

## The Appeal of An Ambassador Part Two

Let's turn to 2 Cor. 5 and let's pray.

<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.<sup>[a]</sup> 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<sup>[a]</sup> 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. 2Cor. 5:16-6:1

This is the second in a two part message called the Appeal of an Ambassador. Just to recap briefly from last week:

- These verses give us a window into Paul's ministry: his motive, his message, his method. In light of that we are framing this message around the question: how do we help people change? God isn't done with us – we are all a work in progress. But while God works on us, He also wants to work through us to help others grow and mature. As Paul Tripp says in his book, *Instruments in the Redeemers Hands, people in need of change helping people in need of change*. How do we do that: as ambassadors of Christ.
- An ambassador represents their government or king, and they are to bring the message of the governing power they represent. Every Christian is an ambassador of Jesus Christ. We represent Jesus and we are to speak, not our own thoughts and ideas about what people need, but we are to bring God's word to them. Verse 20: *God making His appeal through us*.
- The appeal of an ambassador has four characteristics:
  1. The appeal is motivated by the love of Christ
  2. The appeal depends on the power of a new creation

Let's continue. The third characteristic of the appeal of an ambassador of Christ is...

### 3. The appeal is the message of reconciliation

<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<sup>[a]</sup> 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.

We have been given the “ministry of reconciliation” and the “message of reconciliation”.

Reconciliation is necessary when a relationship is broken. To reconcile with someone is to fix what was broken, ending alienation and estrangement and restoring warm and friendly relations with them.

Sin had alienated us from God! Our sins broke our relationship with God and put a gulf between us and God that we could never, ever, bridge. A lot of people I have talked to who aren't Christians think they're fine with God, but the Bible says they're not. None of us are, apart from Christ. There is a break between us and God that we could never, ever heal.

But God could. And God did, through His Son Jesus Christ.

*<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<sup>[c]</sup> the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.* How is God able to not count our sins against us?

*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

God bridged the gap with His Son Jesus, who as fully God and fully man, became the bridge between God and man. It's the cross that gives us a way to be reconciled to God. God couldn't just ignore our sins, they had to be paid for. Jesus paid it all on the cross: for our sake God made him to be sin who had never sinned. Jesus carried the weight of all our sin as he hung there on the cross, so that in Christ justice would be meted out.

But God wasn't done: not only did He make Jesus sin (in the sense that our sin was placed on him), but then God made us righteous. In Christ we become the righteousness of God.

And all of this makes reconciliation possible. The break in our relationship has been healed. The gulf between us has been crossed. We can come to God boldly through Christ.

As ambassadors of Christ we have been given the ministry of reconciliation and the message of reconciliation. We speak and we work for reconciliation.

The anger and violence we saw this week in the Capitol has been a painful culmination of anger and violence that has been growing for years. I remember the early days of the Internet when the thing that bugged me about the “social messages” I'd get every day was that they were syrupy, moralistic urban legends that believers would pass on as fact. Now I long for those days! There is so much anger and tribalism and polarization on social media and it reflects the great rift going on in our nation.

That rift, that brokenness isn't the root cause, it's a symptom of our break with God. All the relational brokenness we see in the world, whether it be friends who are longer speaking, to families torn apart by conflict, to civil unrest, to violence, to wars between countries, it's all a symptom of a deeper brokenness.

When our vertical relationship with God was broken, our horizontal relationships also got broken. That's why the Bible says the world will seek peace but will never find it apart from getting peace with God.

Jesus brings us peace with God. And as ambassadors, we are to speak and work for reconciliation by sharing the gospel with those who don't believe. We have been given the message of reconciliation: *be reconciled to God!* Jesus died to save you!

I was so blessed to hear that Tara Wood, our beloved Brenda's daughter, prayed to receive Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior during a service a couple weeks ago. What happened as she prayed to receive Christ was that her sins were forgiven, the break between her and God was healed, and she became a dearly loved daughter of God! And it's been cool to hear how the Spirit is working in her life, as she and Brenda listen to the Bible together and end each day by praying together. Tara, we are praying for you and cheering you on in your walk with the Lord! That's what Jesus came to do!

But the ministry and message of reconciliation is also for helping believers who are ensnared by sin to turn back to God.

For the Christian the work of reconciliation was completed in Christ, but the ministry of reconciliation is ongoing. Sin alienates our heart from God, sin distances us from God, builds an imagined wall between us and God. Our position with God and our acceptance by God isn't affected, but our fellowship with God is affected. God doesn't pull away, but our hearts pull away from God. That's the power of ongoing sin.

What we need to hear in the face of ongoing sin is the ongoing power of the gospel: repent of that sin and *be reconciled to God!* What you're trying to get from sin, only God can give you. Turn and be healed! God's waiting. God loves you. God has new life to give you.

As ambassadors of Christ, we want our words and actions to help heal, not hurt; bind, not break, relationships as much as possible, starting with their relationship with God. The appeal of an ambassador is the message of reconciliation.

#### **4. The appeal is an appeal to God's grace at work within them**

**Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. 2Cor. 5:16-6:1**

We have a part in this and God has a part in this. Our part is small, God's part is big.

- God has made us new creations in Christ. Our part is to believe.
- God reconciled us to Himself. Our part is to receive the reconciliation God offers us.
- God gives us grace. Our part is to live in the grace He gives.

Oh, and one other thing: *working together with Him*, our part is to appeal to others to live in the grace God has given them. The appeal of an ambassador is the appeal of God's grace.

If you remember my malfunctioning dipstick story from last week, where I poured 3 quarts of oil into a

car that didn't need it, it reminds us people don't need 3 quarts of our ideas of what will "fix" them. They need a word from God. And that word is grace.

Years ago, at the Bible school where I met Janice, we used to have Sunday services. And one day a guy I knew named John came to the service. John was married with several kids and at one time John was an on fire, go-for-broke, non compromise Christian. But for several months he had been struggling with depression. He went from on fire to barely surviving. His faith had plummeted. He wasn't functioning and his wife and kids were the ones carrying the weight of his disability.

I had talked with John before, but I felt like the time for talk was over, action was needed. Before the service, I went up to where John was sitting, knelt down in the aisle next to him and began to tell him that he needed to get his act together. That his wife was suffering. That his kids needed him to reactivate.

Poured 3 quarts of my thoughts into him. 3 quarts of condemnation into the soul of a guy already very aware of how he was falling short, a soul paralyzed by depression, a heart demoralized by a feeling of failure. His was a soul already full of condemnation, but my dipstick said he needed more so I poured away.

If I could have that moment back I would want to appeal to the grace of God at work in him. Remind him of the unfailing, unbreakable love of Christ. I would want to pour the assurance that Jesus was walking the dark valley with him and his family and Jesus would never leave or forsake him. I would want to pour grace, grace, grace into that young man.

It's been over 30 years since that day. I'm happy to say John and I are still friends on FB. He's doing well, on fire again. Sometimes he burns too hot for my taste, but I rejoice that Jesus held onto him. His wife and kids were kept strong and grew in love and compassion through that time. They're all heroes in my book. But what really gets the credit is God's keeping grace.

When believers are falling short of the grace God has given them, we appeal to them to live by the grace so abundantly available. Sometimes that calls for a strong word – like a rebuke, when it's purposeful sin that blocks the grace of God in their life. But even strong words need to be grace words. Words that build up and not tear down. Words that appeal to draw near to the God who loves them, to trust in the Savior who lived and died for them.

The appeal of an ambassador of Christ is 1) motivated by the love of Christ, 2) depends on the power of a new creation, 3) is the message of reconciliation, and 4) appeals to the grace of God at work within them.