

## Ambassadors for Christ

2 Corinthians 5:14-6:10

### *Introduction*

To the surprise of many journalists George Bush was unmistakably reelected. Since November much of the news has been about his ambitious agenda for the second term. One of the most important and challenging of his goals is to repair the fractured relationship with our European allies. And for that reason he sent Condoleezza Rice to Europe last month. Miss Rice did not go to Europe to see the great cathedrals or to enjoy the wine of France. She did not go to make friends with the European leaders. No, Miss Rice went to Europe with a very specific goal – to represent George Bush. If you believe what you read in the papers, she apparently shares the most important of the president's views and goals. But even if she didn't, her job – her obligation – is to represent the president. She will present his position, persuade the allies to see things his way, and seek agreement to act collectively in the face of global challenges. And, for better or for worse, she *will* represent President Bush. What she says and how she conducts herself will reflect on the president. The question is, will it reflect well or poorly?

Our passage tonight says we are ambassadors for Christ. (v. 20) That means that we represent Christ. Our role in society is similar to Miss Rice's role in Europe last month. We tell others what God has said to mankind, we persuade others to see things from God's perspective, and we urge them to obey God. We may do this well, or we may do it poorly. If we are ignorant of God's word, we will misrepresent Him to the world. If we are lazy, we will convey to the world that God does not care about them. If we are harsh, the world will conclude that God is harsh. For good or ill, we represent God. We are ambassadors for Christ.

### *Ambassadors for Christ*

In verse 20 Paul elaborates on our role as ambassadors for Christ. He makes three points in this verse. First, through our embassy God is *pleading* through us. God did not appoint us as His ambassadors just to give us something to do, or to build up our self-image. No, God is deeply concerned about all men and women on earth. God passionately desires all men to forsake lies and come to a knowledge of the truth. Remember, God Himself came to earth as a man to call us to repent of our sins and follow Him. Jesus lived a dangerous life and died a violent death because of His intense love for men and women. That love remains unabated. God still longs for sinners to come to Him. He still goes into difficult and dangerous places seeking the lost sheep – but now he goes in the form of His ambassadors – ambassadors which represent the God who sends them – men and women who teach the gospel to others as though pleading with them to repent and believe.

This leads into Paul's second point – that we *implore* others. We are not government functionaries. We are not in this simply for a pay check. The urgency which grips our King is our urgency as well. We are personally invested in this mission, and we throw our whole lives into it. We do not proclaim the gospel when it is convenient, or when we are being watched, or when we want something from God. We do not proclaim the easy parts of the gospel, or the parts we like. No, we study to learn God's message thoroughly, and practice to speak it persuasively. Our minds are marshaled to argue coherently and our emotions reveal the passion of God for His lost sheep. We do not *inform* people of the gospel, we *implore* them to believe in Christ.

The third point in this verse has to do with the content of our message. We are announcing the reconciliation between God and man. We could speak at great length on this topic, but only a few words are in order tonight. All men and women are alienated from God by their sin. Every person who exits the womb enters upon life in rebellion against God. And they know it. Scripture tells us that all people know there is a God of infinite power and righteousness. All people know God will judge them and find them deserving of death. The religions of this world are man's attempt to shield himself from this knowledge. The central

problem of the human race is not racism, or global warming, or terrorism. Man's central problem is alienation from God. The message we are enlisted to proclaim is reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ. What a wonderful task! No wonder it is called the gospel. This is truly good news! This is a message every man, woman, and child should love to hear. This is the message God has sent us to proclaim.

If you do not often tell others the gospel, you are a poor ambassador. If you tell others the few things you know about Jesus, but never learn your message more fully, you are a poor ambassador. If you tell others the good news of salvation in Christ in a sloppy, half-hearted way, you are a poor ambassador. You are Christ's ambassador! Let's resolve to be good ones.

### ***Compelled by Christ's Love***

But why should you bother to exert yourself so much? Telling others the gospel can be inconvenient, difficult, and dangerous. Why not remain a more moderate Christian? Do not let religion ruin the rest of your life.

Paul anticipates these questions in the preceding verses. In verse 14 he says the "the love of Christ compels us". A phrase like this could mean "our love for Christ" or "Christ's love for us". In the first sense it would be saying that we love Christ so much, we are compelled to be His ambassadors. In latter sense it would say that Christ's love for us so transforms us that we are compelled to be His ambassadors. This is clearly the sense of this passage, for the following verses remind us of the depths of Christ's love. The point here is not how much we love Christ – which is never a very impressive point anyway – but how much He loves us. And that is always a profoundly impressive point. Paul is not saying that he is moved by Christ's good example, or swayed by devotion to Christ. No, Christ is the subject here. Christ loves us so much, and His love so infects us, we become new creatures. When Christ loves someone this way, his whole life is transformed. He is born again from above and begins changing into a man or woman who lives like Christ. The love of Christ at work in your life is making you more and more like Him – if you know Him. So you are becoming more and more compelled to proclaim the gospel to others.

Paul reminds us that the goal of Christ's death was to give life to the dead. We have studied in Ephesians, chapter 2, that all people are born dead in sin. We enter this world as dead spirits in live bodies – and those bodies are destined to die, too. But when Jesus rose from the dead, He broke the power of death. Everyone who believes in Him is released from the death sentence and receives new life. One day our bodies will be raised, too – just like Jesus'.

Therefore we who were dead, but now have life through Christ, must live as Christ. We are now part of the new creation that Christ has begun, and it is against our nature to live for sin. Christ defines the new creation, and He defines our nature as part of the new creation. Before you believed in Christ, it seemed natural and right to live for yourself, to indulge your sinful desires. Now it is unnatural to live by your sinful desires. Your new nature is designed to live for Christ. Furthermore, it is repugnant to think of living for yourself when you would have no life if it were not for Christ. Common decency demands that you show your gratitude by living for Him.

### ***Serving Sacrificially***

Paul gives a specific example of how this works in chapter 6, where he shows how he lived for Christ. He begins in verse one by pleading with the Corinthian believers not to reject God's grace which he is proclaiming. He quotes Isaiah 49:8 and concludes that "now is the day of salvation". God's grace is so magnificent, His love is so amazing, that to reject it at any time is scandalous. If you have heard the gospel and have not surrendered your life to Christ, what makes you think that God will ever be gracious to you again? And if life is short and death certain, shall we not do our utmost to minister to those in need of God's grace?

So Paul declares that he gives no offense in anything so that he will not distract people from the message of salvation. That means that he cheerfully gives up his own interests and pleasures so that others may be saved. Elsewhere he says that he adopted Jewish customs when he was with the Jews, and adopted gentile customs when he was with the gentiles. This same principle applies to us today. So on our trip to Mexico we will not drink any alcohol, even though some of us are old enough to do so – not because alcohol is wrong in itself, but to remove any possibility of offending those whom we seek to love. In some places in this world you would never wear shorts – neither men nor women – because it is offensive to people living there. This is not legalism, it is removing barriers to the gospel. Remember Paul’s motive? He seeks to be a good ambassador, to press God’s case with urgency and effectiveness. Today is the day of salvation, and there may be another. This is not a call to be frantic, but to be wise and loving.

Then in verse four Paul says that he commends himself to God *in all things* as a minister. Nothing escapes Paul’s notice as he seeks to orient his life toward God’s service. Now follows a most vivid and sobering account of what this meant in Paul’s life. He was troubled, he was needy, he was distressed. But the list continues. He was beaten and imprisoned. He worked without sleep. And in all this he was patient, kind, and loving. He was at the point of death, yet became a source of life for many. Finally, he was “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” (v. 10) If someone suffered such things for you, would you believe he sincerely loved you? Do you think this kind of life effectively commended Paul to his people? I think that such an ambassador is incredibly effective in persuading people.

### ***Examples***

Hudson Taylor  
Jim Elliot  
Larry Kraft

### ***Application***

all are ambassadors  
    we do represent Christ  
    we should be motivated by Christ’s love  
    we should serve sacrificially  
some should go to those who have never heard  
the rest of us should support with money and prayer

### ***Conclusion***

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