

Being An Ambassador for Christ

Scripture Text: 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Introduction

It is Labor Day weekend. Labor Day is supposed to honor the contributions all workers have made to our country. It is also considered the unofficial end of summer. Many people celebrate the extra day off. Some gather with family and friends. Labor Day can also be a reminder that we are the Lord's workers. We are (or should be) laboring for Him, for this is His world and we are His servants working in it. Being a disciple of Christ means that we are learning from Him, serving Him, and following Him wherever He goes. It also means that whatever we do and wherever we go, we represent Jesus. How well do you represent Him? Do others know that you serve Jesus? Put another way, if you were put on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? We can become apathetic or just disobedient to God by not serving Him. This passage in Paul's second letter to Corinth can remind us who we are in Christ and what we should be doing. Paul mentioned two things that should motivate us to serve God.

The Fear of God Compels Us

No one really wants to fear anything. Many pride themselves on having no fear. Fear that is out of control and not used properly can paralyze us to do nothing. That is not good. However, fear can be useful. Fear can help us make right decisions. Fear can help to preserve our lives in dangerous situations. I read somewhere that whatever you fear the most is what you will serve the most. If that is true, what or who do you serve the most? Is it some person or group that endangers you? Is it your health? Is it money or the lack of it? Is it God? Fear of God is certainly a good thing as Jesus told us that it is God who we should fear, as He has the power over life and death (Matthew 10:28). Fear can also be helpful to a disciple of Christ. Look at the following verse.

2 Corinthians 5:11 *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.*

Paul did not have an unhealthy dread of God's judgment. He knew the love of Christ who gave Himself for him. But Paul's extraordinary experience of God's love and forgiveness did not paralyze his consciousness that God remains a holy and righteous God. The fear of the Lord is the awe and respect that is due to Christ as the world's judge. The fear of the Lord is a prominent theme in the Old Testament, where it is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom (Proverbs 1:7, 9:10). We need to be reminded of this fear as we can be in danger of becoming complacent. We may say, "Oh, I am good with God. He has saved me. I do not need to do what He says." We need to have a healthy fear of God that corrects our behavior and brings us into obedience to God. Other people also need to be told about the fear of the Lord. We know there is a judgement coming and we should want all people to be saved from it as we were saved from it. Without Christ, people are under the wrath of God and have much to fear. The fear of the Lord should compel us to share our faith with others.

The Love of Christ Controls Us

Paul also mentioned that the love of Christ controlled him. There are at least two ways to view this statement. Paul could have meant that his love for Jesus compelled Him to follow Christ and represent Him to the world. Our love for Jesus should compel us to trust and obey God. It should also produce acts of love. Does your love for Christ control you that way, or do you take advantage of His love for you? Another way to view Paul's statement about the "love of Christ" is Jesus' love for us. Because God loved us so much, He gave His Son to die for our sin (John 3:16). If someone were to sacrifice himself for you and your family so that you could live, you would probably be motivated to act a certain way. Since Paul was speaking about what Christ had done for him, he was probably referring to the love that Christ has for us. Look at the following verses.

2 Corinthians 5:14–15 ¹⁴ *For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died;* ¹⁵ *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.*

Jesus died to save the world. He died to pay a debt that we could not pay. His love for us is what should control us as it did Paul. In fact, it is Jesus' love for the world that re-creates people into the Church. By Christ's death, the death penalty for sin has been paid for all those who trust in Him. God counts their old life as ended, thus freeing them from any future punishment for their sin. This love for us has consequences, though. Jesus died for the sins of the world, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Christ. Because of Jesus' death, the power of sin has been broken for all those who trust in Him. If we are disciples of Jesus Christ and we follow Him, we will live a new life for Him. We will live as different people. Jesus' love for us will move us to view the world as He sees it — *broken and in need of Him*. I recently read a quote from C. S. Lewis which said, "To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you." It is the love of Christ for us that moves us to view others as God sees them, as needing His unconditional love.

The Mission of God is Our Ministry

People like new things: new cars, new homes, new babies. We are attracted to new things. Disciples of Christ can relate to this appeal to newness. This passage states that those who believe in Christ and confess Him as Lord are a "new creation". What is old has passed away; what is new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). With this new life that we have in Christ comes a new purpose and a new mission. As disciples of Jesus Christ, God has given each of us a new ministry, something for all the saints to work together. What is that ministry? It is a ministry of reconciliation. Look at the following verses.

2 Corinthians 5:18–19 ¹⁸ *All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;* ¹⁹ *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.*

Through Jesus, we have a new, restored relationship with God. Through Christ, those who were once separated from God are brought into fellowship with Him. God has no need to be reconciled to humanity. He does not need to make things right with us. We, however, have a desperate need to be reconciled to God. More than that, we are adopted into God's family. We become royalty and will live forever with Him. With this new relationship also comes a new mission. It is God's mission, but it becomes our mission, too. It becomes a ministry that we are all called to do. We are given a ministry of reconciliation, meaning, we are called to share what Christ has done for us with others. This passage shows us the basis, the message, and the call for this ministry.

The Basis of Our Ministry

The basis for Paul's ministry was his own reconciliation to God through Christ. Jesus saved Paul. God did not have to save Paul. He does not have to save any one of us, but out of His great love and mercy, He does. God then used Paul to share his salvation and reconciliation experience with others. Paul's own reconciliation with God was the basis for his ministry. Look at the following from Paul's letter to the Romans.

Romans 5:10–11 ¹⁰ *For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.* ¹¹ *More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

We were all enemies of God. We were all separated from Him and under His wrath, but through Christ, we are reconciled to God. Imagine that you are guilty of a serious crime and are justly convicted and sentenced to death for your crime. You could plead with the judge to let you go or to reduce your sentence. Now, imagine that your enemy came forward and told the judge that he knows you are guilty of the crime, but he would willingly pay the penalty of your crime. He would die in your place. That is what Jesus has done for you. God does not need to be reconciled to us. He does not need to make things right with us. We, however, have a desperate need to be reconciled to Him. We are guilty of the crime, separated from Him, and sentenced to death. But, through Jesus Christ, those who believe in Him and confess Him as Lord are forgiven of their sin, become friends of God, and are reconciled to Him. Our estranged relationship with God is restored through Christ. Enemies have become friends, and more than friends, family. Therefore, the basis of our ministry to the world is our own reconciliation to God through Christ. We offer reconciliation to others because we have been reconciled.

The Message of Our Ministry

The message of the ministry God gives us is the message of reconciliation to the world. It is not a message of what we have done. It is not a message on how to be a better person. It is not some self-help guide to a better you. The message of our ministry is the message of reconciliation. It includes the acknowledgement that we all need God's forgiveness. Sin destroys our relationship with God. It destroys our relationships with one another. The message of reconciliation is about what Christ has done for us and

how He saves the world through the cross and faith in Him. It is a message of how someone can change from being an enemy of God to becoming a friend of God. Christ came and died to reconcile the world to Himself. This message also includes our righteousness. We move from being sinners to being saints. Verse twenty-one of this passage states that God made Jesus, who did no sin, to be sin for us, so that through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). Through Christ, our sins are washed away, our guilt is removed, and we inherit the righteousness of Christ. That is the message God gives us to proclaim to the world.

The Call of Our Ministry

The basis of our ministry is our own reconciliation with God. The message we have been given is how Christ died for us and that faith in Him makes it possible to be reconciled to God. The third part of this ministry is the call that God places on us to do that ministry. We can have the experience of salvation, we can receive the message of reconciliation, but if we do not actually "go" and "make" disciples, we are not fulfilling the ministry God gives us. We are each called to be a part of God's mission on earth. God calls us to tell others to be reconciled to Him. Look at the following verse.

2 Corinthians 5:20 *Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

God's act of reconciling the world did not end with Jesus' death and resurrection. It continues with the work of the Church who has been given the task of proclaiming His message to the world. Paul was sent as an ambassador of Christ, His official representative, to announce God's "peace treaty" with mankind. He did not act on his own authority but under the commission of a greater power and authority who sent him. The message of reconciliation is made available to others when God's ambassadors spread the message to them. Since Jesus no longer walks on earth in the flesh, His people, the Church, are His ambassadors. They speak and act on His behalf. We are the hands and feet of Christ. We are the ones representing Jesus to the world. The recipients of God's grace are enlisted to be participants of His grace to the world. Because we have been reconciled to God, and because God has given to us the message of reconciliation, He sends us out to be messengers for Jesus Christ.

There is a second way to view the call of our ministry. It is a *calling* to others to believe in Christ and confess Him as Lord. Our call is to call others to join with us. Paul's charge "be reconciled to God" is an important summary of the gospel message. It is a call to receive the reconciliation that God has worked for us. But, notice the urgency of the call. Paul said, "We *implore* you to be reconciled to God." The sense of this message to the Corinthians was that of *begging* them to be reconciled to God. This was not Paul just asking them to consider what he was saying. He was begging them to get themselves right with God. This is similar to the man who cried out to Jesus to heal his son saying, "Teacher, I *beg* you to look at my son, for he is my only child" (Luke 9:38). If your child was sick or dying, would you just ask someone to consider helping him, or would you likely beg them to help? Do we treat the mission of the Church with such urgency?

Lastly, when and where do we represent Christ? When and where are we His ambassadors? Does the work of an ambassador of Christ only happen at select times, or is it all the time and everywhere? We represent Jesus at home, at work, at school, at a sports game, and when we are with other friends or acquaintances. In short, we represent Jesus whenever and wherever we are. The question is this: how well do you represent Jesus? How well are you being an ambassador of Christ? If Jesus took you home right now and asked you to give an accounting of how well you represented Him while on this earth, what would you say? If Jesus visited us today and asked us to give an accounting for how well we as His church have represented Him to our community, what would we say? Could we say with confidence that we have been good servants of Christ sharing the message of reconciliation to the world? Could we say that we have represented our Lord and Savior well to others in this community?

Conclusion

In closing, we all need to be reconciled to God. We have all been separated from God and have all been under God's wrath. We have all earned the wages of sin, which is death (Romans 6:23). Were it not for the grace of God, we would perish in our sin. However, God acted to reconcile us to Himself. God brought reconciliation to us through Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection removed the barrier between us and God and brought us into fellowship with Him. Have you been reconciled to God, or are you still living in rebellion to Him? If you have been reconciled to God, are you living as a new creature in Christ Jesus? Are you serving Him as His ambassador, as His official representative to the world? The world is in need of a Savior and they are in need of His ambassadors to share the message of reconciliation with them. Are you doing that? May it be so! Thanks be to God. Amen!