

Text

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²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Main Point

God has chosen to reconcile people to himself. He chooses those he has already reconciled to share this message of reconciliation.

Reconciliation is only possible In Christ, through the great exchange of Imputed righteousness.

Introduction (300)

[Read passage]

[Pray]

Hook

In the Bible we have many illustrations which picture the relationship between God and his people.

We are sheep who must follow the good Shepherd.

We are branches who must abide in the Vine

We are subjects who must obey the King

We are slaves who must submit to the Master

We are clay who must accept the will of the Potter.

Each of these are humbling to the human race.

We are sheep, branches, subjects, slaves and lumps of clay. And rightfully so when we recognise the majesty, power strength and holiness of God. The more we realize who God is the more we accept these pictures for ourselves

But in this passage, a nobler illustration is used. Here the illustration of an ambassador is used. A trusted person sent on behalf of the king. God is the King and Christians are depicted as His ambassadors. Appointed to this noble position and entrusted with a critical message.

As we are about to enter yet another new year, and as we think afresh on our routines and responsibilities, we must take our role as ambassadors seriously. I hope that as the year

ahead extends out with new opportunity and fresh possibilities we would remember our role as ambassadors and prioritize it. I hope that as we understand more clearly what it means to be an ambassador, we can more faithfully implement it in our lives.

Outline

To help us unpack this passage and the meaning behind this illustration, we will divide this passage into three parts.

The King vs 18-19

The Ambassador vs 20

The Message vs 21

Part 1 – The King

Background

So let us begin with part 1. Looking at the King. Let us read verses 18 and 19 again together.

¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling^[c] the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

The first and most important thing to note about these verses is how active God is. God is doing a

mighty work and He is taking action. He is reconciling sinful humans to himself.

His idea to Reconcile

Usually when we think of reconciliation between two parties, the person who has done the wrong would realize what they have done, and after some degree of remorse seek out the offended party and extend apologies.

But in this verse, we are told that God is the Author and the instigator of the reconciliation. Humans are the sinners. People are the ones who broke God's law. We are the ones who have piled up God's wrath against ourselves.

And yet *"All this is **From God**"* – He has taken action and all we can do is receive and embrace his offer of reconciliation.

[God] is ... reconciling^[c] the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them,...

If God were to count the trespasses of people against them, their punishment would be infinite. They have committed a crime against the infinite God and eternity in Hell is the due punishment. But God is choosing to reconcile people to himself. And not just from one people group, no, people from all over the world.

This raises all sorts of questions, such as how can a holy and just God reconcile sinful people to himself? How can a just Judge let a criminal go

free? How is that even possible? But before we think of that, let us think a bit more about the King who reconciles.

His Nature to Reconcile

God is not being forced to reconcile with humans. He does not have some quota to fill to satisfy some third party.

He is free to do as he chooses. So why would he save any of these criminals and rebels?

We learn from scripture, to our wonder and joy that He in fact delight's to reconcile and save people.

In Ezekiel for example, chapter 36:15-16 we read of His compassion. Turn there with me in your bibles...

¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. ¹⁶ I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy.^[a] I will feed them in justice.

Throughout the Old Testament we see God's attribute of compassion displayed again and again. God seeing people headed to destruction and in despair (granted often due to their own actions), and God seeking to taking action.

In it is in his very Nature to save.

Application – Prais God

As we read these verses, we should be struck by how proactive God is, and how gracious God is.

If you are ever at a loss as to what you can praise God for, here it is.

Praise him for taking action.

Praise him for having a plan.

Prais him for having a mission.

Praise him not giving you what you deserved.

Prais Him that He is eager to reconcile those who hate him.

Praise Him for His character, that compassion is part of his very being.

Prais Him that he does not limit his plan of reconciliation to a certain nationality, or geography, or gender.

Praise Him that He is reconciling people form the whole world.

As we think about the King of reconciliation and his great work it must push us to our knees in humility and our hearts to sing his praise.

Application – Lost without God's initiation

Because without him taking initiative it would be impossible to be reconciled to God. Further, without following his methods it is impossible to be reconciled with God.

In short it is impossible for a sinner to be reconcile to God on their own effort and initiative. Outside of God's plan there is no way for people to escape hell, nor for people to get to heaven.

This is the tragedy of all other religions. They are honest enough with themselves that there is something wrong, that there is a breakdown of relationship with God that must be rectified. But it is futile to attempt to bridge the gap on human terms and with human means. God way is the only way and all human means must be discarded.

His Means to Reconcile

But there is a twist, as we can see in these verses. Although God initiated and orchestrated this work of reconciliation, He gives redeemed sinners an active and major part to play in this work.

Notice the end of verse 18

and gave us the ministry of reconciliation

and the end of verse 19

and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

To those He has already reconciled, God gives the ministry and the message of reconciliation.

Think about the magnitude of that. As far as we can tell, how important is the work of reconciliation to God? Minor importance? Average importance?

The work of reconciliation is of colossal importance! He planned it since time began. He gave his son to die such that it could happen. And the Holy Spirit continues to work throughout the world. This is top on his priority list.

And he entrusts this work to us. To people, who not two seconds ago were his enemies and were not able to look beyond our own desires, let alone be a part of an international mission of reconciliation for the king of kings.

Surely, he could have given the ministry and the message of reconciliation to the angels and they would do a much better job.

But no, he chooses to entrust it to us. This critical and all-important job he gives to us. To us weak, distracted and fearful people.

Application – We cannot question him

And who are we to question him. He is the instigator. He is the author. He is the one who knows what is best. We think we know our weaknesses and fears, but he knows them all the more than us. He knows all too well who we are,

but despite that he chooses to use us. Or maybe because of that he chooses to use us.

We overcome those weaknesses and fears is only by his grace. All Glory to His name.

When we share the gospel, even in our weakness and stumble over our words fear and somehow that person responds positively, there is no doubt that He is at work. All glory to his name.

Whenever we share the Gospel God is working in us and through us to glorify His name.

God has chosen to use us to do his work. Each and every one of us. This is again echoed in Romans 10:13-15.

¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?^[c] And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

Link

God is the King who reconciles. He is the author and instigator of this. But he chooses to uses

human means to carry out his plan. His people are to be his ambassadors to implore people to be reconciled to Him.

Having spent time with our attentions on the King, let us have a closer look at the Ambassador, which brings us to the second point of our study.

Part 2 – The Ambassador v 20

Read with me again verse 20.

²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

And there we have it. Paul calls himself, and other Christians, ambassadors for Christ. So what is he trying to communicate with this illustration? What can we conclude about this illustration?

His Office – In a foreign Land

First off, an ambassador always does his work in a foreign country. He not only works there but he lives there and interacts with the people there. He is a stranger in a strange land.

And that is important to remember. When we are called ambassadors, we remember that this world is not our home. We are citizens of heaven

in a strange land. We are sojourners and exiles as Peter puts it in 1 Peter 2:11.

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

His Office – Special Assignment

The second thing about an ambassador is that they are in this foreign land with a special assignment. It is not an overseas vacation. They are in this foreign land to share a message from their king. The ambassador is there to nurture and build diplomatic relationships and this takes much time, energy and effort.

We must keep this distinction in mind too. Too often we believe we are in this world to maximize our fun, like if we were on holiday. But we are in this world on a mission with a message to share. We will talk more about the message soon, but the point here is that we are posted out here with a purpose and we cannot let ourselves be distracted by constant amusement.

His Office - Representative

The third thing about an ambassador is that they are a representative. They represent their King in a foreign land. This is a massive deal. The people of that foreign land will look to the ambassador to show them what is king is like,

what his king sanctions and what his king condemns. The ambassador speaks and acts on behalf of his king.

In the political world, only the most trusted of people will be ambassadors, and then they must make sure their words and actions line up with their kings. Anything short of that is treason. And if they act out of line the king has every right to take decisive action.

Think of how much more critical this is for an ambassador of the court of heaven, representing the King of kings, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Not anyone can be his representative. Not anyone can stand up and say “I represent Jesus”. Only those who are reconciled to God can do that. Only those who follow his means and his ways. Only those who recognize their sin and trust Jesus as saviour. Only those who have been born again by the Spirit. Only those who are truly regenerated can represent Him.

The distinction is not between a mature Christian and an immature one. The distinction is between a child of God and an enemy of God. All the children of God are his ambassadors in this foreign land, but too many of his enemies try to represent him.

The local church has a critical role to play in confirming those who truly represent Christ. There is no external marks or race or geography

to distinguish anymore. Instead through baptism, church membership and the Lord's supper, God has given the authority to the church to recognise those who have the right to represent Jesus.

And God has also given the church the right to confront them if their life is not lining up with their profession through church discipline.

Part of the role of the local church is to confirm that a person professes Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and that they live according to that profession.

Representing Christ is a big deal, and we must use God's means to safe guard that role, for His sake and the sake of His Church.

His Office - Delegated Authority

The fourth and final thing I want to highlight about an ambassador is that they carry authority. Their word is just as good as the King's word. They have delegated authority due to their position.

We should be filled with fear and trembling to speak on behalf of the king of kings. "Thus sayeth the lord" and "God Wills such and such" are huge statements which cannot be made without being absolutely positive that what we are saying is in fact from God. False prophets in the Old Testament were stoned for speaking

words which were not from God, but claiming the authority of God.

But yet as ambassadors we have been given delegated authority. With His word we can truly say “thus saith the Lord” and know with confidence what the Lord wills.

We can say with confidence and authority that God hates Sin.

That God will punish Sin.

And we can also say with full confidence that God wants to save you.

And that if you trust in the Work of Christ, He will save you.

We can make all of these truth statements with confidence because they are clear in his Word.

God making his appeal through us

So these are some thoughts that should flood our mind when we see the term ambassador, but also notice the work Paul wants to highlight.

He says: ²⁰ *Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, **God making his appeal through us***

This is a striking phrase, and much could be said about it.

But the thing I want to highlight today is how active God is in the work of evangelism and the proclamation of the gospel. This is the same

theme we saw in verses 18 and 19. God is planning, initiating and doing the work.

He chooses to use his people his church, as his mouthpiece, as his instrument or as his megaphone as it were, but it is God who makes his appeal. We are like a garden hose and he is the water, quenching the dry and parched land. We are simply the channel he uses to fulfil his purposes and designs.

There is much comfort, strength and reassurance in knowing this. When you evangelise, when you share the gospel with the aim to persuade others, know that God is working through you. Just like Moses was His mouth piece to Pharo, you too can be his mouthpiece to people still slaves to sin.

You don't implore their captor, like moses did. Theses slaves are so blind, they are content in their slavery and oppression. And so, we implore the slaves themselves, trying to convince them on behalf of Christ, to turn form their sin and be reconciled to God.

Link

So being called ambassadors paints a sharp picture of our Christian life. We are strangers in a foreign land, not on holiday but on a mission for our King, representing him and working with his authority.

We are his mouth piece, God is making his appeal through us as we proclaim the message he has entrusted to us. To be His ambassadors we must have His message crystal clear in our hearts and minds. And this message is laid out in verse 21, which brings us to the third and final point of our study.

Part 3 – The Message – v21

Know the message

This message is foundational to our salvation, and the heart of our mission as ambassadors. In verse 21 Paul gives a clear and concise summary of the message of the Gospel.

Think of this scenario. Your friend or your colleague asks you point blank something along the lines: “So what is Christianity about anyway?”

What would you say? Where would you begin? What would you include? With limited time what should you focus on. When you have finished how would you know if you have included what you should include?

Well this verse helps us. This verse helps us to know what to focus on. Read with me verse 21 again:

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Exposition

Simple but profound

This verse is astounding in its conciseness and clarity. In the Greek this verse is only 15 words, and yet it conveys the message of salvation to those who would believe it.

But not only is it concise, but it is also clear. You can read these words and understand that God has taken action to make an exchange for the guilt of sin. Those who used to be sinful can now be righteous before God.

It is concise and clear, but it is also profound and contains depths beyond our imagination. Almost each phrase is a pinnacle of theology which is elaborated on and expounded in the rest of the Bible. Entire books have been written on each of these phrases. Scholars have spent lifetimes attempting to understand the depths of these truths.

Doctrines such as Unconditional Election, The Passive and Active Obedience of Christ, Penal Substitution, Limited Atonement, Imputed Righteousness, Justification by Faith alone, and more are all alluded to in this verse.

We know the saying that “The Bible is shallow enough for the toddler to paddle in, but deep enough for the theologian to dive in”. This verse typifies that.

And the marvel is that this verse, in it’s simplicity and profoundness, answers the fundamental question that was left unanswered before:

“How does a Holy God reconcile sinners to himself?”, “How does a just God allow criminals to walk free?”

God initiates

So let us break this verse down just a little bit. First we see God at work. In the phrase

“He made to be sin who knew no sin”

God is the main person at work. He has made a plan, and he initiates and applies it. He Decrees all things, and specifically here we think of the salvation of men and women. Through His providence God makes things come to pass which accomplish his purposes.

In Acts 2:23, when Peter is addressing the crowd in Jerusalem he makes this statement:

²³ *this Jesus,^[c] delivered up **according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God**, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.*

God, planned, orchestrated and implemented this because it was the only way for justice to be satisfied and for sinners to be saved.

If God gave humans what they deserved, we would all burn in hell. We are rebels and criminals. We are guilty before God and deserve punishment. And God in his very character is just. He is a righteous Judge.

Just hear one verse of many, which remind us of his justice. Psalm 7:11-13 says

*God is a righteous judge,
and a God who feels indignation every day.*

¹² If a man^[d] does not repent, God^[e] will whet his sword;

he has bent and readied his bow;

*¹³ he has prepared for him his deadly weapons,
making his arrows fiery shafts*

God knows the problem we face; we cannot stand before his justice and live. But he chooses to act. Only He can provide the appeasement for our sins.

He takes our sins

And the only way for sinners to be saved is by substitution. By another paying the price they own in their place. But that person must not have any crimes of their own, or they too would need to pay. The person paying the debt must be guiltless.

And this is what the phrase “ *he made him to be sin who knew no sin,*” is talking about.

Jesus knew no sin. In all of his life he did not commit any crimes against God. His motives, thoughts and actions were holy and perfect. His followers affirmed that, even his enemies could not find fault against him. Think of the false witnesses who could not indite Jesus and Pilate saying “Against Him I find no fault”.

But more importantly, and critically God the father confirms that He dose not find fault in him. On the contrary, God is well pleased.

In Matthew 17:5, we read:

⁵ He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son,^[a] with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”

Jesus knew no sin, but God made him to be sin. That is, he accounted the sins of sinners to the account to Jesus. Our register of wrong actions, was placed under the name of Jesus. He became legally responsible for those actions.

He gives His Righteousness

But the transactions did not end there. Not only was Jesus held responsible for our sinful actions, but the right actions of Jesus were credited to our account. We were deemed responsible for the good work that Jesus has done. Those who

believe in Jesus, legally benefit from the righteous works of Jesus.

That is what the final phrase of verse 21 is getting at:

so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This is what we call imputed righteousness, or the great exchange. Our sins have been legally exchanged for the righteousness of God.

Phil 3:9 puts it this way:

⁹ ..., not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith

This is the only reason we can stand with confidence. The only reason we can know with absolute certainty that when we die, God will welcome us to heaven. We can stand with confidence because Christ's perfect life makes us righteous in God's eyes. It has nothing to do with our work and nothing to do with our strength. It has everything to do with the finished work of Jesus. And so it is sure, because the work is finished.

Faith

We are simply to believe this message. By taking God at his word and believing his word we accept this gift of eternal life.

The simple response of faith is implied in verse 21. Paul is making this truth statement and he expects people to believe it. There is no work that must be done to make this true to you. You must simply take God at his word. You must believe this message to be true and you will be saved.

Application

This is our Message We must Remember

So let us think back at our Friend asking us point blank: “ What is Christianity about anyway?” . In this verse we have the answer. In this verse we have the Gospel summarized

And I have found that the Gospel can be remembered and outlined by answering four simple questions:

- 1.Who is God?
- 2.Who is Man?
- 3.What Has God done?
- 4.What must Man do?

I have found this to be incredibly helpful in my feeble attempts to share the Gospel. It is a simple outline I can hold in my head as I try to talk about things of the Gospel.

First Who is God? God is the creator of the universe, He has made the rules and he will judge according to those rules.

Then Who is man? Man is a rebel against God. He has broken God's rules and deserves to be punished.

But what has God done? *he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* Jesus paid the punishment in our place. Jesus secured a place for us in heaven because of his good works.

And finally What must man do? Man must believe in what Jesus has done for us. We must accept this truth as a gift. And of course, when we realise that Jesus died for us, our life will be different.

If you talk about these four things with your friend, you can leave the conversation knowing you have given him a clear presentation of the Gospel, and know you have been faithful in your work of ambassador.

Use these four questions if it is helpful, discard them if they are not, but stay true to the message you have been given from your king:

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Conclusion

As we bring this study to a close, let us ponder on the wonder of being ambassadors of the King of kings.

We understand the picture of a sheep with the shepherd;

Branches and the vine seems a good picture of Jesus and his people.

Or jars of clay seems even more fitting of who we are in relation to Him. But here we have been reminded that we likened to the position of ambassador. Ambassadors with the ministry of reconciliation.

This makes us think of our king. How it is in his very nature to reconcile people to himself. How He is the one who initiated and worked out this reconciliation. We praise him and worship him for his mercy, his compassion and his wisdom.

And in his wisdom, he has chosen to use the very people he has reconciled to continue to carry out this ministry of reconciliation. We are reconciled, equipped and sent on his mission as his ambassadors.

As his ambassadors we remember that we are strangers in a foreign land, not on holiday, but with a special message. We are his representatives tasked with living out and explaining what our King sanctions and

condemns. And we also hold delegated authority. Through His word God expects us to speak on his behalf, proclaiming his word, being his mouthpieces.

He is making his appeal through us. And his message is simple but profound. As ambassadors we must know this message inside out. We must know the answers to the questions:

1. Who is God?
2. Who is Man?
3. What Has God done?
4. What must Man do?

And when we answer these questions according to God's word, we proclaim the good news of salvation to all who would hear.

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Let us pray.