

Ambassadors

2 Corinthians 5:14-6:2

So here we have Paul, responding to criticisms from those who had arrived at the church in Corinth and who had criticised Paul because he did not make money out of his ministry, did not try to make himself impressive and always found trouble following him. He encouraged the Corinthians to take pride in what they were doing because lives were being transformed as a result. His ministry had been focussed on them not himself and he could boldly testify that because they knew it was true. He took risks to speak the Good News. Why? Because "*Christ's love compels us*".

The love of Christ compelled him to take risks and reach out to them. It was agape love. The self-sacrificing love. The love that put the needs of others before his own. It is outward love that points towards God and others..

Contrast that to his critics. They were people who were "professional evangelists" – they did it for money and prestige for themselves. They didn't take the risk and they weren't doing it all for the sake of Christ. And the recipients of the letter knew it. The contrast was attitude to people and they knew Paul did it for them – all born out of this phrase "the love of Christ compels us.

What does Christ's love also compel us to do? It makes us take a different view of people. Paul was under heavy criticism – but how did he act? His words which are the key words for me in this passage. *No longer, then, do we judge anyone by human standards. Even if at one time we judged Christ according to human standards, we no longer do so. NIV 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.*

This is a verse about attitudes to people and how love shapes those attitudes. If we're no longer supposed to judge in a worldly way how do we do that? The worldly way is doing things from our personal perspective or from attitudes that we have picked up from around us. Judgemental people always make their views and their prejudices the criteria by which they live. It's all human standards.

We all hear criticism and gossip about others. We hear it about others in the church. Where does that come from? The compelling love of Christ?? Or from personal prejudice, venom, revenge, idle chatter, or the human tendency to revel in another's failings. Paul develops these ideas in the subsequent verses.

Paul once viewed Christ from this worldly point of view. What did he do? His prejudice told him Jesus was a false Messiah and that his apostles were heretics. It wasn't based on an encounter with God. It wasn't based on the word of God. It wasn't based on love. It centred around him and was shaped by the people he circulated with.

That was changed when he encountered Jesus on the Damascus road and the love of Christ then compelled him to become an apostle to the Gentiles.

When the love of Christ compels us, we see everything in a Christian way, a Jesus way. It is none of ourselves and all from God. We honour God and serve men. So when we see someone struggling with a problem in church, we don't condemn, but find solutions through prayer and love. You can always tell the difference between doing things from a worldly point of view and from a Jesus point of view. Worldly thinking separates, Jesus thinking is about love and seeks to embrace.

As Paul found out, separation and dissent does happen in the church, but when sin does cause separation, his desire was that it was not going to be his sin. Others criticised him and tried to undermine the church at Corinth, but his desire was to serve Christ and him alone and temper his attitudes with love, not a worldly point of view. The same should be true of each of us. The love of Christ compels us to reach the community for Jesus. The love of Christ compels us to serve and work together as a church. But love isn't the only reason we try to reach the community or work together in unity as a church. Something else shapes it. Let's move down to verse 17. *Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come.*

Being a Christian means we don't do things according to the created order – the worldly way. That isn't us. We are here this evening to remember Jesus around His table. We don't just know forgiveness, but also regeneration. *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

I could spend a long time on what it means to be a new creation in Christ, but I want to focus on it in the context of this passage. *18 All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into his*

friends and gave us the task of making others his friends also. 19 Our message is that God was making all human beings his friends through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins, and he has given us the message which tells how he makes them his friends. Let me give this in to NIV although the TEV actually gives us the context. *18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 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 don't look at things from a worldly point of view because we are new. In Christ we have been reconciled to God. Therefore as we reflect the love of Christ, it compels us to act. Jesus reconciled us to God, now we should bring reconciliation ourselves.

But there's more to reconciliation than just reflecting Jesus love. Because he reconciled us to God – made us God's friends, we are *commanded* to do the same – to have a ministry of reconciliation – to bring others to be reconciled to God – give them the message of reconciliation, and to be reconciliatory in our behaviour.

So it isn't only love that drives us to reconciliation, it is something given to us by Christ, it's our ministry, our task to do that.

In fact verse 20 amplifies that: *Here we are, then, speaking for Christ, as though God himself were making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf: let God change you from enemies into his friends!* NIV *20 Paul uses another term to describe this ministry of reconciliation. 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.*

So our ministry of reconciliation makes us We are ambassadors. What does an ambassador do? He speaks for the Queen or the government of his country. He speaks in their place with their authority. That said, Paul I think gives it in the war context. Ambassadors were sent in times of war to bring peace. We are Christ's ambassadors. Not only are we sent, we go with His authority to reconcile men to God – the context in this passage has been two-fold, to reconcile unbelievers to God and to reconcile believers who have strayed off the path back to God and to follow His ways.

So we started with love as the motive, and attitude and we end with a command of Christ and a badge of authority. We bring reconciliation – in our community and in our church, it is our passion, it is our obligation, it is our mission done with the full authority of Jesus Christ.

So therefore the appeal to the waverers in Corinth was: *We plead on Christ's behalf: let God change you from enemies into his friends! 21 Christ was without sin, but for our sake God made him share our sin in order that in union with him we might share the righteousness of God. 6:1 In our work together with God, then, we beg you who have received God's grace not to let it be wasted. 2 Hear what God says: "When the time came for me to show you favour, I heard you; when the day arrived for me to save you, I helped you." Listen! This is the hour to receive God's favour; today is the day to be saved!*

Be reconciled to God. He's saying, if you are believers this must happen because this is what the cross is all about. Christ was without sin, but for our sake God made him share our sin in order that in union with him we might share the righteousness of God.

Knowing what Jesus has done for us, we need to deal with situations in life where relationships are broken and where we're not carrying out the ministry of reconciliation when we know we should. Don't let God's grace be wasted. Deal with it now.

Like Paul, I know of people that need to be reconciled to God. People who don't know Him and for whom time is running short. Then there are those believers who criticise and backbite. There are those who need to be reconciled with others.

And if we are not doing that, then actually we need to be reconciled with God to. When our relationships are broken then our relationship with God becomes broken. We need to be reconciled with God as we come to Him in confession and repentance, that we've slipped back into worldly attitudes.

As we come around the table, these words of Paul are words for us. We should reflect the love of Christ in all our actions and relationships. Let's start by confessing our shortcomings, making sure we are fully reconciled to God and determining that we will reconcile ourselves with others and commit ourselves afresh in our ministry of reconciliation in bringing the Good News to people who desperately need it.

F B Meyer What is meant by "the love of Christ?" Is it His to us, or ours to Him? It is impossible to divide them thus, for they are one. As the sunlight strikes the moon, and is reflected from her to the earth, so the love we have to Christ, or to man, is the reflection of His love to us. All love in our cold and loveless hearts is the emanation and reflection of the Love which began in Him, was mediated to us in Calvary, and is reflected from us, as sunlight from a mirror.

Let's be that reflection

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