people in need of*

Who Am I? *Finding Our Identity in Christ*

Allen Snapp

Grace Community Church

June 26, 2016

change. But we need to be careful that we don't go with our own message, that we don't try to tinker with people's hearts and souls by trying to "fix them" with our own ideas of what they need.

Some of you have heard about the time my car was running rough, and because the only thing I knew anything about when it came to cars was to check the oil. So I checked the oil and the dipstick said the oil level was full. I looked at that and thought, "that can't be right, the dipstick must be malfunctioning." So I added three quarts of oil. The car still didn't run right so the next day I had to take it to the mechanic. They fixed it, but they also had to drain 3 extra quarts of oil. The car did have a dipstick problem - the dipstick driving the car!

We don't want to do that with people...decide we know what's wrong with them and begin pouring quart after quart of our own ideas into them to help them change. As ambassadors for Christ we have been given a message - it's to get right with God. So whether they are not believers or they are believers who are straying or struggling or backslidden or hardened, our message is a call for them to connect relationally with God through Christ. Every problem we have is, at core, a relational issue with God. The solution begins by getting right with God, by drawing near to God through Christ.

How can you, as an ambassador for Christ, help someone come to Christ, or help them change in some area where they need to change? Remember the first point: never underestimate the power of simply loving and caring about them. A cup of coffee with a friend who cares can have a tremendous effect on someone. Humbly bring God's word to their situation - that's why we need to be careful students of God's word. Pray for them. And if they have a specific need or issue that is beyond your scope, try to connect them with someone who can help them. I find it easier now, after 20+ years of pastoring, to say to someone that I am not equipped to help them, than I did 15 years ago.

But at the core of our message is always this: be reconciled to God. Draw near to God through Christ. Confess that sin, humble yourself, repent of that sin that hinders you by turning from it and turning to God. Be reconciled to God! That is a message for those who don't believe in Christ, and it's a message for those who do believe but are out of fellowship with Him because they're walking in disobedience and unbelief.

Our message is really God's appeal through us: Turn to Christ. Confess sin. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Be reconciled to God!

II. The appeal of an ambassador is to the ministry of God's grace in other's lives

Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. 2 Cor. 6:1

Paul was always conscience that God was working through him and that God was working in others. *Working together with him* (that's God at work through Paul's ministry) *we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain* (that's God's work in those Paul is ministering to).

Many times I've heard people share how God led them to witness to the one person who seemed the least interested, the hardest person to reach, and they came to Christ. We need to look beyond the outside, the natural, and see and believe that God is at work.

When I was in high school, I was a pretty outspoken Christian, and I took some light-hearted heat for it. The funny thing is, the two guys who gave me the hardest time and ridiculed my faith the most, both came to Christ later. One I was able to pray with, the other came up to me at a church meeting ten years

Who Am I? *Finding Our Identity in Christ*

Allen Snapp

Grace Community Church

June 26, 2016

later to tell me he had come to Christ. God's grace is working in people's lives, our appeal is to the ministry of that grace in people's lives.

There's a big difference between an appeal to God's grace in them, and an appeal to them to "get it together for God", to try harder, work harder, do more. Legalism focuses on what man can do, grace focuses on what God can do. That doesn't remove man's part - after all Paul is appealing to them not to receive God's grace in vain - but it doesn't elevate man's part above God's part. It's based on God having given them grace if they will but appropriate it. There is grace to believe in Christ if you never have before. Do it now - today is the day of salvation! Don't put it off - you don't know that you have tomorrow. You don't know that your heart will have any desire to trust in Christ tomorrow - the enemy may so distract you that you ignore Christ. Today there is grace - believe in him!

Or to the struggling believer - there is grace. Abundant, overflowing grace. But it's not automatic. If it were, Paul wouldn't be talking about receiving God's grace in vain (in other words, it doesn't accomplish what grace is designed to accomplish). Turn and trust and obey. Do it now.

We don't pour legalism into people to try to get them to change. I remember a friend who was suffering from a deep depression many years ago. Once he had been a really fireball for Christ but this depression had caused him to check out on life. He was listless in his walk with God. He stopped being engaged with his wife and children. They were feeling the loss of a husband and father who was an emotional shell. Feeling frustrated by the price I knew his family was paying, I remember kneeling next to him before a church meeting, and basically telling him he needed to stop being depressed and get it together for the sake of his family. I explained to him how much he was hurting his family - something he already knew - and basically poured three quarts of condemnation into his soul in the hope of motivating him to change.

If I could have that moment back...if I could kneel next to John again, I would want to remind him of the grace of God in his life. Remind him of the love of Christ that walks through the darkest of life's seasons with him. And with his wife and daughter. Invitation of the Father to draw near. Through Christ. I would want to give him hope - the hope that comes from God's grace.

Listen, there isn't the time to cover every aspect of how we approach every situation this morning. There is a time to convey the consequences of bad choices to someone. There is a time to warn. But the problem at its deepest level is never just that they're doing wrong, it's that they're not right with God. And the solution is never just "try harder", "do better", stop it! The solution is God's grace in their lives. Go to God, receive grace to change, He is at work in your life, believe that, cooperate with it, don't resist it.

Appealing to God's grace at work in them gives them hope for change rather than leaving them hopeless. And so we appeal the grace of God they have received, that's at work in their lives.

- Remind them of the grace they have received –encourage them with evidences of grace in lives.
- Encourage them to daily depend on God for grace. To daily approach the throne of grace for mercy and grace to help in time of need.
- Entrust them to God's grace to work in them and motivate them to change.

We are ambassadors for Christ. Which means we have received this amazing grace that I've been talking about. We have been loved by God in Christ. We have been reconciled to God through Christ. And God's grace is powerfully at work in our lives. In your life. Maybe you don't feel it or see it this morning but I'm appealing to the grace that you have received:

Who Am I? *Finding Our Identity in Christ*

Allen Snapp

Grace Community Church

June 26, 2016

Be reconciled to God! And see yourself as what you really are: an ambassador for Christ. An unfinished person sent by God to unfinished people with the message of God's grace so that through you, God can reclaim hearts for His glory. Let's pray.