

ECF 4th December 2016 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 Ambassadors for Christ

Video: Good News Good news is meant to be shared. As followers of Jesus we've been given the most amazing news ever. And yet, often we keep quiet about it, we hold back from telling others about it, we give in to fear, excuse our apathy, or try and justify our silence.

But as Paul taught in our next section of 2 Corinthians, we need to stand up and speak up because we've been called to be ambassadors for Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:11-21: "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. ¹²We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. ¹³If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. ¹⁶So 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. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹that 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. ²⁰We 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. ²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

1. Centred on the Fear of the Lord

As we've seen before in this letter, Paul's ministry and message were under attack from people in this church:

- They were looking for someone who were looked impressive, sounded eloquent and appeared powerful. In their eyes, Paul didn't fit the image of an apostle.
- They were looking for a message that matched their focus on an old covenant of rules, regulations and ritual. In their minds, Paul's message of unconditional love and grace wasn't true.

And so Paul felt that he had to respond. He had to defend and explain his ministry and his message. He wrote: "What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience." 2 Corinthians 5:11 He hoped that this church would accept him, just as God saw him.

But this wasn't for his own benefit. Instead he wrote: "We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart." 2 Corinthians 5:12 He wanted these Christians to have confidence in him and his message, so they'd be able to stand in it, and stand against the influence of the false apostles who'd infiltrated this church and who judged by external appearances.

a) Seeking to Persuade Men

But this wasn't because he needed their approval. When people criticised him or rejected him, he didn't retreat into silence. When people didn't like his message, he didn't decide to keep it quiet. Paul didn't bow to public opinion.

Instead he said: "We try to persuade men." 2 Corinthians 5:11. However people responded, Paul was passionate in sharing the good news about Jesus and in doing everything he could to convince people of the truth of it. No matter what other people thought or said, Paul was committed to sharing the good news of Jesus.

b) Seeking to Please the Lord

One of the core reasons for this was because he could say, "We know what it is to fear the Lord." 2 Corinthians 5:11. Paul didn't fear what other people thought of him. Instead he feared the Lord.

That doesn't mean that he was terrified of God. He knew that he was loved and accepted by him. Instead it means he had such a deep respect and reverence for God that above all else, his driving ambition was to please and honour him.

We saw this last week. "We must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ." 2 Corinthians 5:10. What we do for the Lord is noticed by him, appreciated by him and will one day be rewarded by him. And so it didn't really matter to Paul what other people said or thought about him. All that mattered was what the Lord would say to him on that day of review.

This is such an important lesson for us. One of the major barriers to sharing our faith is fear of what other people will think or say if we speak up about Jesus. Will they challenge us, ridicule us or start to avoid us? As a result many people say that faith and belief is a private thing. "It is ok what you believe, but you don't need to tell anyone. You can just keep it to

yourself.”

But if we are going to fulfil God’s plan for our lives, then we need to break free of the fear of people. We need to have a genuine and deep reverence for the Lord, so that, above all else, **“We make it our goal to please him.”** 2 Corinthians 5:9

2. Compelled by the Love of Christ

But Paul didn’t only share the good news because he was centred on the fear of the Lord. He also shared because: **“Christ’s love compels us.”** 2 Corinthians 5:14

Before Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he passionately persecuted the church. He was willing to travel to hunt down followers of Jesus because he was driven by self-righteousness, religious pride, prejudice and hatred.

But now as an apostle of Jesus, he was driven by love. Not so much the love in his own heart. Rather the love of Christ for mankind, expressed at the cross: **“Because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.”** 2 Corinthians 5:14

a) Christ Died To Save

At the start when he had heard about the death of Jesus, Paul had assumed that this was because he was a fraud, rejected by God and cursed by him. Now he realized that this was God’s plan. Jesus had died to save. About 700 years previously, Isaiah had prophesied:

“Surely he took up our infirmities

and carried our sorrows,

yet we considered him stricken by God,

smitten by him, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,

he was crushed for our iniquities;

the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,

and by his wounds we are healed.” Isaiah 53:4-5

- Jesus took upon himself our sin, so that we could be forgiven.
- He took our punishment, so that we could be accepted by God.
- He died our death sentence, so that we could live.

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21 Jesus, the sinless one, became sin for us – so that we could receive his righteous standing before God; so that we could be saved!

b) Christ Died for Sinners

And this wasn’t something that we deserved, or had earned, or could ever pay back. Rather this was the incredible gift of God’s unconditional, unlimited and unending love for messed up, selfish and self-centred sinners like us. **“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** Romans 5:8

c) Christ Died for Me

Paul had been convinced that this was all true. He’d come to realise that Jesus had died for him, because he loved him. It was this that had changed his life so dramatically. He wrote to the Galatians: **“The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”** Galatians 2:20

d) Christ Died for Everyone

But Jesus hadn’t just died for him. **“He died for all.”** 2 Corinthians 5:15. In sacrificial love, Jesus had laid down his life to pay for the sins of everyone, wherever they were from and whatever they had done.

And so they needed to hear about Jesus too. They needed to hear the message of his love. They needed to hear the reason for his death. They needed to repent and put their trust in him as the forgiver of their sins and the leader of their life and receive the gift of salvation that Jesus had paid so much to give to them! And so it was Christ’s love for everyone that compelled Paul to share the message of the gospel with everyone that he could!

And if we really have experienced Christ’s love, if it really has sunk into our minds and impacted our hearts, then it will motivate us and energise us to keep going with the message of the Son of God who love us and gave himself for us.

3. Convinced of the Power of the Gospel

But thirdly, Paul also shared the gospel because he was convinced of the power of the gospel! He knew that the message of Christ's love could completely transform lives!

a) A New Peace

Outside of Christ we are all enemies of God. Our sins are such a deep offence to God that they would have separated us from him forever. "Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you." Isaiah 59:2

And there was nothing that we could do to fix this. Nothing that we could do to remove this barrier, to bridge this gap.

But in Christ, God has done it all. "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ." 2 Corinthians 5:18 In dying for our sins, Jesus paid the price in full. He cancelled that written code that was against us. He removed the sin-barrier that separated us from God.

And so the moment we put our faith in him, and trust in his death we are reconciled to him. We are brought into an eternal relationship with God. And we have peace with him! "Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Romans 5:1

b) A New Person

And this changes everything. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" 2 Corinthians 5:17 Through Christ, we are not only brought into a new covenant relationship with God. We are brought into a new creation experience by God.

The moment that we trust in Jesus, that old life, separated from God, under the wrath of God, held captive by sin, helpless and hopeless, heading for the grave is gone, and gone forever.

And in its place, we are made new, adopted as children of God, set apart as the people of God, dressed in his righteousness, washed clean by the Holy Spirit, set free from the power of sin, empowered to live a brand new life and heading for glory!

c) A New Purpose

And this changes the purpose and direction of our lives. Jesus died "...that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again." 2 Corinthians 5:15

If we've accepted Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, then we're no longer the focus of our lives. We don't just live to please ourselves, follow our own desires, do our own thing. Instead we are called to live for Jesus, for the one who laid down his life for us. This is because we belong to him. "You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body." 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

But this isn't a heavy burden or a painful slavery. Instead, it is when we accept Jesus as our Lord, that we find true freedom, purpose and joy. "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." Matthew 16:25

d) A New Perspective

And this is true for anyone, whoever they are and whatever they have or haven't done. "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." 2 Corinthians 5:16

Just as Paul had once judged Jesus and his death on a cross from a worldly perspective and concluded that he was a failure and a fraud – so Paul once judged other people in this way. Like so many in this world he valued people differently based on their race, religion or reputation.

But that changed. When he saw Christ, he saw himself as a sinner and he saw that we are all in the same boat. "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." Romans 3:22-24

We are all sinners, who have messed up and cannot save ourselves. And yet, we are all loved by God so much that Jesus died for us all. So this means, that whoever we are, wherever we are from, whatever mess we've made in our lives, if we put our faith in Jesus, then we are forgiven and we are reconciled to him.

So this is why Paul believed that this message was worth sharing with everyone he met. Whoever they were, whatever

their background, circumstances, mistakes, regrets or hurts, through faith in Jesus, they could be changed

- From an enemy of God to a child of God.
- From a hopeless sinner to a heaven-bound saint.
- From a captive to self, to a servant of Christ.

This is good news that is worth sharing!

4. Commissioned to Represent Christ

But, Paul had not volunteered for this role. His fear of the Lord, the love of Christ and the power of the gospel, motivated him to share the gospel. But Paul hadn't taken the initiative to volunteer for that role.

a) Our Ministry

Instead Paul wrote: "All this is from God, who... gave us the ministry of reconciliation." 2 Corinthians 5:18 This was God's calling in his life. God had given him the responsibility of working to bring people into peace with God through faith in Jesus. He wasn't so much a volunteer as an obedient servant.

b) Our Message

And God had given him the message to share: "He has committed to us the message of reconciliation." 2 Corinthians 5:19. This was God's message and so he had to faithfully pass it on, without any additions, deletions or alterations.

c) Our Mission

But he also knew that this was an amazing privilege: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us." 2 Corinthians 5:20 Paul knew that he had been called to represent Christ in this world: to live out his standards, to embody his values, to express his love, continue his ministry, to declare his truth and call men and women and young people from all nations into his kingdom!

And this is our mission. We've been called to this ministry of reconciliation. We've been entrusted with this message of the gospel. We've been given this privilege of representing Christ in this world. So are we going to accept it and live it out?

Conclusion

In the late 1700s William Carey was at a meeting of fellow church leaders. He passionately shared his conviction that the command to share the gospel with all nations was just as relevant for them as it was for Jesus' original disciples.

But an old guy wasn't convinced. He interrupted him, "Young man, sit down: when God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without your aid or mine."

Carey sat down on that occasion, but he didn't give up. Eventually he would go to serve the Lord in India for 40 years, leading people to Christ, translating parts of the Bible into something like 40 different languages and inspiring a worldwide missionary movement.

And today God is calling us to continue this mission. So I pray that we will be

- Centred on the fear of the Lord
- Compelled by the love of Christ
- Convinced by the power of the Gospel
- And answer our commission as ambassadors for Christ in this world!

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