

Ambassadors For Christ

By: Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Paul is going to great pains to point out to the church at Corinth something new that is happening to them, and something that they must accept and be a part of. He starts in vs. 17 by saying, *"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature."* It starts with a conditional 'if'. If you are in Christ, then you must accept the fact that you are new creature. What happens when you are a new creature? *The old things passed away; behold, new things have come.* Old habits, old things that you used to indulge in, are all gone and new things have been placed into your heart and into your life. Therefore, we have a new purpose; we have a focus to our lives. We cannot, at any point, go back to the things that we were doing before. That is a closed chapter, as he says, because new things have now come as we have taken on this new position of being in Christ.

Then he goes on to say, vs. 18: *Now all of these things are from God, (the new things that you are putting on are from God) who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.*

All of these things are from God and that is because God has reconciled us to Himself. We are reconciled to Him through Christ. What is the transaction that has happened? Jesus paid the penalty for our sins and the anger that we see in the book of Romans, that God is angry at the things that have happened, where truth has been taken away and replaced with the lie. That reconciliation now has happened because Jesus has paid the penalty for the sin, and He has brought God and humanity together. In Christ.

So he says, "You who have been reconciled to God through Christ, God has now given to us the ministry of reconciliation." We, who have been reconciled, now have a ministry of reconciliation that God has placed upon us – those are the new things that have taken place to those of us who are in Christ.

And, if this morning we say, 'I am in Christ,' then we must also be able to say that the ministry of reconciliation that God has give to me is something that I must accept and fulfill in my life.

Vs. 19 *"namely, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation."* Again, this underscores the whole idea of reconciliation. In these two verses, he tells us that we have this ministry now, the ministry that comes through Christ who has paid the penalty. The trespasses that ought to have been counted against us are not counted any more. God has

not committed that word of reconciliation. We are reconciled because of what Christ has done on the cross of Calvary. That message of reconciliation needs to be taken by us.

Vs. 20, *“Therefore we are ambassadors of Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”* We are ambassadors of Christ! I wonder whether you see yourself as an ambassador of Christ, because that’s who Paul says we are. If we are in Christ, we have the ministry of reconciliation – and Paul says that you and I are ambassadors for Christ.

Then he says, *“This is now we need to be as ambassadors for Christ. We look around at people who don’t know Him, who are still not reconciled to Him, and we beg you on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God.”* That’s the plea that needs to come forth from us to people who don’t know Him – that we beg you; we plead with you to be reconciled to Christ. Those are very unusual words that Paul is using. He is not just saying: I present this to you. Here it is. Here’s the gospel. Now you decide – and we walk away. No! We plead with them. We beg them to be reconciled with God.

I was reading a sermon by Dr. William Sangster, a British preacher who lived between 1900 and 1960. He references a book by Lord Templewood, or Sir Samuel Hoare, as he was known. Samuel Hoare wrote a book called ‘Ambassador on Special Mission’, a book that detailed things that happened to him. He was sent as an ambassador to Spain during World War 2 to try and persuade Franco to keep out of the war. This book details all that went on as he spoke to people, and he outlines what it means to be an ambassador. Sangster says it is so important as we look at this passage of scripture, to understand what is entailed in being an ambassador.

Firstly, let’s look at what Paul means when he says, you are an ambassador.

1. An ambassador is one who represents his own country in an alien land. He’s an ambassador in a country that is not the country of his citizenship. He has an official residence in that alien country, but that official residence is still a part of his own country.
When you look at any embassy around the world, e.g. the Indian Embassy in the UK or the US, that area which the embassy is on is actually Indian land. Indian laws are followed in that place, Indian cultural things happen in that place.
So, when you are an ambassador, you represent your own country in another land, you have a residence in that other land which is a small piece of your own country. Rules and customs of your country are present there and your allegiance is and must be to your country alone, wherever you are posted.

As we look at those few statements that were made about being an ambassador, and if we bring an ambassador for Christ back into us and upon us in our own lives, then we need to ask the question: If we are indeed ambassadors of Christ, are we representing God in the world? Is our home a little bit of heaven here on earth? Do people who walk into our homes know that this home is the Kingdom of God? Can that be said of you and me, that we are passionate about our allegiance to the King of kings and the Lord of lords? Would that be visible to everybody who came into contact with us?

2. Ambassadors have a direct communication to the land that they represent. We know that they have a mailbag that comes from the home country to the country where they are. That diplomatic bag is sealed in the home country and unsealed

only in the embassy. Nobody can open it except the ambassador or his staff. That kind of communication is necessary for an ambassador to do his or her job.

If we were to take that and ask the question: As ambassadors of Christ, do we have that kind of communication with Him? Are we in communication with God to such an extent? God has said to us, “My will will be known to you. I will continue to give you My thoughts, My mind, My will, My purpose.” The only way that we cannot know what His thoughts are, is if we stop being obedient to Him or stop listening to Him. That can never be part of who an ambassador is. Imagine a US ambassador saying, “I am not going to take any more instructions from the US.” He couldn’t be an ambassador after that. That’s the same with you and me. If we indeed are ambassadors for Christ, and if we are in Christ, then the question is: Do we have a clear communication with Him? Are we listening to Him? Are we hearing every word that His is speaking to us?

3. There can also be a danger in being an ambassador. The danger is that you can get denationalized, that you can begin to think like a citizen of the country that you are in. denationalized is the word that he uses – instead of speaking for the country that you represent, you begin to speak for the country that you are in and you begin to take on their understanding and their culture. You are not listening to the place that you have come from anymore. You become a ‘citizen’ of the other country. When that happens, ambassadors are quickly pulled back. Often we read about consulates where consular officers are immediately pulled back when it is felt that they have got too enmeshed in the world that they are called to be a part of only as ambassadors or consular officers.

Paul reminds us of the same thing. In Romans 12:2 he says, “But do not be conformed to the world” or to be in the world but not of the world. The question for us is: Have we gotten to be so much a part of the world that we no longer are representative of the Kingdom of God, whom we are supposed to represent? Have we got enmeshed in the philosophies that are prevalent, the ways that decisions are made, the blurring of the truth? Have we got into that kind of system and forgotten who we represent as an ambassador of Christ?

Ambassadors or embassies prevent this by bringing the ambassador home, or by having different programs within the embassy to help them stay connected. For us, as we think about how to continue to remain focused on God, the things that we need to do is:

- To continue to meet with like-minded citizens,
- To meet with like-minded disciples,
- To be in church,
- To be able to know His Word,
- To have a communication with Him so that we are constantly aware that we are ones who serve the Almighty God.

It is His values that must be preeminent in our lives. And yet, if we are honest, if we look at our own lives and say, “Have the values of the world crept into my decision-making processes, the way I do business, the way I communicate with people around me? Am I still espousing the values of the Kingdom of God?” it must be a good reality check for us.

Finally, Paul says in vs. 20 that we have a particular task. All of this is preparation and sustenance of an ambassador. But the key focus is that we plead with everybody to be reconciled to God. That’s the most important thing that we do as an ambassador of Christ, that we tell people all around us, that we never forget our mandate. Again, the question for

you and me today is: Do we? Do we tell people about this reconciliation that has happened between God and humanity, that there is a heaven, that there is eternal life with God and there may not be if we don't know Him through Christ? Sometimes we wonder why that is important. It's important because if it were not for Christ, the sin that stands between us and God would remain. As sinners, we can never be in the presence of God, which brings in the reality of heaven and hell (or eternally in God's presence or eternally away from God's presence). That is the truth of the Bible. That is why Paul says, "I plead with you, please be reconciled to God because the span of our life is small compared to eternity, where there is no end." You and I are ministers of reconciliation, ambassadors of Christ. Are we fulfilling that mandate?

All ambassadors finally go home when retired. And when they do, they are recognized as ones who held strong to why they were sent to a different land. We too, beloved, will one day go home and be able to stand before our Lord and say, "Lord, we were Your ambassadors. We were faithful to being ministers of reconciliation. We pleaded with people, begged them to be reconciled to God."

My mum used to sing songs all the time. I always remember the songs coming from the kitchen or the bedroom or wherever she was. I learnt a lot of songs from her and as I was preparing the sermon, one of them came to mind.

*When all my labors and trials are o'er,
And I am safe on that beautiful shore,
Just to be near the dear Lord I adore
Will through the ages be glory for me.*

*When by the gift of His infinite grace
I am accorded in heaven a place,
Just to be there and to look on His face
Will through the ages be glory for me.*

*Friends will be there I have loved long ago;
Joy like a river around me will flow;
Yet just a smile from my Savior, I know,
Will through the ages be glory for me.*

*O that will be glory, glory for me,
When by His grace I shall look on His face,
That will be glory, be glory for me.*

Do we have that to look forward to, beloved? Will we look forward to that smile on His face when He receives us? Can we stand before Him and say, "The mandate You placed upon me, I fulfilled. I was an ambassador for You, Lord Jesus. I begged and I pleaded for people to be reconciled with You. I was an ambassador. I faithfully lived my life. I was an ambassador who was sent by You to be Your representative here on earth, and I am done now." Can we say that beloved?

The songwriter says, "O that will be glory, glory, be glory for me." God has given to us the ministry of reconciliation. Because we have been reconciled to Him, we too must let others be reconciled to Him. We plead with them, we beg them on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Shall we pray?

Our Father, we confess that we have often taken and read Your Word without applying it in our hearts and to our lives. Lord, we have often used these terms about being ministers of reconciliation and ambassadors of Christ glibly. But Lord, this morning maybe, there are some here who have never considered, but want to. Would You empower them by Your Spirit? Or maybe there are some who started out as being ambassadors, but have gotten into the culture of the world, and need to be taken out and mandated once again. Would you do that, Lord? Or maybe there are some who have just not taken it seriously. Would You let Your Word speak to us? We know it never returns back void. So let it do in each one of our hearts what it needs to do, so that Your Word is fulfilled, Master, for we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.