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Grace Evangelical Church
Communion Sunday, August 3, 2008
"Why Be An Ambassador For Christ?"
II Corinthians 5:17-21

The biblical God is in the reconciliation business.

This is one of the basics of biblical Christianity affecting directly our daily experience with the Lord, as we continue this theme on Sunday mornings in the summer.

In fact that is what the Lord's table is all about as we commemorate His death, burial and bodily resurrection in His table this morning.

The biblical God is in the reconciliation business.

"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them."

I. God's work of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:19a).

1. We need to discover the meaning of the word, reconcile.

Reconcile means to change, to restore.

2. We need to understand the need for reconciliation.

Those in the world were dead in trespasses (offenses against God) and sin. They had turned to their own way, following Satan rather than God. They were sinners, having broken God's laws, their Creator's commands and directions. They were a part of the Adamic race that had turned against the biblical God. Now there was a separation between the holy God and sinful humanity. The Holy God can not have fellowship with those who have rebelled against Him. God's justice will not permit Him to have fellowship with that which is sinful and an enemy of His.

How will God who is holy, and man who is sinful ever be able to get together in fellowship and harmony?

Since man is sinful, it is impossible for him to somehow conjure up enough holiness, enough goodness, to make himself acceptable before a holy God who is transcendent moral purity.

The cults, world religions, and other ideas of men today think that somehow man can do enough good works to outweigh the bad and gain acceptance before God.

But when the holy character of God is considered, it is quickly seen that man on his own is incapable of appeasing the holiness and wrath of the biblical God.

Thusly, man is in a real pickle, if I can use that term. He is in a hopeless state with no help or hope of any kind in sight.

So what does God do? Leave mankind in a pickle? No! Praise God!

3. God takes the initiative to provide mankind reconciliation.

God was in Christ reconciling the world that was in trespasses and sin. God is taking the initiative to provide the reconciliation man so desperately needs.

How is that done?

4. Through Christ's cross, burial and resurrection, God reconciles mankind to Himself.

Did you notice these words in II Corinthians 5:19. That's phenomenal no matter how many times we have heard it. **The holy God reconciles sinful humanity, who rebelled and continues to rebel, to HIMSELF! There is no greater love, no greater grace and mercy than that.**

How is that done?

5. On that cross, God placed the sins of the world on His Son Jesus Christ.

What does II Corinthians 5:21 tell us? Christ was made sin for us who knew no sin. The sinless Christ became sin for us. Yes, God placed on Him the very sin nature we have all inherited from Adam, plus all the sins we have committed, and will commit. Jesus Christ became the sin bearer for us. He took all of our sin, past, present, and future. He paid the eternal price for our redemption with His very life blood.

What Paul is saying here is that through Christ's death, which paid the penalty for man's breaking God's law which is death, Christ's burial and bodily resurrection, God satisfied His own justice and wrath, in order to reconcile sinful man, to restore sinful man to fellowship and to new life, His resurrection life.

In so doing, the sins of humanity were not counted or put against them (II Corinthians 5:19) for they were put on Christ. He became the Savior of the world.

Yes, in that process God's very wrath and justice were satisfied. Propitiation is the word.

- **Redemption is toward sin – sin's penalty is paid through Christ death, burial, and bodily resurrection.**
- **Propitiation means that God's wrath, His justice is satisfied through Christ's death, burial and bodily resurrection.**
- **Reconciliation means that God has provided a change in relationship for mankind with Himself, a restoration to fellowship through the cross and open tomb of Jesus Christ. Man once an enemy of God becomes His friend!!**

However this reconciliation is not just conferred on everybody.

II. Our personal response to God reconciling us to Himself through Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 5:17).

1. God's common grace.

God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.

Christ's death, burial, and bodily resurrection made each person ready to be restored to fellowship with the Creator God. God is the Savior of all men as Paul told Timothy in I Timothy 4:10. The Word of God tells us that **who ever** will call on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Romans 10:13). God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

This is not universal salvation meaning everyone will be reconciled to God.

For reconciliation to take place in a personal life there needs to be what is called,

2. God's efficacious grace.

This is God's work in the life of the individual who acknowledges to God that one has sinned against Him and asked into one's life to be one's personal Savior. It is calling on the Lord to be one's Savior from sin, and provide His eternal forgiveness and eternal life.

If you shall confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved, for with the heart a person believes resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation (Romans 10:9-10).

The one who calls on God for Christ's forgiveness and grace becomes reconciled to God, no longer an enemy of God but His moment by moment Friend.

There needs to be a positive response from each of us concerning who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for us in His death, burial, and bodily resurrection.

That's why Paul tells the Corinthians to make sure that they are reconciled to God (II Corinthians 5:20), that each of them knows Jesus Christ as personal Savior.

Accepting Christ as one's Savior, one becomes a new creation in Christ, a part of His forever family, a part of His eternal kingdom, yes, His body, the church (II Corinthians 5:17).

But that is just the beginning of a life, of fellowship, with the biblical God.

III. God gives the believer, reconciled to Him through Christ, the privilege to be His ambassador. (II Corinthians 5:20).

"Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ."

1. The meaning of the word ambassador.

The word ambassador has two meanings.

(1) The person commissioned by the Emperor to represent him in a province.

Roman provinces were divided into two types in that day. One type was under the control of the senate and the other was under the direct control of the Emperor. Provinces which were peaceful and had no troops were senatorial provinces.

Provinces which were dangerous and had troops were imperial provinces. The Emperor's direct representative, the man who administered the province on behalf of the Emperor, was the ambassador. He had a direct commission from the Emperor.

In this light, the word, ambassador, as Paul used it, meant that he regarded himself as having a direct commission from Jesus Christ to present the gospel for building Christ's church.

As believers in Christ, we have been given the great commission from the Lord, our "Emperor" to make disciples of all nations. We are to be the Lord's witnesses.

(2) The person (s) sent to bring a province into the Roman Empire.

The 10 ambassadors or envoys who along with the victorious general arranged the terms of peace with the vanquished people, determined the boundaries of the new province, drew up the constitution for the new province, and then they returned and submitted what they had done for the approval and ratification of the senate.

They were the men responsible for bringing people into the family of the Roman Empire.

Thusly, Paul thinks of himself as the one who brings to people the offer and conditions of belonging to God's kingdom, His church, whereby people can become citizens of God's kingdom and members of His family.

We too, as believers in Jesus Christ, are to bring to people the gospel of Christ telling whereby they can come into God's kingdom, His forever family. They can come out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Summary:

(1) The ambassador of Jesus Christ is commissioned by Him, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

(2) The ambassador of Jesus Christ brings people God's message so they can believe in Christ and come out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, the eternal kingdom of the Sovereign Jesus Christ.

2. The privileges and responsibilities of an ambassador.

(1) An ambassador represents His country in another land or country.

His life is spent among people who usually speak a different language, who have different traditions and a different life-style.

The believer in Jesus Christ is first a citizen of heaven.

Paul tells us in Philippians 3:20 – “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” That’s a great reminder as we see our country’s moral fiber coming apart in this beloved country.

As citizens of heaven we are also citizens of the United States. As we represent heaven, God’s world, we live in this world, of which in one sense we are aliens. It is filled with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. It is totally no friend of grace, really an enemy of God. The believer has the mind of Christ, yes, Christ living in him, so he does not become conformed, or squeezed into the mold of the world in which he lives.

The ambassador of Jesus Christ knows that He represents heaven in this old sinful world.

He also knows that he has the manual, the Word of God, to direct him how to live as a citizen of heaven in the world that is opposed to who the Sovereign is, Jesus Christ.

The ambassador for Christ, then, uses what God gives him for His glory to further His work on this planet, and in the process not becoming attached and materialistic.

As the old song goes, “This world is not my home, I’m just a passing through, my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.”

(2) The honor of a country is the ambassador’s hands.

The ambassador’s country is judged by him.

His words are listened to and his deeds are watched. That’s why Paul told the Corinthians in his first letter that believers are epistles read of men.

One writer has said that the ambassador, while acting, acts not only as an agent, but as a representative of the sovereign.

Thusly as an ambassador for Jesus Christ, the believer represents Jesus Christ. Is concern is to do what Jesus would do, and to do it in the power of the Holy Spirit.

(3) An ambassador speaks for his own country.

When an ambassador from the United States is an ambassador to another country his message and policies are that of the United States.

The follower of Christ as a citizen of heaven, speaks like Christ would speak, building others up rather than tearing down. He brings the counsel and wisdom of Christ to bear on his individual life, his family life, his church life, at work, in the neighborhood, and at school.

He realizes that God is for life. God is for the family. God is for freedom of the individual. He realizes that true liberty is found in Jesus Christ.

Really as an ambassador of Jesus Christ, the believer brings the message of reconciliation through His life and witness.

Isn’t that what Paul wrote in our text?

Note II Corinthians 5:18 – “And gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”

Then II Corinthians 5:19 – “He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ.”

Yes, God is in the reconciliation business, that’s what the cross of Christ, His burial, and bodily resurrection is all about.

And He gives the believer in Christ, the privilege to be His ambassador, to represent Him as a citizen of heaven in this old world that is no friend of His, and to share the good news with those bound by sin in this old world that there is true forgiveness and freedom in Jesus Christ in His eternal kingdom.

But there is not just the message of reconciliation in the gospel of Jesus Christ for the one who trusts Christ as personal Savior.

God is also in the reconciliation business between those who are ambassadors for Christ when there are disagreements, when there is breakdown in communication, when words are said, and attitudes expressed that cause relationships to become marred and friendships broken.

Believers forgive one another because Christ has forgiven them (Ephesians 4:32).

Without the biblical God being a God of reconciliation there is no forgiveness for us in our relationship with Him through faith in Christ. Neither is there any true forgiveness between believers without the biblical God of reconciliation.

Why? Because our relationship needs first to be right with our Creator Redeemer God, and then right with each other.

Praise the biblical God that He is the God of reconciliation!

It is all pictured in these elements that represent our Lord's body and blood in His table that we partake of today.

Why be Christ's ambassador? He gives us the title, the privilege, and responsibility to be an ambassador for Him each day as we serve Him on planet earth.

James Hudson Taylor (1832-1905), better known as just Hudson Taylor, was one of the greatest missionaries of all time.

Once at age 4, Hudson piped up, "When I am a man, I mean to be a missionary and go to China."

He surely did!

However, as a teen, Hudson was influenced by his friends and became worldly for a period of time. But one afternoon when he was 17 years of age, in June 1849, he went into his father's library in search of a book to read. Finally he picked up a gospel tract entitled, "It is Finished," and decided to read the story in it. The Holy Spirit greatly used that tract, which soon led him to receive Christ as his Savior.

Taylor later founded the famous China Inland Mission, through which he established 20 mission stations, brought hundreds of missionaries to the field, trained some 700 Chinese workers, raised four million dollars by faith (which may be worth a billion or more in today's money), and developed a Chinese church of 125,000.

It has been said that at least 35,000 were his own converts and that he baptized some 50,000. He had a great gift for inspiring people to give themselves and their possessions to Christ.

Some years ago the Communist, atheistic, anti-God government in China commissioned an author to write a biography of Hudson Taylor with the purpose of distorting the facts and presenting him in a bad light. They wanted to discredit the name of this consecrated missionary of the gospel, thus discrediting the gospel and our Lord.

But as the author was doing his research, he was increasingly impressed by Taylor's saintly character and godly life, and he found it extremely difficult to carry out his assigned task with a clear conscience.

Eventually, at the risk of losing his life, he laid aside his pen, renounced his atheism, and received Jesus as his personal Savior.

Whether we realize it or not, our example leaves an impression on others. Let us ask God to help us make it one of love, faith, and purity of life – to be an ambassador for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16, NIV).

Let's all be an ambassador for Christ where He has us serving Him this week!