

## The Appeal of an Ambassador Part One

Good morning and happy New Year!

Let's pick back up in 2 Cor. 5 as we continue our series Messy Grace.

*<sup>11</sup> Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. <sup>12</sup> We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. <sup>13</sup> For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. <sup>14</sup> For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; <sup>15</sup> and 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.*

*<sup>16</sup> From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

**6** Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. | 2 Cor. 5:11-21, 6:1

Eighteen years ago when I was doing an internship at Covenant Church, I was given an opportunity to preach a message in a message series about helping people change inspired by Paul Tripp's book, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*. It's one of the best books on counseling I know of. The tagline of the book is *People in need of change helping people in need of change*.

Anyway, the passage of scripture I was given was the passage we read this morning. And I was quite nervous about it! The average church attendance was about 1200 people, and I wasn't sure how to connect the passage I was given with the theme of the series.

The Lord woke me up in the middle of the night with a title and an outline for the message. I got up and wrote it down. The title was: *The Appeal of an Ambassador*.

I want to share an updated version of that message, and I want to share it in the same framework: how do we help people change? How can we be an influence for spiritual growth in other people's lives? Let's ask it this way: how can we help people make godly changes and grow in Christ in 2021?

Paul says *therefore knowing the fear of the Lord we persuade others*. Knowing the reality and glory and coming judgment of God, he says, we work to convince and persuade others. But persuade them of what? And persuade them how?

In context, Paul certainly means persuading people to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. But I think the context also shows that the ministry he has in mind includes helping believers change as well.

This is where it all can get messy. Messy grace. Cause we see all have areas we need to change in and that makes us think we aren't qualified to help other people change. But God wants to use you as an instrument of redemptive change in other people's lives even though you see so much that needs changing in your life.

*People in need of change helping people in need of change.*

But how? How do we help people move in the direction God has in mind for their lives?

What do we have to offer to people who are hurting? Whose lives are falling apart? Who are in the grip of an addiction? Who have been abused? Or are abusive? How do we help the person whose life is being destroyed by pride learn humility? How do we help someone who doesn't know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior come to know him?

I believe verse 20 gives us the answer to those questions:

*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

When we come to Christ in faith, we become ambassadors for Christ. This isn't just for "some Christians" or vocational ministers. All Christians are ambassadors for Christ. You are. I am.

*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. ~ Paul Tripp*

An ambassador of Christ is about kingdom work. We are sent by the King and we represent the King. Here's the thing: ambassadors are not free to say whatever they want; they bring the message that the one who sent them gives them. *God making His appeal through us.* It's what God says, not what we think, that will help people experience kingdom change in their lives.

When I was about 22 years old I was driving along one night when the car just didn't seem to be running right. It started running rough as if it was going to stall. The first thing that came to mind was I hadn't checked the oil level recently and it's probably low on oil. So I pulled over and checked the dipstick, and to my surprise it read full. I tried it again, same result.

Yet I was so sure the problem was that the car was low on oil that I thought the dipstick must be malfunctioning. I went to the nearest convenience store, bought 3 quarts of oil and poured all of them into the car. It didn't fix the car, it just added one more thing that was wrong with the car.

I'm sorry to say I've done the same thing with people. I think I know what's wrong with them and what

they need so I pour 3 quarts of my thoughts and opinions into them.

People don't need *our* ideas and solutions. They need a word from God. That's what we are to give as ambassadors of Christ: *God making His appeal through us!*

We see in this passage four characteristics of the appeal of an ambassador of Christ. We will only get to two this morning.

### 1. The appeal is motivated by the love of Christ

*For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; <sup>15</sup>and 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*

The motivating drive in Paul's ministry was the love of Christ. It was the love of Christ that controlled him, the love of Christ that compelled him. And the love of Christ was most powerfully demonstrated on the cross: *One has died for all, therefore all have died...*The cross is the greatest act of love in history. It was love that caused God to send His Son. It was love that motivated Jesus to willingly lay down his life.

Verse 15 tells us that Jesus died for our sin in order to change what we live for: *that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.* What we see putting these verses together is that Jesus loved us with such a great love he gave his life to save us (*the love of Christ controls us*), AND that love expresses itself in changing us (*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***).

There are a lot of reasons for wanting people to change. We might want them to change cause we hate the way they are. Or what they do annoys us. Or they disagree with us and we want to agree with us. Or we just like controlling people. There are a lot of reasons, but only one right reason: love. Jesus loving them through us.

As ambassadors of Christ, we not only want to say what Jesus wants us to say, we want to say it the way he wants us to say it. With love.

Sometimes love means saying things that are hard – even painful – to hear. Paul's first experience with the love of Christ was when Jesus knocked him off his horse on the road to Damascus. When Paul (then Saul) hit the road, Jesus said, "Saul, you're going in the wrong direction. Change direction and live for me!"

God making His appeal through us won't always say what someone wants to hear. The kisses of an enemy are deceitful but faithful are the wounds of a friend. Sometimes God making His appeal through us will be painful for the other person to hear. Change isn't easy. Often it's painful. Change is often costly. Forgiveness costs. Humbling our pride hurts. Breaking addictions costs. Changing from an abusive mindset to a compassionate mindset will be painful. Change isn't easy. And helping people change means sometimes we say things that aren't easy for them to hear. But they need to hear.

Maybe there's someone that you know who's going in the wrong direction and needs to change. Maybe they see it, maybe they don't. God might well be calling you to help them change, but ask God to fill your heart with the love of Christ for them. The appeal of an ambassador of Christ is motivated by the love of Christ.

## 2. The appeal depends on the power of new creation

*<sup>16</sup> From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

Human beings constantly judge and assess and evaluate each other. We are constantly sizing each other up. We all do it! Someone drives up in a 2020 Tesla, we assess them a certain way. Someone drives up in a 1980 Ford Pinto, we assess them a different way. We put people in categories based on things like nationality, education, wealth, status, looks, popularity, personality, and so on.

Sometimes we assess people as failures, losers. We assess someone as unimportant because they aren't socially connected, or successful, or in the cool club or whatever. Or we assess someone as very important because they are well connected or financially set or cool or whatever. And others have done that to us too. Humans have an infinite number of labels we put on each other.

That's what Paul means by regarding according to the flesh. It's seeing them based on temporal, surface categories instead of seeing them as eternal beings made in the image of God.

Paul admits he not once did that, he did it to Jesus. At one time Paul judged Jesus by the flesh and assessed him to be a false messiah whose followers needed to be silenced and stamped out. But then Paul was knocked off his horse by the power of the risen Christ and he got up a new creation!

Ever look at someone and think, "they're so close to becoming a Christian. They're nice, moral, and open to talk about the things of God"? Or, "they will NEVER become a Christian – they're such big sinners, so hard-hearted, so antagonistic towards the things of God"? We are assessing according to the flesh. Paul was in the "hard-hearted, antagonistic, I'm going to kill every Christian I meet" category. Then he met the risen Christ.

We might look at someone who professes Christ and think they'll never change. A lot of times we think that about ourselves. "I'll never change". That's looking at things according to the flesh, not according to the new creation, resurrection power of the risen Christ!

God is in the business of changing lives! In Christ we are a new creation, not a refurbished creation.

So if you are in Christ, if Jesus is your Savior, this is God's appeal to you, and it's a great appeal for the New Year: know that you are a new creation in Christ! Believe it! You might fail, but you're not a failure – you're a new creation in Christ! You might sin, but you're not a slave to sin – you're a new creation in Christ! You might get discouraged but you are not hopeless – you're a new creation in Christ!

And God wants to take all that messy grace working in your life and use it to help other people grow in Christ. *People in need of change helping people in need of change!*

Close with this: as the leadership is prayerfully considering ways we can go deeper in Bible study it's because God makes this appeal to believers in Romans 12:2

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.*

This is interesting: we are new creations in Christ but God says, as new creations, don't be squished into the image of the world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds. It's the Bible that renews our minds.

The Holy Spirit takes the Bible and pierces our hearts with it, comforts our hearts with it, directs our lives with it, convicts our consciences with it, draws us to Christ through it, strengthens our faith through it, gives us boldness to be witnesses for Christ through it.

And He pours His words into us through the Bible, so we have more than 3 quarts of our own ideas to pour into others.

New creations still have need of being transformed and renewed through the word of God. And as we get God's word deeply in our hearts, we are more effective ambassadors of Christ, God making His appeal through us.

Let's ask God to empower us to be more effective ambassadors for Christ in 2021.