WE ARE CHRIST’S AMBASSADORS

2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2

Key Verse: 5:20

“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.”

In the last passage we learned that God has given us a glorious hope of an eternal home in heaven, where there is no flooding, and a glorious spiritual body that never gets old or tired. And he has given us the Holy Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing this. Therefore we are always confident, living with a sense of victory. We live by faith, not by sight. Furthermore, we make it our goal to please God, for we must all appear before him to be judged. Today’s passage teaches us what we should do to please the Lord in this troubled world, as we hold on to the living hope in the kingdom of God.

I.  A new creation in Christ (11-17)

In verses 11-15 we find what motivated Paul to preach the gospel. It was the fear of the Lord. Moreover, Christ’s love compelled him. In verses 16-17 we learn to regard people as new creations in Christ.

First, we fear the Lord (11-12). Look at verse 11. “Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience.” Paul said this to explain and defend himself. Some people criticized him, saying he used deceptive techniques to capture people by trickery (4:2; 12:16). Actually, this was the method of the false apostles. Paul was different. Paul tried to persuade men out of the fear of the Lord. He knew that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive what is due us. And Paul was always conscious of God’s presence. He knew that God sees everything, and nothing is hidden from God’s sight. Paul hoped that the Corinthians would recognize his pure heart and gospel faith and simply accept him as God’s servant. Paul wanted them to know that what really matters in a servant of God is his inner motive to please God. Then they could be proud of him as their shepherd (12). Paul wanted them to discern spiritual reality and not be tossed around by the waves of people’s ideas. Paul wanted them to stand firm in the gospel which Paul taught them.

Second, Christ’s love compels us (13-15). Paul explained further his inner motive in preaching the gospel in Corinth. Look at verse 13. “If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.” Some people criticized Paul by saying, “He is out of his mind; he’s crazy.” Governor Festus once said, “You are out of your mind Paul!” (Ac 26:24). Paul admitted the possibility. But if he was crazy, he was crazy for Jesus. Actually, everyone is crazy for something. Some are crazy for sports, others for romance, and still others for money or political power. Then again some are crazy about their pets, video games, or drugs. One alcoholic decided not to drink anymore. He made it through one day. Then he was so happy that he celebrated by having a drink. What are we crazy for? We must be crazy for Jesus. Actually, the word “Christian” was first coined by unbelievers in Antioch who observed that the early Christians were crazy for Christ.

Paul explained why he was crazy for Jesus in verses 14-15. Christ’s love compelled him. What is Christ’s love? It is that Christ died for our sins, once for all. Christ offered himself as the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29). Whoever believes in him participates in his death and resurrection and is set free from the power of sin and death. Those who receive Christ’s love no longer live for themselves, but for Christ who died and rose for them. They are willing to live for Christ. Before knowing Jesus, we lived according to our own selfish purposes, as poet William Earnest Henley described: “I am the master of my fate, the captain of my soul.” The motive of our words and deeds, and even religious activity, was to please ourselves. However, after accepting Christ who died for us, we die to ourselves and live for Jesus. The motive of our words and deeds is to please Jesus. Moved by Christ’s love, Paul was full of passionate love. This was his inner motivation. Some people are motivated by selfish ambition. They work hard. If they succeed, they become proud and useless. If they do poorly, they despair and give up. However, when Christ’s love compels us to do God’s work, we are never tired. We never despair. Love does not dry up in our hearts. We are continually motivated to do God’s work willingly and joyfully. That was the secret of Paul’s successful ministry.

Third, a Christian view of people (16-17). Look at verse 16. “So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.” Before meeting Christ, Paul saw him from a worldly point of view as a cult leader, and his followers as insane. However, after meeting Christ, Paul saw him as Savior and Lord, and his followers as holy saints. Before knowing Christ, we see others from a worldly point of view. We see their natural talent, education level, bank account, and house size. When we are in Christ these things become insignificant.

How then should we see people? Paul gives a general principle. Look at verse 17. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” What really matters is whether a person is in Christ. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! Before accepting Christ, we were under the power of sin and death. It was in our nature and we could not change it. No one, and nothing, could change us, not good ideas, noble education, keeping regulations, or religious activities. However, Christ makes us a new creation. He does not merely improve our old creation; Christ makes us a new creation.

Abraham Nial in India was a devout Hindu. He offered the sacrifices, kept the regulations, and recited mantras from memory. But his inner man did not change. He was fearful, thinking that he would be reincarnated as a pig or a rat. However, when he heard the message of Jesus’ forgiveness, he accepted it and became a new creation. Now he is a fruitful gospel worker. Chuck Colson was a typical politician. He was loyal and hardworking, yet driven by selfish ambition. This blinded him and led to abuse of power, criminal behavior, and imprisonment in the Watergate scandal. He realized that nothing could change him, not a good Ivy League education, political power, knowledge of the law, money, or anything else. But when he accepted Christ in his heart, Christ changed him. Since then he has been an evangelist for prisoners and a national spiritual leader for America. At one time, Steve Stasinos was a candidate to lead a heavy metal rock band. He wore t-shirts with weird images, had hair down to his shoulders, and wore leather and chains. Mother Barry told him, “Your hairstyle is like Jesus. I like it.” Later Steve accepted the gospel and was changed. Now he wears a suit and tie and looks so handsome. He is a loving husband, a responsible father, a compassionate shepherd, and an inspiring messenger who uses his poetic ability to preach the gospel powerfully, especially at UIC campus.

Here we learn that Christ has transforming power. So if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come! Everyone wants to live a new life, leaving their old life behind. But no one can change his life. If we really want to live a new life with new hope and new vision, we must be in Christ. When we are in Christ, Christ changes us into a new creation. He changes everything: our lifestyle, value system, inner desires, and the way we see others. And Christ gives us love and joy and peace in our hearts. Christ gives us eager desire to serve God. We can give thanks in all circumstances, we are joyful always, and we can be kind to others. Though the world does not change, when anyone accepts Christ, he or she changes inwardly and becomes a new creation. Then we see everything differently.

II.  Be reconciled to God (5:18-6:2)

In this part we learn what God wants us to do as new creations in Christ. God wants us to participate in the ministry of reconciliation. Look at verse 18. “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation….” In this verse we find two things that God has done for us. First, God reconciled us to himself through Christ. Reconciliation assumes that the relationship between God and us was broken, and as a result we were enemies of God. Israel and the PLO are always in conflict. They need reconciliation. They are comparable in size and strength. However, in the conflict between God and us, we are not so. God is the Creator and we are his creatures. God is holy and we are terrible sinners. God is the Judge and we are the objects of his wrath. So there is no way for us to reconcile to God. Because of this we always feel threatened and are fearful of God’s judgment. There is no peace in our hearts. When we had no way to go to God, God took the initiative to come to us. God had mercy on us and stretched out his hand to reconcile us to himself.

In the Old Testament, God provided a way of reconciliation. It was to offer animal sacrifices to atone for one’s sins. However, this was temporary and its effect limited. It was only a shadow of what was to come. For true reconciliation, God sent Jesus Christ as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Christ is the Mediator between God and us. God needs Christ in order to relate to us. We need Christ in order to relate to God. We can come to God only through Jesus Christ. When we come to God through Christ, God accepts us. Now we can come to God in any place, at any time, just as we are, without sacrificing animals. Hebrews 4:16 says, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” As God’s enemies we had no peace and no joy and no real happiness. We were like prisoners on death row who suffer from anxiety, fear and depression. They know they are destined to die a criminal’s death. Fine food, designer clothes or luxury cannot really make us happy, for we are destined to die once and be condemned forever in the fiery lake of burning sulfur without hope. But when we are reconciled to God, we have a right relationship with God. We are free from the sense of guilt and fear and anxiety. We can enjoy true peace and freedom (Ro 5:1). Furthermore, we receive God’s love, mercy, protection and provision as God’s children. Finally we will inherit the kingdom of God as his heir.

Verses 18b,19 say, “…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.” After reconciling us to himself, God committed to us the message of reconciliation. God has great faith. He trusts us to carry out the ministry of reconciliation. This is the most precious work in the world. The world is full of disharmony, conflict, division and war. The world needs reconciliation. The Nobel Peace Prize is given to those who contribute to world peace. Miss USA beauty pagaent contestants always say they want world peace. Though people try in many ways to bring about reconciliation, they fail in the end. It is because the root problem is not the relationship between people or nations; it is the broken relationship with God the Creator. God wants his children to participate in his ministry of reconciliation with the world. We are very important. Though people do not recognize us and we do not receive the Nobel Peace Prize, we are true peacemakers in the world.

Look at verse 20a. “We are therefore, Christ’s ambassadors….” When we accept God’s commissioning as ministers of reconciliation we have a new identity. We are Christ’s ambassadors. Ambassadors represent their nation in relations with other nations. They are important and highly respected. As Christ’s ambassadors we represent Christ. We must reflect Christ’s character and teachings to the world in a way that wins others over to God. If we do not represent Christ well, we can make others stumble. Many people complain that Christians are all hypocrites, so they don’t want to be one. But when we truly represent Christ, some will say, “Wow! You are different. You are always smiling. You are always thankful, even on the phone. You are very kind and never get angry. You are humble and meek. How is it possible?” Then we can say, “It is Christ living in me.” This is good outreach. As Christ humbled himself, we should humble ourselves. As Christ forgave his enemies, prayed for them and blessed them, we should do the same. As Christ came not to be served, but to serve, we must serve others. As Christ lived a holy life, so must we. As Christ never complained and was always thankful, we must do the same. As Christ lived for the glory of God, so must we. As Christ pleased God, even in the midst of suffering, so must we.

We should be proud of being Christ’s ambassadors. However, we must not be proud of ourselves. We must humble ourselves as Christ did. In verse 20b, Paul says, “We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.” Our attitude must be both humble and urgent, with a great shepherd heart. The message is: “Be reconciled to God.” There was an underlying conflict between Paul and the Corinthian believers. That is why he wrote this letter to them. But he did not say “Be reconciled to me.” Rather, he said, “Be reconciled to God.” Without being reconciled to God first, it was impossible for them to be reconciled to Paul. Most people think that their relationship problems are with another person. So they try to solve the problem with the other person and often fail. It is because at the root, each one has a relationship problem with God. Without solving the relationship problem with God we cannot really solve our relationship problems with others. But when we are reconciled with God we can be reconciled with others as well. When we commit sin against our brothers, basically we commit sin against God. That is why in the parable of the prodigal son, the son said, “I have sinned against heaven and against you” (Lk 15:18, 21). And King David said, “Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...” (Ps 51:4a). So even though we try to be reconciled with others, unless we are reconciled with God we fail to be truly reconciled with others. That is why Paul encouraged the Corinthians to be reconciled with God first.

In order to be reconciled to God, we must come to God as we are and we must confess our sins sincerely (1 Jn 1:9) and ask God’s forgiveness. Then God will accept us as we are and forgive all our sins. This enables us to reconcile with others. Verse 21 says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” God did not blame us or condemn us. God embraces us as we are by sacrificing his Son on the cross. He became sin for us. Isaiah 53:6b says, “The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” God did this so that our sins might be forgiven and we might become pure children of God. In order to become Christ’s ambassadors we must be reconciled to God first. In order to be reconciled to God we must repent of our sins very sincerely. Then God will surely cleanse all our sins with the blood of Jesus and enable us to carry out the ministry of reconciliation as Christ’s ambassadors.

6:1-2 show how Paul carried out his ministry of reconciliation as Christ’s ambassador. As God’s fellow worker he urged them not to receive God’s grace in vain. For he says, “In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.” God’s favor is deeper than the ocean. However, the opportunity to claim it will end. We don’t know when Jesus will come again. We also don’t know when we will leave this world. It is most urgent to receive God’s grace. It is urgent for us to be reconciled to God.

God took the initiative to reconcile us to himself by sacrificing his one and only Son Jesus Christ for our sins. Not only did he reconcile us to himself through Christ, but he also gave us the ministry of reconciliation. He trusted us and gave us a glorious ministry. We are Christ’s ambassadors. So we implore people on Christ’s behalf: “Be reconciled to God.” Now is the time of God’s favor. Today is the day of salvation. Let’s pray that we may carry out this glorious mission this fall semester with the love and humility of Christ. Let’s pray that our nation may be reconciled to God and receive the message of reconciliation and spread it to the world as Christ’s ambassadors.