

Christ's Ambassadors

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ 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. 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. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2Cor 5:18-21).

Most who are Christians know that they are called by God to be Ambassadors. In fact, it is a rather common term in the Christian world today. But as the saying goes, just because it is common, does not mean that it is commonly understood. As those who are growing in grace, we have a challenge before us. If we are to communicate the word of God, we must do so in terms, which are biblical. We must avoid traditional definitions of words if communication is to be effective. The challenge is for us to look beyond traditional stances and embrace the biblical. In this way, we will have a medium of communication with believers everywhere, the eternal word of God. In order for us to be what God called us to be, we must know what it involved in this calling. And certainly, if we are to fulfill our responsibility, it demands that we know what is expected of us.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

The words, “All this” refer to the many things God has done for the believer to reconcile us. God has taken the believer out of Adam and placed him in Christ. God has taken the believer out of spiritual death in Adam and made him alive in Christ. God has separated him from his sinful nature and given him a new nature that is according to righteousness and truth. God has taken the believer out of condemnation and justified him in Christ. All this is from God as our verse says, it is not from us. It does not refer to anything we do or can do; it refers to the work of God on our behalf.

Who reconciled us to himself through Christ

God is the one who reached out to us. We were the ones dead in trespasses and sins. We were sinful and hostile to God. But God the Father, through the work of Christ, reached out to us in order that we might be reconciled. We were unrighteous and totally depraved, but God came after us to reveal to us the reality of what His only Son did to reconcile us to Himself. We heard the message of truth, believed in Christ and now, we are saved, reconciled, redeemed by the grace of God. None of us can attribute our being reconciled to anything we have done, for all we did was to simply believe in, trust in or simply rely on Christ as

our only hope of salvation. There was and stands only one way to be reconciled to God, and that is the only way God Himself provided. If you want to be approved by God, then you must rely on that only way God Himself approves. God did not even spare His own Son, but judged Him fully on our behalf. There is no doubt that He will also save us if we put our trust in His provision for us.

and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

We are given something as a result of us being reconciled. One result of our reconciliation is that we are given a ministry. To minister is to be in the service of God on behalf of others. It is not simply to serve others, but it is to serve others on behalf of God. Many are engaged in service to others but not everyone is serving others on behalf of God. The goal of our service is that those we serve might be reconciled to God. Unbelievers help other unbelievers every day. But, this is a special ministry that only believers have been entrusted with. There are other ministries believers can engage in that may aid, support, or teach other believers. But this is a unique ministry which is for believers to minister to those who are lost in order that they may be reconciled to God. It is called here the “ministry of reconciliation.” We have been given this ministry by God. It is not limited to those in the clergy. This ministry is for everyone who is already reconciled to God.

We must see this ministry as a trust. God has entrusted something of value to us. How will we handle it? Will we prove faithful in the administration of it? We must first note that God does not need us to be ministers of reconciliation. God can deliver the message of reconciliation to every man all by Himself and I believe He does. We do not want to adopt the thought that God *needs* us to get the message out. God the Holy Spirit does this work whether we do it or not. God has not left anyone’s soul salvation to the whim of man. We may or may not execute the trust given to us. The Holy Spirit is working in the heart of man from the start. So then, this is not a necessity, it is a privilege.

1Co 9:16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.

1Co 9:17 For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me.

Those who work in the service of God will be rewarded. Notice that Paul’s attitude is that he is under an obligation to preach the gospel. If he does it voluntarily, he has his reward. What is his reward in context?

1Co 9:18 What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.

Even though Paul mentions this as his reward, he is really letting the arrogant Corinthians know that he is very pleased to not have to take any money from them. Even though it is his right, for he said earlier, “So also the Lord directed

those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel” (1Co 9:14). His real motivation in preaching the gospel is found a few verses later. “I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it” (1Co 9:23). Paul has the proper motivation and that is to be a sharer, or a partner in the work of the Gospel. God has entrusted this work to us. It is an important work and it is a blessing and privilege to us to participate in this work, the work of saving souls. What is our part? We just read earlier where reconciliation is from God. We, the ones being reconciled have no part in the process, it is all grace. God uses us to deliver a message, an important message to unsaved man. What is the message?

namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself

Here is the message of reconciliation. The first thing we have to let people know is that we have a message from God. The message is that God was reconciling the world. The world here refers to the unbelievers in the world. They are the ones at enmity with God. Most do not even know they are at odds with God, but many do. Those that do are involved in religion and think the answer is for them to work themselves into His favor. They feel that works, good deeds and sincerity will move God to have favor upon them. They think that in this way, God will overlook the fact that they are spiritually dead, condemned by God, and have a nature that is repulsive to His righteousness. They are convinced that they can gain God’s favor. God, on the other hand, has been working all along to get their attention. God was the one who reached out to them. They cannot reach out to God, they must respond to God by means of the method God Himself provided.

The one thing we need to know if we are going to serve God is what He wants us to do. In the same way, God has commissioned us to speak for Him, we should know what He wants us to say. This should be the first thing we as servants seek to know. But, today we find the opposite. Many are serving and speaking for the Lord what the Lord has not spoken. When God called Moses to be the deliver for the children of Israel, He had a specific message. Moses was not to go and tell Pharaoh what he thought. He was to go to Pharaoh with a message from God. This important message has not been left up to what we think, it is specific. God knows best what He wants to convey. What is the message?

not counting men's sins against them.

This is the message. This is what is on the heart of God to tell unsaved man. He wants unsaved man to know that He has been working all along behind the scenes to reconcile them through Christ. He wants man to know what His attitude is toward them. For God to say this as the first thought means He knows this is what is most prominent in the minds of men. God gave the law to show man His high and perfect standard. From a look at the law, man can know he is a sinner. He can know that he does not measure up to God’s perfect standards. Everyone knows that God disapproves of sin, and since everyone is involved in sin to some degree, guilt develops when we violate a standard we respect.

Motivation from guilt makes hypocrites out of people. Many behave only because they feel guilty, instead of the true obedience which comes from love. Guilt motivates those who are guilty to try and behave to get God's approval. Even Christians will do things because of guilt. They may get involved in a sin which shocks even them. Because they are guilty, they may attend church more often, put more money in the offering plate and even pledge to never sin like that anymore. This is all in an attempt to appease God and to assuage their guilt.

Everyone is born in Adam and has the sin nature which was passed down to us. To some degree, we cannot avoid this feeling of guilt, because we are guilty! Adam may have started the sin ball rolling, but we have certainly picked it up and run with it. We by nature enjoy sin and when God confronts us, we feel guilt. If we approach God with the wrong attitude, we will not be saved. Salvation is on God's terms and if we are to be saved, we must pay close attention to the savior. God's attitude is just this; He is "not counting men's sins against them." This is truly good news. First, we should note that God is not excusing sin in any way. God is holy and will never compromise, excuse or be lenient with sin in any way! All sin must be judged. Do you realize that God did just that, He judged all sin in Christ. Not counting sin against us means that even though we were the ones who committed sins, God is not going to hold us accountable for those sins. God is not going to charge those sins we committed to our account.

It's like you stayed at a five star hotel and used room service all you wanted. When you go to check out, you find that the charges for the room were never charged to your account, but someone else picked up the tab. Good thing, because you had no money and you were feeling pretty guilty about how you would pay. The hotel staff tells you that all the charges are paid in full. You can hardly believe it, so you ask if they are sure. You don't believe it, so you ask for the manager. The manager tells you the same thing that you had a huge debt, but it was never charged to your account, someone else picked up the tab before you checked in. You walk away still not believing this. You are leaving the hotel, but constantly looking over your shoulder expecting security to come out and arrest you. Even after you leave, you expect someone to come and knock at your door and demand payment. Your next thought is to find the person who paid your debt and find out why.

Sins not imputed to us

God never imputed our sins to us, they were imputed to Christ on the cross and He judged them. Many will say that Jesus Christ died for them. This is so entrenched in the Bible that no one will openly dispute that fact. When someone says they believe that Christ died for their sins, they may not understand what it means, and once understood, they really may not believe it at all. We can exchange words like "Christ died for us" with others but we must define terms before we say we are in agreement. What does it mean that Christ died for our sins? It means that God is "not counting men's sins against them." This is a natural result of God's attitude, taken from what He has done. It is like someone who charged a credit card to the max, and cannot pay. The credit card company

is after them constantly with pushy telephone calls and threatening mail. But, what if I paid your bill in full? Would you still expect to receive the threatening letters and phone calls? Wouldn't you expect the credit card company to treat you differently? If they continued to try and collect on a debt which was paid in full, that would be criminal! One of the greatest things God ever did was to completely judge every sin we would ever commit in His Son. He counted our sins against Christ. He certainly cannot and will not count them against us!

And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

God has given us a ministry which is important. We must take responsibility for this ministry. God wants to tell men to be reconciled and He wants to use us to do it. Many will jump at the chance to speak for God. Most Christians know that this ministry is committed to them, but few understand their responsibility. Learning the message of reconciliation is the key to accepting responsibility for the message committed to us. The second is to give the message with boldness. It is to not be ashamed of the message (Rom 1:16) which brings life to everyone who believes. This ministry of reconciliation has been given to us, believers, as a sacred trust. God has given us the privilege of sharing in the work of the gospel to save lost souls. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" (Col 3:23). We should first understand we have been given a position of trust by God Himself! This position is not trivial, but we share in the fiduciary work of telling others of the most important feat God ever performed. God judged His only Son for the sins of the whole world. Many have heard of this, but they do not know what it means. Once we understand the message, then we are prepared to represent God as ambassadors.

Misrepresenting God

Many are going about with their own message. They have not taken time to learn the message of reconciliation. One thing I learned over the years, if you do not understand the principle, you cannot make accurate applications. Further, if you get this wrong, you are misrepresenting God. No one wants to be misrepresented. Especially when God tells us what is important to Him. If we disregard that and come up with what we think, God cannot be pleased with our actions. Can you image an Ambassador from one nation misrepresenting the intentions of that nation to other nations? That could lead to a declaration of war! If I was the leader of a nation, I would make sure anybody who speaks for me knows my thoughts on the issues. Salvation is the most important thing in this lost world. God has done a tremendous work to reconcile lost man. Before I misrepresent God to the lost, I would rather keep silent.

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.

Just as the Father sent the Son into the world, Christ sends us into the world with a message. This is our role to play. Our Lord trusts us with this important information to deliver this message to an estranged, lost world. Just as the Father was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, we have Christ in us making an appeal to world. He was judged for all of their sins, and most are still walking around as if it never occurred. The greatest thing in human history occurred and yet, many are denying the heart of the message. Countless religious people have the words "Christ died for our sins" on their lips, but their hearts are far from Him. Satan was defeated at the cross (Col 2:15), but he continues to fight now to hide this truth. "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2Cor 4:3, 4).

Our Responsibility

If you love the Lord Jesus Christ, then it is your responsibility to make sure you get the message right. We are speaking "on Christ's behalf." God is using us to make His appeal to a lost world. We cannot assume we know the appeal; we must be ready to learn exactly what it is. And, the message is clear, "be reconciled to God." The very thing they think will hold them back, their sins, are not counted against them. For the world, being reconciled to God is free, it cost them nothing. But, for God, there was a tremendous price paid. "He did not even spare his only Son, but delivered him over to judgment for us all." We have been given the privilege to tell this good news to a world which is in desperate need. The world is dead in trespasses in sins, following the ruler of this air- Satan. Because of the sinful nature, those in the world have no fear of God, and know not the ways and thoughts of God. Their minds are darkened and they are simply going about fulfilling their lusts. Everyone was in this place at one time.

If God has saved you from this death, you are no longer an enemy of God, but are truly reconciled. How this happened is not through any work on your part. God provided all the work and the means by which we have become reconciled. God speaks to unbelievers on two fronts. On the primary front, God the Holy Spirit witnesses on the inside of every person (John 16:8-10). We can rest assured that the Spirit is doing His job. Some have questioned at this point, "How can God reach everyone with the message?" I answer, if God was able to judge the sins of every person in His Son (the hardest thing), certainly He can figure out a way to tell every person what He has done. On the secondary front, God uses those who have been reconciled to tell others the message of reconciliation. We have been given this ministry of reconciliation. Before we can assume that role, we must know the message. Many are presuming to know the message and are not proving faithful to their trust.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Here you find the reasoning behind the statement “not counting men’s sins against them.” I’m so glad that God doesn’t simply dictate commands, but He is willing to reveal His reasoning. God is not counting sins against us, but He is not excusing sin. He may excuse us, or let us off the hook for our sins, but He is not excusing sin! Every sin must be judged for God to maintain His standards of holiness. Man is not concerned with God’s standards. He is only concerned with salvation. Does it matter to man how God saves him? What if God were to say “Oh OK, forget about your sins, I understand you are human.” Man, in his position would not be in a position to do anything but accept that kind of salvation. God must maintain His standards! This is more important to God than saving man! This is what the world does not know about God. The world has figured out a way of salvation which is very logical to them, but it does not maintain God’s righteous standards. God is who He is, and to the world, He seems rigid, but when we get to really know God, we find this is one of the greatest attributes He has. As unbelievers ruled by the sin nature, we have no standards of righteousness. In this state, we do not respect God for His standards.

No other way

The fact that God went to such lengths to save us says that there was no other way! “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!” (Gal 2:21). God did not “spare His only Son, but delivered Him over to judgment for us all...” If there was any other way, God would have exercised that option. Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane asked if there was another way, “Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me...” But, there was no other way. Christ had to go to the cross where He would accept the imputation of ALL our sins. Then, the Father judged Him for those sins. The statement that God made Him sinful is just that. He imputed our sins to Christ. Justice demanded that the debt be paid, and Christ fully paid the debt. Justice is now satisfied. If justice was not satisfied, then God would look to count all or part of our sins to us. This would also say that the one who bore our sins on the cross did not bear all of them. Or, that the work done on our behalf was lacking or not sufficient; which leads us to the thought that God is not satisfied with the work of Christ. I never hear anyone saying these things, but they will say that the justice of God is still after them for their sins! People are occupied with sin when God has already settled the matter once and for all. Sin is not the issue between God and man in salvation, and the reality is that it never was. Some may read that and be offended, thinking I am making light of sin. Not so, for I am seeing the matter from God’s perspective.

The Exchange

What we find in this transaction, God imputed our sins to Christ, and we who believe are made the righteousness of God. This is the wisdom of God. Before we can be declared “justified” we must be cleared by Divine Justice. Every sin must

meet its just punishment. This is the first part of the exchange, God putting our sins on Christ. Our Lord did not deserve this at all. He lived a perfect life before God. He never sinned, not even once! God was pleased with Him. He earned His righteous standing before God by pure obedience through love. Then, He submitted to the Father's plan to be judged for the sins of the world. When we believe in Christ, God the Father imputes that perfect life of Christ, His righteousness, to us. We have been truly graced out. God took our sins and placed them on Christ, which we do not deserve. If we believe in Christ, God takes the perfect, spotless life of Christ and credits us with that life, again, which we do not deserve. Some cannot believe God would do this for us. Well, let me tell you two things. First, this is the *only* way for us to be reconciled to God. There is no other way. We do not have options here. God designed this salvation a certain way where He maintains His holiness and yet is still able to reconcile sinful man. Second, God is good! I am pleased to know that we serve a God who is not selfish, arbitrary, arrogant or evil. He is upright, pure, righteous and loving. This is the character of the one who has reconciled us through the Son.

In Conclusion

If you have been saved by the grace of God, then you have a responsibility. That is, to assume the role God has given us as Ambassadors. As Ambassadors, we have a specific message to give to those who are lost. This message perfectly reflects the heart of God. The greatest thing God ever did was to provide a way to be reconciled. This way of salvation is through the cross of Christ. God took the sins of the whole world and placed them on the shoulders of one man- our Lord Jesus Christ. We have been reconciled by simply believing the message of salvation. Now, God has given us the message of reconciliation. How sad it is that many know nothing of their responsibility to deliver this message which they really do not know. Further, many are giving a message, but it is not the message God would have them give. God did not leave the message of reconciliation up to us. He tells us what should be on our lips "not counting men's sins against them." This is the message we are to take to a dying world. This is what God thinks they need to hear. This message will get their attention; and when it does, you have a perfect opportunity to explain the glorious gospel of truth. Our message is a gospel according to grace. It is truly good news to the hearers. But, because of the ravages of sin in their lives, some cannot bring themselves to believe it.

There is something truly good in this world, and that is the good news. I challenge you to take this message to a lost world. This is the very thing they need. Let us drop all the cute and clever phrases man has come up with and simply say what God told us to say. We need not dress it up for the younger generation, or put it in traditional terms to suit the older generation. Let's tell it like it was given to us. We need to approach the message of salvation in simple terms. Sin is not the issue in salvation. If anyone is lost, it will be because they refused to believe in Christ. If sins are paid, then they are truly paid. There is

nothing left to pay, by Christ or by us. Rejecting Christ is the ONLY sin that was not covered in the payment (John 16:8-10). If someone thinks that sin is an issue in salvation, they will try to work toward resolving that issue. They will do this by refraining from sin, so called repenting of sin, or doing good works in an attempt that God will forgive them because they are somehow reformed. In all this, they are going in the opposite direction and getting further away from God. The Father already did all that is necessary for them to be reconciled. If sins are not counted against us, it is because they are really paid! They are paid enough to satisfy the Justice of God! By their attempts at resolving what is already resolved, they reveal that they really do not believe the solution God provided. They refuse to believe that Christ died for their sins! They will say that Christ died for their sins with their lips, but their hearts are far from Him.

An Ambassador is a high official sent to another country. The Ambassador is sent to represent the interests of his country to another. He is not sent to just any country, but it is usually specific, because the Ambassador needs to know the language and customs of the country. In times of war, the Ambassador's job is very important. They may be called on to deliver a message which could be very sensitive. If an Ambassador delivers the wrong message, it could possibly result in war. There is no question, the Ambassador must understand the interests of their country and convey them exactly as they were told. As Christians, we are also sent into the world with a message. This world is not our home, but we certainly know the language and customs of those to whom we are sent. There is hostility between the Father and those in the world. We are sent to tell the world the message of the Father. We must make sure we have had sufficient briefing in order to know what the Father wants to convey. If we convey the wrong message, we will misrepresent the Father and all the work He has done to reconcile men.

We cannot adjust or revise the message of salvation. It is a very specific message. It is like a company's mission statement. Many hours are poured into every word to make sure it reflects in a nutshell what the company stands for. God has given us the message of reconciliation, which has been forged out of divine wisdom. It is a privilege to be a witness to the greatest message ever! What can we do? We can take the time to learn the message. Also, we can be courageous in having the word of God on our lips as we speak to those who are lost.

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (Rom 1:16).

In Christ, Doug...
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