

2 Corinthians 5 Commentary-Wayne Barber

PREVIOUS

NEXT

Sermon Index to 2 Corinthians 5

- [2 Corinthians 5:1-5 The Great Departure](#)
- [2 Corinthians 5:6-10 Courage In the Face of Life and Death](#)
- [2 Corinthians 5:11-13 The Character of an Ambassador for Christ-Part 1](#)
- [2 Corinthians 5:14-17 The Character of an Ambassador for Christ-Part 2](#)
- [2 Corinthians 5:18-21 An Undeserved Mission of an Ambassador for Christ](#)

2 Corinthians 5:1-5 The Great Departure

We are in chapter 5 now as we work our way through 2 Corinthians. Now let me get you into this. When we as believers do what we're supposed to do, when we allow God's Word to renew our minds, it completely changes our way of thinking. Then that which we cannot humanly understand is divinely revealed to us by His Spirit and His Word. You see, we fear what we do not understand and so many people do not realize that if they'll just get in the Word with a yielded heart, God's Spirit will reveal truth to them that will dismiss their fear.

You see, if you know Scripture today, you've studied Scripture, you know that death is no longer anything to fear. It is not the enemy of the believer. Death is just a departure from here to there: it's graduation day for the believer to be in the presence of God. Paul talked about this in 2 Timothy 4:6 and he's about ready to be martyred for the faith, if you know anything about the apostle Paul. And he says in verse 6, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come." There's a departure here. When we walk by faith in what the Word of God says, then we will be pursuing the eternal instead of the temporary which we looked at last time.

In our text of 2 Corinthians, coming out of 2Co 4:16+, Paul says that in the face of hostility—and there were a lot of hostile people around him—Paul says, "I'm delivered over to death every day." Somebody was threatening his life and ultimately one day he would be martyred for the faith, but he said, "When I'm in the face of that hostility, I'm not going to turn coward. I'm not going to quit and run back." He said absolutely not. "I'm not going to lose heart." That's what the word means, to turn back, to doing it other ways.

He says in verse 16, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying," Paul knew something else was going on, "yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." Now what does he mean by that? Well, the outer man is dying; he knew that. He knew that the outer man was dying every day. His earthen vessel in which the treasure had come to live; Paul knew that it was dying. If they killed him, so what? That was just bottom line. But Paul also knew that something else was going on: in his inner man was being renewed day by day.

You see, all of the adversity on the outside was just squeezing the life that was in him so that people could see it outside. Paul knew this. The term "inner man" is synonymous with the spiritual heart that every believer has where Christ comes to live in the person of His Holy Spirit. He says in 2 Corinthians 1:22+, "who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit," that's the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, "in our hearts as a pledge." The inner man is also synonymous with our Spirit. Romans 8:16, "The Spirit Himself bears with our Spirit that we are children of God." It is in the inner man where the Treasure, who is Christ Himself, has come to live. It says in 2 Corinthians 4:7+, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves."

It is in the inner man, in our spirit, in our spiritual heart, where we are strengthened by the Holy Spirit of God. He says in Ephesians 3:16+, "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man." So it's in the inner man where our spiritual heart beats with His heart. This is where we want to do His will. He says in Romans 7:22+, "For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man." So the inner man is being renewed day by day. This is where God has come to live. This is where the life of Christ is.

Paul lived in this world but because of Christ living in him, he didn't live for this world. Faith had lifted him out of the obvious, out of the realm of the eternal. Faith had enabled him to live in the realm of the actual, the eternal. He looked for things that were not seen instead of the things that were seen. He saw clearly that the pain that this earthen vessel has to go through and that might suffer in

this life was only momentary compared to the eternal weight of glory it was producing in him. And again, that's the life of Christ being seen in him. The very life of Christ was being manifested in Paul day by day regardless of the pressure that came upon him.

And in 2Co 4:17+ he says, "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." Paul had learned to focus his life on the unseen, not the seen, as we said a moment ago. Verse 18 says, "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." So to Paul death was a piece of cake. I mean it was no big deal. It was just from here to there. And today we're going to see how this truth can encourage and help each of our lives. How God has prepared us for the moment of death, the moment of departure when we depart these bodies and go to be with the Lord Jesus.

2Corinthians 5:5+ says, "Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us His Spirit as a pledge." Now what we're going to do as we look at the text, we want you to get ready, strap your seatbelts on. We're going to look today at what happens at the moment of death, how Paul pictures death, and what it is, and all the glorious things that the believer has in store for him when that death occurs. So, as I said, strap your seatbelts on. None of us have experienced this. How do I know that? Because we're all sitting here today. We haven't been there yet but every one of us is headed that way. So how do you conquer that fear of death? I think it will be a blessing and a challenge to your heart.

The purpose of our departing

First of all, we want to see the purpose of our departing. Why is there the departure? 2Co 5:1+, "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God..." Now the word "know" there in the phrase "for we know" is the word *eido*. Now *eido* means "intuitive knowledge." Now that's something that's different from knowledge that you have to go to a class to learn. This is something that is built in. It's a knowledge that doesn't have to be taught to those who live focused on the unseen.

I want to tell you something. If you're not letting your minds be renewed by God's Word, if you're not living in the eternal instead of the temporal, if you're not living in the unseen instead of the seen, you have no clue what we're talking about right here. But a person who lives that way and a person who grasps that Christianity is moment by moment, breath by breath, then he has a knowledge, a built-in intuitive knowledge. For we know something. And we live with this intuitive knowledge.

Paul uses another contrast in this verse. And he says, "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God." Now he contrasts a tent with a building. And that's a beautiful way of teaching truth. He wants us to understand that anything we have in this life is temporary but what we have in the next life is eternal. A tent is a temporary dwelling. It is made for a person on a journey. It is not meant to be a permanent residence.

When I was in church youth and recreation I became an instructor in the American Camping Association. And we had to do a survival training in the mountains of the Ozarks in Arkansas. And they put two of us, on purpose, they put two of us in a pup tent and both of us were very large people. The other person was a guy who was All-American at Mississippi State University in basketball. He was 6'8" and his shoulders were at least twice the size of mine. And they had the cameras ready the next morning when we tried to get out of that tent. Getting into the tent was bad enough, but getting out of the tent and especially at the same time, we liked to have torn that tent all to pieces. We learned real quickly that a tent is not designed for a permanent dwelling. Anybody knows that.

And they knew that in the days of Paul. The nomadic people would live in tents and move from place to place. However, a building, a building, is a lasting structure and it's built to remain. So once again Paul shows us in a figurative way the difference between the temporary and the eternal. You want to talk about it? Listen, the body you're living in right now is a tent: it's a temporary dwelling. But you have something on the other side that is an eternal dwelling. It's called a building, not a tent. Paul says that our human bodies are earthly tents. They are our temporary dwelling. They are our house in which we live in on this earth.

Now death is described as our tent being torn down. He says, "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down." Now, what a picture Paul draws of what physical death is all about here on this earth. It's our tent being torn down.

The word translated "torn down" is [kataluo](#). It means "to be loosed." It has the idea of striking a tent, when you take it down; breaking camp. I mean if you've ever been camping, breaking camp, striking the tent, taking it down. And the whole idea in this is you are moving on. That's the implicit truth that's in this. Death is for us like taking down a tent, breaking camp and moving on from here to someplace else.

"For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down." Now the "torn down" is aorist passive. The aorist passive tense tells us a lot of what's going on. First of all, the aorist tense says it's an instantaneous event. Even though we're dying, death is an instantaneous thing, just like birth, death is an event. It happens at a specific time. It means, by the passive voice, that something or someone is causing this to happen. Physical death is brought about by something, either illness, violence, you get worn out, or whatever. Something is causing that death to happen.

But we learned last week in our message that God determines when and where this event takes place. At the very moment of death our spirits depart. If you've never been with somebody who has gone on to be with the Lord, then you don't quite grasp what I'm talking about. I've seen this. It's incredible. One second they're breathing and fighting for life and the next second, just the next instantaneous second the spirit leaves. You can sense it. It's almost as if you had a more visual way of looking at it: it just departs that whole room. The spirits depart.

2Cor 5:8+ tells you where they go: to be in the presence of the Lord. Look down in verse 8 of chapter 5. He says, "we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord." So the purpose of our departing, of our earthly tent being folded, of the camp being shut down and the camp being broken up and we move on, is so that we can be in the literal, visual presence of God. Death must occur or Christ must come for His church to ever be in His visual presence, to where we can see Him.

Now this brought quite a dilemma to the apostle Paul. The apostle Paul wasn't so sure which he wanted more: whether to live here or to go on to be with the Lord. Really, that's what was really pulling him. And he says in Philippians 1:21-24+

"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Now you understand why he's saying this. He says, "But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose." If I had a choice to make, I'm not so sure which one I'd choose. "But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake."

And you can see that dilemma. He understood what death would do. Death was necessary to get him into the visual, literal presence of Christ. We have to die in order for that to take place, or He must come for His church. So the purpose of this departure is to be with God. That seems so exciting to the believer: to be with God. I remember when my Mama died, I was doing her funeral. She asked me several months before she died. She said, "Wayne Allen," that's what she called me when she was serious about something. She said, "Wayne Allen, I want you to do my funeral."

And I remember really struggling with that, because my Mama and I were really close. You talk about a Mama and her son; we were very, very close. And I remember at that funeral I walked into the chapel where her body was in the casket, nobody else was in there. I've done hundreds of funerals, I've never done this before, but I walked over and I laid my hand down on my Mama's head. It was just a tender moment for me. And I don't know why, I guess it's the way they preserve the body or whatever, but it was ice cold and I jerked my hand back and it was like the Holy Spirit of God was in that room and He said, "Wayne, what are you doing son? She is not in there, she's with me." And it overwhelmed me.

All of a sudden I was grateful for the fact that death had finally taken her into the presence of God. You see, believers live that way. This world doesn't live that way. They get all they can, can all they get, save the can and poison the rest. They're living for this world. That's all they know. They've got so much invested in this world that death scares them half to death. It does not scare a believer, a believer who lives in the unseen, a believer who lives in the eternal instead of the temporary. That kind of person understands that death is necessary for him to finally be in the literal, visual presence of God.

The prize of our departing

So what's the purpose of our departure? To be with God. Not bad, huh? Secondly, the prize of our departing. There's something that we have waiting on us. The moment death occurs, the moment our earthly tent is taken down and we depart to be with Christ, Paul tells us we have a building from God. "A house not made with hands," a house meaning a body, "eternal in the heavens." Now this is the prize. This is that "building" we've been talking about. The temporary residence that we have on earth, that tent, is now contrasted with a building we have from God. "A house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Paul, by using the term "house not made with hands," is talking about a resurrected body. You say, "How do you know that?" Because Jesus Himself used those terms in Mark 14:58. He says, "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.'" And He's not talking about a physical building; He's talking about a resurrected body. So when our earthly body dies, our earthly tent is taken down, camp has been broken up and we're moving on. We have another body, a heavenly body, for a covering that is permanent. Paul is summarizing what he said to the Corinthians already in his first epistle to them, 1 Corinthians 15:34-54. But let me read 1 Corinthians 15:42-44.

He says, "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body [there's your glorified body] it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body." So we understand that there's a permanent dwelling waiting for us.

Now we must be real careful here. The context of 2 Corinthians 5 and of 1 Corinthians 15 specifically refer to the eternal covering,

that permanent body that we'll have one day; our resurrection body. Chapter 5:1 again says, "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." The phrase "eternal in the heavens" is clear enough; it speaks of the permanent spiritual covering we will have in that day.

Now let me see if I can explain this. This is the bodies that we have here being resurrected and glorified and changed. In 1 Corinthians 15:50-57 he explains much more of this. He says, "Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Now why is that? Because where we're going our bodies are not fit for that place: "nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep," and that word "sleep," when it's referring to death, has to do only with the body, "but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Boy, there are some powerful verses there.

I have a good friend whose son was killed tragically in a car wreck and I went down to his funeral. We all knew the boy that was killed; he was 26 years old, only been married seven months. It was going to be a tough funeral because even though everybody was rejoicing, it was so sudden. And Fred Wolf, the pastor at Cottage Hill at that time, stepped out to do the message that day. And I didn't know what he was going to say and oh, how he excited my heart.

He came out and he started talking to death. It was almost as if we weren't even there. He said, "Oh, death, where is your victory? Oh, death, where is your sting?" And his whole point was there is no sting of death, there is no victory in death to the believer. We've already seen it conquered in the Lord Jesus Christ and death is not an enemy to us.

Now when this happens, when the Lord Jesus comes for His church—now some of you don't believe in the rapture of the church. That's okay, like I've said many, many times; I'm not going to argue with you. You stay here; I'm going on with the first bunch. Send me a postcard if that's the view you want to hold on to. It doesn't bother me—but there's an order in which we're going to get our resurrection bodies. They're not going to happen until He comes for His church. That's when we're going to get the resurrection body, the permanent, eternal, spiritual covering for the body.

Now, there's an order. Jesus was the firstfruits. He bodily resurrected from the grave, 1 Corinthians 15 says if you don't believe that, you don't even believe the gospel and you're not even saved, because He set the pattern. The second thing is that the dead bodies of the righteous dead, those who departed, have gone on to be with the Lord, then they will be raised from the dead. And then thirdly, those who are living at the time He comes for His church will be changed.

You say, "How do you know that?" In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, that's what he's dealing with. They knew that death took them into the presence of God, but they were worried about the bodies in the ground. Has that ever bothered you? And it was bothering them. So Paul explained it. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13 he says, "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep [remember, it's not talking about their spirits if they're with the Lord; it's about their bodies], that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus."

Now wait a minute. I thought they were in the ground. No, remember there was a departure. He brings their spirits with Him. "For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep." In other words, they're going to be raised first. "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air [and by the way, I don't see how in the world people get around that that have other views] and thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words."

Christ set the pattern. His resurrection from the dead, His bodily resurrection, His glorified body and we know that from Scripture. Then those that are dead, their bodies are in the ground will raise up, and then we as believers who are living at that time shall in an instant be changed. I love the skeptics that are always hanging around. And they say, "How in the world is God going to raise a dead body. It's already turned back into ashes. Or maybe one that was in a plane crash and blew up in the middle of the plane crash. Or maybe somebody took a grenade in a battle and it blew him to smithereens. How is God going to raise that kind of body?"

Don't you love skeptics? They're everywhere; they're a dime a dozen. You know what my answer is? The same God who stepped out on nothing and spoke and created everything is going to raise those bodies from the dead. Any questions? See, this is where people are. They don't believe. They don't believe in creation, they've got to come up with some humanistic formula and that's why they can't understand death. They can't understand the promises of God. Only the people that live in the unseen can even begin to

grasp what he's saying right here.

But then he's saying that there's an eternal, spiritual covering. That's our prize. Where we live in an earthly tent down here that can be folded at any moment when God chooses, and camp be stricken and torn down, and camp be broken up and we move on, when we see Him, we shall be like Him. We shall have a permanent body. But you say, "There's something missing here. The Lord Jesus has to come for His church before this permanent body can be given. So what happens at the moment of death for a person when Jesus has not yet come back?"

Paul seems to suggest in this passage—and I'll show you why I believe this and I'm not the only one—that there is a temporary, immediate covering a body gets until that event takes place down the road. The moment you and I die there's a temporary covering for our spirit. Look at verse 3, "inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked." Being unclothed, meaning without a body, the spirit being just a free-floater. The term "inasmuch" is the Greek word "if indeed it is something that is to be taken for granted."

Paul says, "inasmuch as we," meaning "it should be taken for granted," "having put it on, will not be found naked." But why, why did he add the phrase "we will not be found naked" or unclothed? It seems to me, and like I said, I'm not the only one who thinks this way, it seems to me Paul is saying that our spirits, now listen carefully, are never to be left unclothed. They don't just float around after death like Hollywood would have us to believe. You know the *Twilight Zone* song. "I was riding down the road the other day and somebody's dead spirit came floating through my car window."

You know, people who think that way probably had pizza the night before. That's not it. Good grief, we get our theology from Hollywood instead of from the Word of God. It seems apparent that spirits are not to be left free-floating. If you'll think about something, even evil spirits, when Jesus cast the Gerasene demoniac out, where did He cast him into? To the swine. Why did he cast him into the swine? Why didn't He say, "Shoo, shoo, shoo, you all get out of here, just float around somewhere?" He put them in a body, and so the idea then is that the moment we're dead, the moment our earthly covering is shed, there is some kind of covering so that our spirits would never be left unclothed.

Even though it's not as clear as we'd like for it to be, we'll find out the day that we die. It should be taken for granted that the spirit is not to be left unclothed: "inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked." We also know from Scripture that whatever this covering is, the moment we die, it's identifiable. And that just comforts my heart. It is recognizable. You say, "How do you know that?" It's easy, I told you, Scripture tells us. Luke 16:19-23 it says, "Now there was a certain rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, gaily living in splendor every day. And a certain poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried."

Now some people say this is a parable. No sir. In parables no names were given. This has to be a little story. "And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom." He recognized Abraham and he recognized Lazarus. In Luke 9:29-31, "And while He [Jesus] was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming." This was on the Mt. of Transfiguration. "And behold, two men were talking with Him;" two men, they were identifiable as men, "and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem."

So just in those two contexts, Lazarus, Abraham, Moses, and Elijah, all were recognizable. So what do we know then? What can comfort our hearts? First of all we know that one day when Christ comes for His church, our dead bodies will raise up from the ground, be glorified, changed, and clothed in our immortal spirit. But we also know there has to be a temporary covering that is identifiable, recognizable the moment that we die because the spirit is not to be left unclothed.

Our prize then is an identifiable covering of our eternal spirit. There is a departure at death. What is the purpose of it? That we might be in the presence of God. But there's also a prize. There's an identifiable heavenly body waiting on us. I tell you what, that comforts me. How many of you have people more on the other side seems like anymore than you do on this side besides me? Doesn't it get good after while? And just think about it: you will recognize them immediately. I don't know how that happens but they are recognizable, and that should be a comfort to each of our hearts.

The problem of our departing

Well, thirdly, the problem with our departing. You say, "What could be the problem with our departing if we're going to be with Jesus and we're going to have a heavenly body, what could be the problem?" Well, listen, to be unafraid of death does not mean that all of us look forward, now listen carefully, to the act of dying. You catch the difference? To be unafraid of death does not mean that all of us look forward to the act of dying.

Verse 4, "For indeed while we are in this tent [this is our earthly body] we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be

unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.” So Paul says while we’re in this tent, he’s saying, while we’re in this earthly body, we groan. The word for “groan” there is *stenazo*. It means “to sigh, to groan.” Now many people think that he’s talking about the suffering that the body has to go through, the pain, and possibly, but that doesn’t seem to be the meaning here. It seems to be he’s referring to the fact that he’s groaning because he so wants to be in that heavenly body. You see this in all of his epistles. He so wants to be in the presence of Jesus. It makes much more sense to read the text that way.

He says, “For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan,” we’re so longing to be in that heavenly body that God has for us. But then he mentions “being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed.” Now this is intriguing to me. The word “being burdened.” When I got hold of it I said, “Wait a minute. He’s groaning because he wants to be in that body, but what’s he burdened about?” The word for “burden” there is the word *bareo*. It means to be “weighed down, to be heavy.” What’s he referring to? I think the answer is in the word “unclothed.” He says, “because we do not want to be unclothed.” Being unclothed is the act of dying. Remember, it’s the folding of the tent; it’s the taking off of the earthly garment. Paul says we do not want to be unclothed, the act of dying, but we really want to be clothed. We want to be in the garment that God has for us.

I believe what Paul is saying is that “I long to be clothed in that body, but I don’t look forward to the experience of having to die.” You know, that to me puts him on a relationship that I can understand. None of us have been through that experience yet and so therefore most of us are a little bit intimidated by it. We’re not afraid of death; we know what’s going to happen.

Again, Paul wasn’t afraid of death, but I don’t think he particularly relished the process of having to die. Paul wanted to be living when Christ came for His church so that he could skip the whole act of dying. Now, I totally agree with that. How many of you agree with that? Wouldn’t we like to skip the act of dying because we don’t know how we’re going to go out of here? I’d much rather Him come and when I see Him I’ll be like Him and I’ll have my permanent heavenly body forever and ever and ever and not have to worry about any of this. I think that’s what Paul is saying.

He would probably die; he knew that he wouldn’t die in his sleep, delivered over to death every day. He knew he’d probably die a terrible death which by the way he did; he was martyred at the hands of those who hated Christ and the gospel that he so boldly preached. But I believe what he’s saying is that “I’d much rather just skip dying and be clothed in that heavenly body.”

The phrase “so what is mortal may be swallowed up by life,” is just saying the same thing he said in 1 Corinthians 15:54-55. It’s a quote from Isaiah 25:8. Let me read Isaiah 25:8-9. He’s quoting it. “He will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces, and He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken. And it will be said in that day, ‘Behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.’”

I believe that the apostle Paul is no different than you and I in the sense that he was a mortal human being and he knew the truth, he knew the Old Testament Scriptures, he knew that God would conquer death, he knew that Jesus conquered it on the cross, he knew that the moment he died was nothing more than the folding of an earthly tent, he knew that there was going to be a heavenly body waiting on him, but oh, if he could just have it his way. “Oh, God, come Lord Jesus, come right now and I can skip the whole thing and be in that heavenly body and live with you forever.”

By the way, has anybody else thought that recently besides me? Wouldn’t it be nice sometimes? Just, “Come, Lord Jesus.” Wouldn’t it be great? I’d like to be on an airplane, taking off. And have that thing just go on up and up and up and up and he’s trying to reach that altitude and all of a sudden the Lord Jesus says, “Come on,” and just keep right on going, just right on up and meet Him in the air like Thessalonians talks about.

Paul knows that God will accomplish all of this. Paul knows that there’s a purpose in departing: to be with the Lord Jesus. He knows that there’s a prize: there’s a heavenly body. But I think the only problem and struggle he has, he was burdened way down, was that he didn’t particularly relish the act of dying: how you have to go out.

The preparation for our departing

Well, the final thing is the preparation for our departing. You see, God has already prepared us for this. He says in 2 Corinthians 5:5, “Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.” Now the phrase, “Now He who prepared us for this very purpose,” is very clear. The word “prepare,” *katergazomai*, means “he who worked this out; he that has accomplished this for us.” Jesus, when He went to the cross, by dying and resurrecting from the grave, accomplished every bit of this for us. He knew that. And to document it, to document it, God built into Paul and each one of us an eternal guarantee.

Who prepared us for this very purpose is God, “who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.” The Holy Spirit living in you and living in me is His eternal guarantee that death is a piece of cake. All of this has been taken care of. When we die, we’ll be immediately in His presence and we’ll have a heavenly body. All of this has already been taken care of. A down payment, the word there is “pledge” is the word *arrabon*, and it refers there to “earnest money” or a down payment, if you please. And a down payment is that which

guarantees full payment is coming later on.

Though we're not to be afraid of death, we're not told to look forward to the experience, and nobody said that. But when death occurs, we will depart this body. There will be a departure. And there will be a heavenly body waiting for us. It is identifiable and one day our earthly bodies will rise incorruptible, and we'll clothe our immortal spirits forever. And the guarantee that this is going to take place is that the Holy Spirit of God lives in us right now and He is God's down payment that everything has already been accomplished.

I tell you what, when I die, if you make it longer than I do, I just want you to remember some things. When you have the funeral, don't come in here with a long face. I want people to celebrate because, man, that's homecoming. "Wayne's gone home." If you shed a tear or two, that will be okay because I want somebody to remember me that way. But don't be too broken up.

You have eyes and if you've had anybody go on to be with the Lord, that if you could get into heaven and talk to him and say, "Listen, God, can you let him come back for 25 years? We miss him so badly." Do you know what they would tell you, even if God gave permission? They'd say, "No way. I'm where you're supposed to be. Now get with the act and come on up here with me."

Death initiates the eternal process of us being with Jesus forever and ever and ever. Now don't discount this life, because He has us here for a purpose. And don't miss that purpose. Just don't get so hung up in it that the tail wags the dog. Don't live for this earth; live in it, but not of it. But remember that death has already been accomplished by what the Lord Jesus has done for us. And it's a departure and we will have a heavenly body and we will be with the Lord Jesus forever.

Dwight L. Moody is one of my favorite people to read about. Realizing that he would soon be gone from this world one day, Moody said to a friend, "Someday you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody of Northfield is dead. Don't you believe a word of it. At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now. I shall have gone higher, that is all. Out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal, a body that sin cannot touch, that sin cannot taint. A body fashioned into His glorious body. I was born in the flesh in 1837. I was born in the spirit in 1856. That which is born of the flesh may die, but that which is born of the spirit will live forever." I love that.

What happens to a believer at death, if we just understood it, we would not be afraid of it. We're afraid of what we don't understand.

2 Corinthians 5:6-10

Courage In the Face of Life and Death

Would you turn with me to 2 Corinthians 5, and we're going to be looking at verses 6-10 today as we talk about conquering the fear of death and this is part 3; "Conquering the Fear of Death – Part 3." What we'll talk about today is "Courage in the Face of Life and Death." Now, let me get you into it. If you're visiting today and have not been with us, we're studying through 2 Corinthians and we've been talking about death and how we can see that fear of death conquered in our life.

When a believer begins to understand this, that death is no longer an enemy to him, when he finally begins to live in the eternal and stops living just for the temporary, when he sees the difference between the momentary pain and the eternal weight of glory that is being produced in his life, when he focuses on the unseen instead of the seen, when he realizes that the purpose of dying is to be instantly in the presence of God Himself, when he sees that the prize of his departure here, when he leaves this body, is going to be a heavenly body that is recognizable that knows no pain, and when he sees that he has been totally prepared for the moment of death and has been given the promise of life after death by the Holy Spirit's coming to live in him, then suddenly—we've just reviewed everything we've studied to this point—suddenly living by faith while still on this earth takes on a brand new significance to the believer.

Life on this earth which brings with it pain, hostility, ridicule, embarrassment, heartache, you name it, is worth it all when one realizes that the One who conquered death lives in him to enable him in life. It's incredible when the two are put together. It's interesting to me how sometimes we get so nonchalant about living now, living here on this earth right now, and the responsibility that we have as believers in it. We almost have this idea that we can live any way we want to live down here, but everything will be fine when we see Jesus one day, and it'll all be gone and erased and everything will be wonderful. But what we don't understand is there is a connection to the way we live here and the way we'll enjoy Him when we see him one day.

Overcoming the fear of death is one thing, but coming to grips with life is another thing and we're going to see today hopefully the importance of living this life, while we're here, this temporary time in this earthen vessel, how important it is to what is coming one day. We're going to see in our text that Paul didn't overlook that responsibility. Yes, he wanted to have that resurrection body, he wanted to be in heaven with Jesus and he says it several times even in our text today, but God had a purpose for Paul and Paul understood that. Paul understood that every day he got up that his purpose was to live by faith, to walk by faith, to let Jesus be Jesus

in and through his life. While he lived in this earthly tent he recognized how important it was to have integrity in his walk and to walk by faith.

And that purpose that God has is directly tied into life after death. We must see how life on this earth has direct results as to when we see Him one day. Paul understood it and again I'm going to say it over and over again, Paul understood this very well. He was unafraid of death and as a result he lived life on this earth by faith and with hope and with confidence. Now let's look at what gave Paul the courage to face life and to face death. There are three things that I want you to see in our text today and hopefully it will be a challenge but also an encouragement to your life.

The perception that identified Paul

First of all I want you to see the perception that identified Paul, in other words, the knowing that identified Paul. There was a certain knowing. Paul had a grasp on this. God had revealed it to his heart and that knowing identified him in his walk. He walked a certain way because he knew something and that was what drove him. In verses 6-7 he says, "Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight."

Now in verse 6 he starts off and says, "Therefore." Here we go again. Anytime you see a "therefore," always ask what it's there for. That's one thing we'll all remember. The "therefore" is based on everything he has just said. I've reviewed some of it, but let me just go over a little bit again. Because he understands that death is a departure of his spirit and he'll be immediately in the presence of the Lord; because he understands that at death he will have a heavenly body recognizable; because he understands that he's totally prepared for that moment and the Holy Spirit is that assurance that lives within him; then, "therefore" he says, he is always of good courage.

You see, that knowing here affected the way he lived while on this earth. The word "courage" is the word *tharrheo*, which means he's always full of hope and confidence. Paul says he's "always of good courage." Why? Because he knows something. He's always full of hope and confidence. Paul's understanding of how death is just from here to there, that's all death is. Jesus only shed one little tear on his face when He confronted Lazarus' death. Because he knows that he's going to conquer death. Physical death is nothing to the believer.

And because Paul knew that God had already prepared him for it, caused him to live with a divine confidence in this life, full of hope and full of confidence. No matter what circumstance came his way, no matter how painful it might be, he was always full of hope and confidence. Always. "Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight."

Now that word "knowing" there is *eidotis*. There are several words for knowledge in Greek, and we only have one. That's why it's so difficult to understand sometimes. This word has more of an intuitive knowledge. It's something you don't have to be taught. If you're walking by faith you already have this, it's built in. It's a divine perception of something. It comes from the word *eido*, which means to perceive something very clearly. It's in the perfect tense and Paul says, "I have come to know, I'm in the state of knowing something."

And what does he know? Now we know he knows a lot of things. But very specifically to the context he says, "and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord." Now, what is he saying here? First of all, he knew that believers are in one of two places, you can write it down, there is no other place, there is no other choice. There is no "soul sleep" as some people choose to believe. There is no purgatory as some people envision. A believer is either in heaven in the visible presence of the Lord or on earth, absent from His visible presence, but indwelt by His Holy Spirit, His Spiritual presence.

And the two, whether it be absent from the body and present with the Lord, or present in the body and absent from the Lord, they are eternally connected. Now, folks, we've got to get a grasp on this. They are eternally connected. Living by faith is what links them together. Paul knew that being at home in the body was only a temporary condition. He was living in an earthly tent destined to die one day and then forever to be in the presence of the Lord. They are connected together and he knew that "soon and very soon" he was going to see the King.

How many of you know that old song? "Soon and very soon, we are going to see the King, soon and very soon we are going to see the King. Soon and very soon we are going to see the King, hallelujah, hallelujah, we're going to see the King." I love that old song; haven't heard it in a long time. It came to me when I was studying this. Then it goes, the next verse: "No more crying there." And then the next verse says, "No more dying there." Paul understood that. And that was what motivated him, that's what identified his life while he was here on this earth. He knew that soon and very soon he would see the King. Therefore he lived with integrity while he was here still present on this earth.

That was the knowing, that was the knowing that identified his life of faith. This truth from God's Word was the basis upon which he lived by faith, not sight. And this living by faith identified his lifestyle all of his life as a believer. He wrote to the Romans of how their faith encouraged him and how he knew that his faith was encouraging theirs. He says in Romans 1:11-12, "For I long to see you in

order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established; that is, that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine."

When you see a believer walk by faith you understand that he believes in his heart "soon and very soon." He has a purpose in his life. He has a destination in his life. He told the Galatians in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith." That's the way he lived. Knowing what he knew about death and knowing what he knew about his eternal purpose of ruling and reigning with Christ forever kept him living faith while he was here.

Faith was believing God was the means by which Christ was released in Paul. Paul understood that. Paul knew what he couldn't do for God, but he understood what Christ could do through him; and that faith released Christ in his life. It was no longer Paul but Christ living in him. One does not walk by faith if he believes that life on this earth is all there is. You don't see anybody walking by faith if they don't understand what is next. Faith is something that jumpstarts the whole process and understanding the afterlife.

The author of Hebrews writes in Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for"—what are you hoping for today? Do you understand where Paul is in this context?—"the conviction of things not seen." That's why it can be called faith. It doesn't have to see it, it knows it's coming. We have a wonderful picture of how faith operates and how one who is anticipating what is to come, that he is spiritually seeing, but not yet seeing the way he wants to see it, Hebrews 11:13. Hebrews 11 is the great Hall of Faith I call it, "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth." They were just here for a short time.

In Paul's last days, when anticipating that which he had believed all of his life, when he was anticipating that moment of dying, that moment of departure to be with the Lord Jesus, he says in 2 Timothy 4:7-8, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." And look what he's looking forward to, the two pulling itself together. It says, "in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."

You see, you have got to understand that trusting God in death, like Paul, causes us to trust God in life and to live by faith. There's a connection between the two. His divine perception of death had fanned the flame in his attitude towards life which caused him to live the way he lived. He said, "I'm always of good courage, I'm always full of hope and confidence because I know what's coming and I know the One who has conquered death has conquered life and He lives within me and enables me to be what I need to be." So he was motivated to live by faith in anticipation of what faith saw in the life to come.

Again, "Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight." So there was a divine perception and this knowing that identified the lifestyle of Paul. He knew; because of what he knew, he lived by faith.

It's the saddest thing in the world to be at a funeral of somebody who doesn't have that hope. I did a funeral for a guy one time that was so angry at God, his wife died three months before. And he told me, "Preacher, she was a believer. That's fine. Whatever she wanted. Don't you dare do anything at my funeral except put me beside her. I don't want any hope; I don't want all that stuff." And when he died, he died with his fist at God. That's the way he lived, you see, he lived that way, bitter, bitter, bitter. And when he died, he died that way. An angry look on his face. The funeral guy told me that he had been there for four or five days and nobody had checked on him. He was so unlovable, who would check on him? And when they found him they couldn't get that fist undone, and he was in the casket with that fist like that. And the family had the casket open. That's a lot of hope, isn't it?

I want to tell you something, folks, if you don't know Christ today, you have no hope and death is a fearsome thing and it is an enemy to you. It's going to cast you right into eternal damnation if you do not know Jesus Christ. But for a believer to be afraid of death, oh my friend, God has already conquered that for us. There is no penalty of eternal separation for us. Jesus took that upon himself. He was separated from His Father on the cross; He took our sin upon Himself; He paid a debt He didn't owe when we owed a debt we could not pay. He's given us a life and what we have on this earth is so temporary, it's so miniscule compared to what He's given to us and when we start seeing what's coming, it causes us to live differently while we're here on this earth.

So this knowing has a definite connection; there as a divine perception and it causes us to walk by faith. What is it that keeps people walking by faith? They know that they're going to see Him one day.

The preference that captivated Paul

Secondly, the preference that captivated Paul. I started to put verse 8 with verses 6 and 7 because it's a flow of a thought there, but I separated it because I want you to see this. Paul is totally honest with his heart's desire. In verse 8 he lived in the unseen instead of the seen. He lived for that day when Christ came. He lived in the eternal instead of the temporary. He so believed in heaven and being with Christ forever, that he had gotten to the point that he just longed for that day to come. He longed to be with Him. He says,

“we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.”

Paul repeats what he says in verse 6 here in verse 8: “We are of good courage.” He wants to make sure people understand that while still present on this earth, in this earthly body, this earthly tent, in the face of hostility, in the face of uncertainty, Paul was able to still say, “I’m full of good courage, I’m full of hope, I’m full of confidence.” But he so longed to one day be with Christ in his heavenly body and says, “and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.”

He understood this. He understood his temporary existence in an earthly tent. He understood being filled with the treasure who is Christ. He understood that. And he was daily full of hope because of that with confidence in the Lord who had conquered death and life, but he was so anxious, so anxious to be with Christ and to have his heavenly body.

You know, it’s a sweet thing to be around believers who live this way. Listen, when you start living that way it shapes everything of how you live while you are down here. He was daily full of hope and confidence in Christ, but so anxious to be with the Lord and looking forward to that event that would cause that to happen.

Faith embraces the unseen that God has promised. Paul knows that that same faith would lead him one day to the seen. In other words, one is going to initiate the other. You see, for faith to be real, the unseen must come about or it cheapens faith. If it doesn’t happen then there can be no faith. It’s like the person who lives believing he has a million dollars but one day finds out he doesn’t have a million dollars but he owes a million dollars and he can’t pay it. And his faith in what he thought he believed that he had was cheapened in the fact that it didn’t exist.

It’s so clear why Paul is of good courage. Man, why not be of good courage? Wake up every morning, today, is it today, Lord? You know, there’s a lot of music out about the coming of the Lord Jesus and “We shall see Him, we shall see the King,” “The King is coming, the King is coming,” and people love prophecy conferences. People love prophecy, but, you know, some people love to hear about it, but they don’t live as if they believe it. Are you ready for Him to come today? Are you ready?

Lord, right now, come on, Lord, come Lord Jesus. There are a lot of people who say, “yes, yes, yes.” You know why? Because the suffering of your life has driven you to a trusting and dependence upon Him and you’ve experienced Him in a way that you could not have experienced Him and you’re living in such a close relationship with Him. Oh, that’s a wonderful sound. But there are other believer’s who have not even given it the time of day. They don’t let the Word of God renew their minds. They don’t live everyday as if He might come that day. And so therefore there’s no walk of faith. Why? Because there’s no real grasp of what is to come.

So the apostle Paul has the divine perception of knowing that determines the way he lives and he has a preference and he’s very honest about it. He’d like to just go on. Just, come Lord Jesus.

The pursuit that motivated Paul

But the final thing I want you to see is going to take me the longest time is the pursuit that motivated Paul. He’s pursuing something because he knows what’s going to be on the other side and it causes him to live in such a way now as if he’s in a pursuit of something. Verses 9-10, “Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

What’s he saying there? By understanding death and therefore having the courage to face life, Paul was driven by that desire to one day stand before Christ. Not just to have a heavenly body. That was part of it, yes, that was a large part of it. But also to receive rewards on that day that would point back to God and not to Paul. He wanted to make sure his life was lived in such a way that the glory, the recognition for what was done in his life would never come to him. It would go instead to the Lord. “Therefore” he says, “also we have as our ambition.”

Now what’s that word “ambition”? The word “ambition” is the word *philotimeomai*. It comes from two words. The first word means to love or cherish something: *philos*. It comes from that word to cherish something. And the other word means honor. To cherish, honor, something that is honorable. To have a desired goal that is worthy of pursuit to be ambitious to see it come about. Paul adds “whether at home or absent.” And he means this goal is going to carry him right on in to the very presence of God.

It absolutely motivates everything that he does. That walk of faith that he has. That willingness to stay on earth until his time comes even though he preferred to be there. It motivated him every day. And every word that came out of his mouth, the way he treated people, everything in his life was motivated by the fact that one day when he stood before Christ, he wanted to make sure that the works that remain in his life pointed to Jesus and not to Paul.

You say, “Wayne, it says here he wanted to be pleasing to Him.” And the word “pleasing,” *euairetos*, it means to be “well pleasing to God.” You say, “I thought we were already well pleasing to God because we’re in Christ. We wear the garment of righteousness. He’s already made that exchange. He lives in us.” And you’re exactly right. Paul is not talking about him as an individual. Paul is

talking about his works, his deeds. It's something different here.

What he's talking about should be the most looked-for thing in our life. But it scares most people half to death. It's not something that is frightening; it's something that is good. He says in verse 10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." Paul is talking about the works that are done in our life. This is why we've been preaching living grace. My heart is to help you understand. If you're not going to walk in that message, let Jesus be Jesus in you, then there's going to be a moment when you stand before God one day and your works are going to be tested by fire.

You see, I'm just trying to help. Paul points to that event. I believe that event is the rapture of the church. I realize in this church right here we have every idea of eschatology, I understand that. I promise you that I understand that. And I love you anyway. You have a right to be wrong. No, whatever. You know, the most common word in heaven is going to be "oh." I believe it's the rapture of the church. I believe Jesus is coming for His church. I've said this so many times it's like a broken record. You stay here, that's fine; send me a postcard. I'm going with the first bunch.

But whatever your view is, whatever it is that you land on, we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. You cannot eliminate that one. That is absolute. The word "judgment seat of Christ" is the Greek word bema. The word bema is the word referring to an elevated place that can only be accessed by steps. This is where they would put the magistrates. This is where the judges would sit: up in an elevated place, and they would cast judgment when the people would bring their cases to them.

I've been to Philippi and I've stood on the bema. I had a lot of fun looking down on my group. But that's where the judgment took place. Now, there's going to be a judgment seat, the bema seat, of Christ. "Oh, I'm scared to death. Can I lose my salvation?" Again, he's not talking about that. You're secure in Jesus forever. It's different; He wants to reward you for walking by faith, living in the unseen and not in the seen, living in the eternal and not in the temporary.

Now what is going to be judged? Now before we go any further I need to go back to a verse and explain a word that I did not explain when we went through it. Go back to 2 Corinthians 5:1. I want to show you a word here that is very important to understand. He says, "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God." Now, I didn't explain that word to you. Let me explain it to you. "Oikodome" is the word; yes it's a house, but listen to this, it's very specifically used. It's a house that is being constructed. While we're down here, we're constructing something over there.

Now Dr. Spiros Zodhiates jumps right in on that, both feet. He believes that this recognition of our garment, of our body, the word means to "put on" has the idea of putting a garment on top of a garment. In other words we already have the robe of Christ, the righteousness of Christ, but this identifies us a little more clearly as to who we are in our life on earth. And he believes that the building, the tent, the heavenly covering that we're going to get when we stand before God is being built right now and it will look like how we live by faith down here. He believes that Paul is showing us that we are developing right now, and I believe this, our capacity to enjoy this moment one day when we stand before Christ.

Well, whether that's true or not, one thing we know for sure and that is there will be a direct tie to our reward in heaven to the way we lived down here as a believer on earth. Verse 10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body." Now the word "recompensed" is the word komizo. It means to receive something. It's like that old adage of what goes around comes around because he says, "for his deeds in the body according to what he has done, whether good or bad." It's going to go right around and come back to him when he stands before Christ one day.

Now the context has told us what is good and what is bad. We know from Hebrews 11:6, "And without faith it is impossible to please Him," so we know what's good. Paul lived by faith, not by sight. And so anything that is done on faith; what is faith? Obeying God, trusting God, letting Jesus be Jesus in you. That's going to produce eternal results. That's going into whatever this building is that we're building down here.

Paul lived by faith because he realized this truth. He realized that when he stood before God one day that he wanted all that he had done to reflect the glory of God and certainly not be diminished by the fire that will test it one day. In fact, turn to 1 Corinthians 3:10-13. Now, Paul had already discussed this with the Corinthian believers. You've got to go back to this because this is what he's talking about. Some people believed that all of the judgments will happen at the same time. I'm sorry; you cannot find a lost person in this judgment: this takes place at a different time. Not the great white throne judgment; that is the ultimate judgment of sinners, and that's when hell comes into existence and the devil and his angels are cast into hell. That's not what he's talking about. This is talking about the believers at a specific time of what will happen to them and how they'll be rewarded.

Verses 10-13, "According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it." Every one of us is a builder here today. The moment you become a Christian, you become a builder. "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones [and then he gives another set of materials], wood, hay

or straw, each man's work will become evident;" this is what he's talking about, "for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work."

Now he begins here by showing that every man is a builder. Now Paul warns each man must be careful how he builds upon the foundation. Now, the foundation is Christ. You say, "How do you know that?" Verse 11, "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ is salvation, Jesus Christ and sanctification. Be careful how you build upon it. Make sure that it's of the right materials because you don't want it to end up diminishing when you stand before Christ.

Each of us has the same set of materials with which to build, in which to build upon this foundation that Christ has initiated in our life. Verse 12, "Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones," then there's a definite mark right there, "wood, hay, and straw." Now these are the materials. The wood, hay and the straw are the fleshly materials that will burn because it will be tested by fire. But the things that are done by faith, Paul says, "I live by faith trusting God to do through me what I understand I cannot do myself," they are going to remain.

And in verse 13 the finished product will be tested by fire. Now fire burns wood, hay, and stubble. But what does it do to the precious stones? It just simply refines them and makes them more precious. Again, verse 13, "each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work." Paul is just basically telling the Corinthians that walking by faith while on this earth is so important. Remember, 1 Corinthians he had to really admonish them because they wouldn't walk by faith.

"Each man's work will become evident." In this statement we see that it is not us that will be judged but our work; and it's singular. Some people look at it like it is a garment; some people look at it as some type of a building, something that is going to represent everything that was done by faith in our life here on this earth. He points to a day, he says, "The day will show it." What day? I think that's the period of time, a day can either be a 24-hour day or a period of time, and to me that day, that period of time, is that seven years while we're in heaven while on this earth is the day of the Lord. And while we're in heaven we're being rewarded; it's a time of celebration.

Verse 13, "each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work." All that we do on this earth is summed up again in that word "work." It's in the figurative house, whatever it is, that we built. That's the work. It's built upon the foundation of Christ. And it will be revealed by fire. Now when you take wood, hay, and stubble and you strike a match and throw it over into it, it's just going to go straight up. "The fire itself will test," he says, "the quality." The word "quality" means "what sort of" each man's work whether it's of the flesh or whether it's of the spirit.

How many of you, before I go any further, how many of you, this just scares you half to death? I grew up afraid of it. I thought He's out to get me. "He's going to nail me because I'm a rascal." Some people still think I'm a hellfire, and brimstone preacher. That just tickles me to death. I want to get a bus and take you and let you hear one. You're going to thank God every day that you've got me instead of them. You don't know what a hellfire, and brimstone preacher is. I grew up under it. "Boy, you better get your life right or God's going to put your deeds up on a screen one day and everybody's going to see it. He's going to shame you, boy. He's out to get you, boy; you better get your life right boy."

I grew up that way. I believed that one day I was going to stand before God and everything I'd ever done wrong was going to show up on the big screen. I'm thinking, "Oh, please, don't put that up there." And then I read 1 Corinthians 3:13, and it says it's going to burn up. Now how are you going to put it on the screen if it's already burned up? Folks, He's not out to get us. Verse 15 says if there's anything that remains, you will receive a reward. It's not to get you, it's to reward you. What an awesome salvation! God comes to live in me knowing how stupid I am and knowing what I cannot do and He wants to do through me what I cannot do myself, and when I finally stop being hard-headed and let Him do it, He turns around and rewards me for it.

This is good stuff. The only people that are afraid of it right now are people that are so invested into this world they can't stand the thought of death, and they cannot stand the thought of the life to come. Because if you're living for the temporal, you're not living for the eternal. That's the only people that get afraid of this. That's what John had to say in 1 John: don't be among those who shrink back at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Who in the world would ever do that? People that are living for this world and this world alone. And they're much to be pitied.

Life on this earth is a serious thing. We're developing our capacity right now to enjoy the moment when we see Jesus and those rewards are given out. We're developing it right now. There is integrity to Christianity, folks. It just not one of the lackadaisical religions that you can do anything you want to do. It's a relationship. And one day we will stand before Him. We're creating—I'm serious, listen to me again—we're creating our capacity to enjoy standing before Him one day right now by the way we choose to live. By faith, or "I'm going to do it my way and God, don't You call me, I'll call You."

So the perception that identified Paul, there was a knowing, and that knowing was what was coming one day and that caused him to

live by faith while he was here and it identified his whole life. The preference was always there. I want to hurry up and get there, because that's what happens to you when you start walking this way, but Paul was willing to fulfill his responsibility in the assignment God had given, but the pursuit that motivated Paul, he wanted his works one day to be that which would reflect Christ. He wanted to hear those beautiful words, "Well done, My good and faithful servant." He wanted to hear that.

Let me ask you, I'm not on anybody's case. If I ever sound mean I'm just trying to get somebody's attention before Jesus comes back. This got my attention several years ago and it still rattles my cage. Out of about 20,000 sermons, Dr. Zodhiates told me he studied, he said he found four on the judgment seat of Christ. You know why? Because people don't want to talk about it and people definitely don't want to hear it, but it's the very thing we need to hear. It's a celebration day and it can be a wonderful day if we'll choose to walk by faith.

You say, "Well, what if I fail?" If it will comfort you, when something happens in the flesh and you come back before God and you confess that and you repent of that by changing allegiance, those are righteous works because that's what He tells us to do and that goes right back into the house that you're building for Him. It's an awesome thing, folks. It is absolutely awesome. It's win-win if we'll just say yes to Christ in every area of our life. Do you realize that affects everything that we do? The way we treat each other, the way you talk about people, the way that we handle life, everything is going into this work. That's why we have to be very, very careful to live by faith.

Life on this earth is a serious matter to a believer. He's living by faith because he hasn't seen what's coming, but he so believes in what's coming, he lives by faith. So are you living in the unseen, the eternal, by faith today? And today we probably have a lot of people that are living that way because we've had enough failure and we've had enough pain to drive us to the feet of Jesus. And hearing the message of grace is not as difficult as it is sometimes for younger people who still think they can do it. But at the same time, how are you living today?

If Jesus came today, if all this took place tomorrow, I don't know when it's going to take place, we don't even know all the ins and outs of it, and we stood before our Lord Jesus Christ, and there's that work, whatever that is, if it's a garment that causes us recognition, if it's a house, whatever it is, what will your work look like? Will it have been diminished by fire the moment you see Him, and it's gone?

When I stand before Jesus it's not going to be, "Oh, this is out, oh this is out." No, and what's left is that which was done by faith. And that's the way I'll stand before Him one day. And my rewards will have everything to do with that. Whatever those are, however that works, I don't know. I haven't been there yet.

How are you living? When are we going to get across to this new generation that Christianity is a relationship and full of integrity and there is accountability? We will stand before Him one day. That ought to determine how we live while we're down here. Talking the fear of death is one thing. Coming to grips with living a life on earth is another. That's why it's courage to face life and to face death.

2 Corinthians 5:11-13

The Character of an Ambassador for Christ-Part 1

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 5. We're going to be looking at verses 11-13 as we push through studying 2 Corinthians. We've been looking at conquering the fear of death. But tonight we're going to open up a new series called "Ambassadors for Christ." This is part 1, and again it'll be in verses 11-13.

Now let me get you into this by what we have studied so far. A believer's purpose in life is made so much clearer when he knows who he is and whose he is in Christ. And when a believer realizes that one day he'll stand before God, and not only will he have a heavenly body, but all of his works will be tested by fire, this understanding changes everything about the way he lives, about the way he treats people, about the way he looks. Everything changes because he knows that anything done of the flesh will burn that day. He wants only the works that Christ has done through him by faith. He knows who he is. When he knows who he is and knows where he's going it changes everything.

I've got to bring you up to date with my grandson, Jonathan. He started kindergarten the other day and my daughter is homeschooling him. I have a lot of respect for those who do that. The curriculum they have is, they use a video setting where Jonathan really is in the classroom in the sense he feels that way. They have other children sitting out there and it's like an interactive type of thing. Well, Jonathan's been watching this video for two days and he watches all the little children in that classroom. The boys have a white shirt on and a tie and a pair of slacks. Now his mother has said not one thing to him about this. They're doing this at home. And the third day, he came downstairs and he had his little white shirt on and had his little tie on, had his little britches on and they were too short for him. He hadn't worn them in a while and he didn't bother about what anybody thought

about him in the family. He knew who he was and he knew where he was going and it changed the way he looked and the way he acted.

That's exactly what happens to a believer when he finally gets a clue. He begins to understand there's accountability. There's integrity to Christianity. We're going to stand before God one day. No, we're not going to be judged, we were judged in Christ; but our works will be judged and tested by fire. You see, Paul's whole life changed drastically when he was persuaded by Christ, when Christ came to live in him. This change intensified when he understood that this life is only temporary. It's like James says, it's just a vapor quickly here and passes away till one day he would be in heaven. And again, not only would he be there with a heavenly body, but his works were going to be tested one day.

And we've seen what a change came in his life from being a Pharisee to becoming a believer in chapter 1 of what we've already studied in 2 Corinthians, when he was ridiculed, humiliated, falsely accused by his critics in Corinth. He ran to God, the God of all comfort. He didn't run from Him; he ran to Him. We saw how he could stand in the face of his accusers with a clear conscience because his walk matched his talk. We have seen in chapter 3 that he was the servant of a new covenant. In this new covenant Christ had come to live in him so that Paul's adequacy would never again be of Paul. It would now be only of Christ.

We saw how the glory of God, Christ Himself, had come to live in him and he was being changed from glory to glory. We have seen how Paul lived in the freedom of the Spirit of God. And because of this in chapter 4 he did not lose heart. He didn't go back to doing things the way he used to do it. He wouldn't turn coward in the face of hostility and in the face of the battle. And in chapter 5 when the threats of death were his daily; I mean, moment by moment, his life was threatened, he had no fear of death and he lived longing to be in the presence of God dressed in his heavenly body.

Wow! He knew who he was and he knew where he was going and it changed everything about the way he lived. And that's what we're trying to get across. He knew that life on this earth was all about the temporary assignment that God had given to him, and soon and very soon he would go to see the King.

Well, in our message today we're going to see that while he was on this earth in the assignment God had given he was truly an ambassador for Christ. Look down in 5:20 and I'll show you where we're coming from. We're going to work up to it and even go to the other side of it. But this is your key right here in verse 20 of chapter 5. We see his purpose very well clarified. It says, "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." Now the word "ambassador" is a great word. It's the word *presbeuo*. It comes from the word normally meaning one who is older.

Now a form of this word, a derivative of this word, was used for the elders who were appointed in the church and it didn't just mean that they were older in age, it meant they were mature. They were spiritually mature. But also in early writings this Greek word was used as an official term to identify an ambassador. An ambassador was one who was sent out as an official representative with a message that had a lot of legal clout. I mean, when you heard this ambassador he wasn't just speaking from the top of his head. He had a message from somebody else who was in an official position and it had a lot of legal clout. Paul was an ambassador in the official heavenly sense. Christ had commissioned him to go as His representative and tell the Gentile world the gospel of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Now be careful to understand; being an ambassador for Christ did not mean it was without pain. The word "ambassador" is only used two times in the New Testament. Paul uses it both times, and look where he uses it the other time. It's in Ephesians 6:18-20, and he's in prison when he writes this. He says, "With all prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view. Be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all of the saints. And pray on my behalf that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel." Then he says in verse 20, "For which I am an ambassador in chains, that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly as I ought to speak." He was an ambassador in chains. And even in the midst of that painful circumstance, pain was not a deterrent to keep him from wanting others to know the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now to get into this, I want to ask you a question. I just want to roll around in your mind while I'm speaking. Are you an ambassador for Christ? Do you realize that while you're here on this earth Christ lives in you and wants to draw others to Himself through you as you allow Him to live in your life? Do you look, do you act, and do you live as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ? You say, what does an ambassador of Christ really look like? Well, that's our message, the portrait of an ambassador for Christ. And there's only two things that I want you to see. I want you to see, first of all, the goal of an ambassador for Christ. What is it that motivates them? And secondly, the grief of an ambassador for Christ. We're only going to be able to do verses 11-13. So let's jump in together.

The goal of an ambassador for Christ

First of all, the goal of an ambassador for Christ. The goal of an ambassador for Christ is to do two things: One, persuade men; but at the same time to be pleasing unto God. His goal is not to persuade God so that he can please men. We've got it backwards. Verse 11: "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men."

Now, he starts off by saying "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord." Now, what he's just said in verse 10 bleeds right into verse 11. He says in verse 10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body according to what he has done whether good or bad. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord," he says, "we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences."

We've got to unlock some of this here. The word "fear" in the phrase, "knowing the fear of the Lord," it's translated terror in some translations. Now this brings a wrong connotation to believers who are servants of a new covenant. The word "fear" is the word phobos, which you get the word "terror" from. But it also means something else. It also means in certain context, this being one of them, reverence, awe, respect, honor. Now this would be the meaning here. Believers do not operate out of terror of God. They don't operate out of terror of the judgment seat of Christ. In fact, to prove that, 2 Corinthians 5:14 says this: "For the love of Christ controls us." You may have a translation that says "constrains us." We do not do what we do out of fear, out of guilt. But we do what we do out of love and respect and awe and reverence and honor to God.

You know, I heard this story of a beautiful girl that was on the mission field and she was working at a leper colony. Supposed to be a true story. A millionaire came that way and he was just on a vacation, one of his many. And he decided to go through a leper colony; had never seen one before. And he went in that leper colony with his little group and there was this most beautiful blonde, blue-eyed girl he'd ever seen in his life, single, working in a leper colony, in the filth of a leper colony. And he said to her, "Honey," he said, "I wouldn't do what you do for a million dollars." And she answered him back, "Neither would I." He said, "Well, what makes you do this?" And she said "The love of Christ Jesus constraineth me."

That's what a believer does. He doesn't live out of terror. He lives out of awe and respect and honor and love for what God has done in his life. It is this love combined with that reverential awe that's a true motivator in the believer's life. They kind of go together.

Paul, out of this love and respect, does not want to stand before the judgment seat of Christ with none of his works remaining. He doesn't want to be there. Paul lived for that day when he would see Jesus. He longed to be in his heavenly body and to stand unashamed before God at the judgment seat of Christ. And the word "knowing," he says "knowing the fear of the Lord," the word "knowing" is the word eido. Eido means to know with a clear understanding and perception. So therefore knowing, understanding clearly the reverential awe of the Lord. It's in the perfect tense which means I have come to know. Something happened in my life that brought me to this understanding. I'm in a state of understanding this. I'm in a position to understand this.

Now you ask, well, when did Paul come to understand this? It's not a fresh revelation. When did he understand, when did the picture finally get a hold of him? Well, we don't know. It could have been on the Damascus road in Acts 9 when Jesus met him on the Damascus road. Remember the light was so bright he was blinded for three days until finally he came out of that and understood what had taken place and his salvation that occurred. And so that would have. I don't know about you, but that would have certainly given me an understanding of who I'm dealing with here, had it blinded me for three days.

Or it could have been, and we haven't gotten there yet, but in chapter 12 of 2 Corinthians, for the first time in 14 years he brings out the fact that he had literally been taken in the Spirit into the third heaven. He had been into heaven. He had actually seen the throne room just like John in the book of Revelation. But Paul didn't write a book on it; Paul waited 14 years to even share it. Maybe that was the time. Maybe standing there in the glory of the presence of God it hit him, this is no game. You don't play church. Christianity is real and one day we're going to stand there before an Almighty holy and righteous God.

However he did, we don't know. But he says, "Therefore knowing," having come to know the awesome reverence of God, "we persuade men." You see, it's a no brainer. It flows out of a person who begins to get a hold of this and God begins to reveal what's going on in his life. He looks different, he acts different. The word "persuade" is the word peitho, which is the word meaning to not only convince a person, but to the point of conviction to where whatever he understands radically changes his life. It's a huge difference than just helping a person understand something. It's not just to convince someone to their point of understanding. It has to go further. It's proven by their response. Paul was persuaded on the Damascus road, completely changed. He didn't just come to understand it, he was radically transformed by what he came to understand.

Let me show you that in Scripture. For instance, in Acts 14:19 it is used of how the Jews used persuasive words to convince the crowds to stone Paul. They didn't just come to some understanding and walk away and say, "Yeah, I guess we ought to do it," no, they did it. And verse 19 says, "But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds," and that phrase is that one word right there, "they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city supposing him to be dead."

It was what Paul was trying to do in the synagogues when he would go in constantly and be beat up and thrown out of town. He'd go

right back to the synagogues, for it wasn't just the Jews that were there. They would allow the Gentiles to come in and it was a time of interaction with the people. That's what he was trying to do in Acts 18:4, "And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks."

Now in verse, in this verse from Acts 18 he couples something with this and it shows you where evangelism, what it's all about. He says he was reasoning in the synagogue, trying to persuade them. Now you have to understand that. The word "reasoning" there is the word *dialogomai*, which means to dialogue back and forth until a conclusion is reached. Now listen, you've got to get a hold of this, and I'm not sure I can balance it, but I hope that you'll get it. An ambassador for Christ knows that you can't reason with the lost world if you don't know the word of God.

I've been saying this for years and I'll keep on saying it: If we're not going to get into the Word we can forget being an ambassador for Christ to a lost world. We've got to know first of all what in the world we are, whose we are, who we are biblically and what salvation is from God's Word. An ambassador cannot reason without knowing that. Paul knew how to take God's Word and to explain salvation to a lost person. He was a student of God's Word. Even though he only had the Old Testament he was as good or better than anybody other than Jesus at taking the Old Testament and showing Christ the Messiah and how to be saved.

But an ambassador for Christ on the other side, the flip side, also knows that the persuasion of men has to be done by the Holy Spirit who is making the appeal through him. He understands he can reason and he's got to be willing to do that and he's got to discipline himself to study God's Word. But from that point on it's got to be God because only God can convict men. We can convince them with a good argument, but only the Holy Spirit can convict them.

Listen again to verse 20 what we read to start off with: "Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ," listen carefully, "as though God Himself were making an appeal through us." So they understood that. The word "as," as though, the word there expresses the manner in which something is done. Paul said, yeah, I'll go in the synagogue if the Holy Spirit leads me there. I go in and I'm willing to open my mouth. I'm willing to reason with these people with the Word of God, but I can't do anything beyond that. Only the Holy Spirit; it's God making an appeal through me. Only God can persuade men.

You see the two-fold responsibility. We have a responsibility to get in God's Word and know why we are what we are. But we also have to make sure that we're filled with His Spirit because only God can persuade men, only God can convict men. Paul didn't set out to persuade men without the empowering of God's Spirit within him. His adequacy was, as he says in chapter 3, not of himself, but of God. In fact, he's already shown the Corinthians that he wouldn't do anything or he couldn't do anything apart from being empowered by the Spirit of God.

Listen to this in 1 Corinthians 2. Remember, these are the same people. In chapter 2 verse 1 it says "And when I came to you brethren I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God." Paul tells them that his methods in no way overshadow the message. He wasn't into this "let's use all the high tech stuff. Let's use all the other stuff to try to impress people." He says that wasn't into any of that. He didn't have five sermons, 10 suits and hairdo that would draw a crowd. He was in no way interested in pleasing men, but reasoning with them from the Word of God, yes. That was what he wanted to do and seeing them persuaded in the power of a Spirit of God.

That's what witnessing is: "For I determine to know nothing among you he says, except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom," which means I didn't use man's way of trying to impress you, "but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power". Paul's heart to persuade men was not in some polished humanistic approach, but in the demonstration of the Spirit of God.

You know what would be helpful for all of us, before we go out and think we're going to win a lost world to Christ, we better remember something; first of all, to get our heads straight about what we believe and why we believe it; but secondly, understand we can win nobody to Christ. Only the Holy Spirit can convict human hearts. It has to be done in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

Verse 11, again, "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men." Then he says something so unique. He says, "But we are made manifest to God." Now God knows what He's done right. You know, sometimes I think I have to take these things on, and God's showing me "that's not your business, Wayne, just go on and preach the Word and get off that kick. I know when it's done right and I know when it's done wrong." Paul says, "But we," His team, "we are made manifest to God."

The word "manifest" means clearly visible. God sees exactly what we have done. The perfect tense is used and the passive voice. Perfect tense means something's already taken place. Passive voice means we didn't do it, God Himself made this clearly seen, and it's a done deal. Now listen to me carefully. While the world questioned Paul and his team in their reasoning and in their methods, Paul knew that God knew and that's all that mattered to him.

Oh, folks, I want to tell you something. When we stand at the judgment seat of Christ it won't matter what men thought about you. It's

going to matter what God thinks about your works and God knows. God knows. Whether a man accepts or rejects the message that Paul and his team preached as ambassadors for Christ was irrelevant. Paul knew that God knew that he had reasoned out of faithful study and discipline and he had worked out of the power of the Holy Spirit of God and that's all that mattered to Paul. He accepts his responsibility to study the Word of God for himself so that he can reason with the world and he knows that he cannot go beyond that. Only God can persuade men. As a matter of fact, he says in another chapter, he says some are going to reject it, some are going to accept it. Who is man that's adequate for these things? He can't figure all that out. He just knows that God knows.

If you're unwilling, listen, I'm not picking on anybody tonight, understand. If anybody's here tonight and calling themselves a believer and you're unwilling to study God's Word, you're unwilling to get into it and find out why you believe what you say you believe, so that you can reason with the lost world, and then you're not willing to be filled daily, controlled by the Holy Spirit of God, Christ living His life in and through you, then you are not an ambassador for Christ. You may be a believer, but you are not an ambassador for Christ. You have nothing to say. That's the tragedy of the 21st century.

So our goal as an ambassador for Christ is to persuade men, but at the same time walk pleasing before God. We're like conduits. I love that phrase. I just wonder why I liked that. But a conduit is like a pipe, if you want water over here or over there it has to flow through and you have to have a clean vessel for it to be able to do that. I noticed the other day our shower was backing up on my feet. I'm looking down and I'm thinking you know that water's not going anywhere. It's just sitting there. And we took some of this Drano stuff. It's awesome. I just squirted some of that stuff. Man, it went. We had to clean the channel so the flow could be what it ought to be. That's what we are.

There have been several versions of this story, but as far as we can tell Warren Weirsbe did some research on it and this is the official version, this is fact. Britain's King George V was to give the opening address at a special disarmament conference with a speech relayed by radio to the United States. As the broadcast was about to begin a cable broke in the New York radio station and more than a million listeners were left without a sound. A junior mechanic in the station, Harold Vivien, solved the problem by picking up both ends of the cable and allowing 250 volts of electricity to pass through him. He was the living link that allowed the King's message to get through. That's an ambassador for Christ right there. You're the living link to let the King's message get through to somebody who needs to be persuaded with the gospel.

So Paul was an ambassador for Christ. Diligently studied God's Word, diligently was a student of what he was and who he was and whose he was. But also he was very faithful to be filled with the Spirit because he knew he couldn't convict anybody. He could convince the best, but he couldn't convict anybody. The Holy Spirit had to be persuading men.

The grief of an ambassador for Christ

But the second thing you see here is the grief of an ambassador for Christ. And I didn't write this so I'm just following his flow. That's what he evidently wants them to know. Every ambassador for Christ who lives to persuade men and to please God, you would think should be able to expect to be defended in the face of the critics by those who had been persuaded. You would think that. But this is not always the case, and the fact that it's not brings a lot of grief to our lives. And I just want you to get ready for it. When you become an ambassador for Christ, even the people you see persuaded for Him many times will not stand for you when the critics get in your face. Paul ends verse 11 by saying, "And I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences."

Now Paul knows that God knows what he's all about. But his concern is that do they know? You can almost hear the exasperation in his voice. He says it's almost as if it's beyond hope. He says, I hope that you understand the difference in our life. These are the people that have been persuaded by the gospel. Reasoned with, yes, but God the Holy Spirit persuaded their hearts. And he says, do I have to tell you again? Paul qualifies everything that he has just said and, about his team and about their purpose. He qualifies it in verse 12. He says, "We are not again commending ourselves to you, but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you'll have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart."

Isn't it sad that with all that God had done through him, the people's lives that had been changed, there were still those in the group that hated his message of living grace and hated and sought to tear that message and him down? Paul addressed those people in the last part of chapter 2. We know who he's talking about. He's already told us in the first few verses of chapter 3. He says, "For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God we speak in Christ in the sight of God." And then he says, "Are we beginning to commend ourselves again?" and you remember that passage. And he says, "You are our letter written in our hearts, known and read by all men."

You see, true believers at Corinth stood as a monument to Paul. Paul didn't need any letters of recommendation. He didn't need men's approval. The church at Corinth would not have been there had they not been persuaded by the gospel of Christ and that was the Holy Spirit working through Paul. But there were those who were not genuine. There were those who masqueraded as teachers and preachers who peddled God's Word, which the basic root idea of that is they did what they did for their own benefit, for their own gain. They were instrumental in bringing a lot of pain to Paul.

But you know what Paul's real grief was? It wasn't these people. He expected them. What he didn't expect was the people that had become believers that had been persuaded, he didn't expect them to remain silent in the face of critics towards Paul. They hadn't said a word. You can almost hear in his voice again that the hurt and the exasperation to those who should know better. He says, "I'm not trying to explain myself. You know better than that. I'm not commending myself to you. I'm giving you an occasion to be proud of us, to have something good to say about us."

All that Paul has told them in our text, about his heart, about his motive, about his work, about the work of his team, was to give them something to say that was good in the face of the critics of those who hated the message of grace. He says, "So that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not at heart." He speaks of his critics, those who peddle the Word of God as being proud of appearance and not at heart. In other words they're fake. They're fake. There's nothing on the inside. And Paul shows the gravity of how he's been accused.

You know, a lot of times we don't know exactly what was said. He sort of alluded to it, but he tells you in verse 13: "For if we are beside ourselves it is for God; if we're of sound mind it's for you." The phrase, "for if we're beside ourselves" could be translated in our day in our culture for if we have lost our minds, and I like that. The Greek word is the word *existemi*, which means to be crazy, to be out of one's mind. This was the very word they used of Jesus when He was doing His miracles. And it says in Mark 3:21 "When His own people heard this they went out to take custody of Him, for they were saying, 'He's lost His senses.'" The same word. By using the word "we" Paul's saying not just me, they're accusing my whole team of losing their mind, losing their senses. And he says, listen, if that's what they say it looks like to them, if that's what the lost world who rejects this message, if that's what they say about it then so be it. It was for God that we have done what we have done.

You have to get into this. I don't know if I can explain it or not, but I'll try. Isn't it interesting how the lost world looks at a believer who's committed to Christ like that millionaire seeing that beautiful girl in a leper colony and they think they have lost their mind. I've had somebody in my own family, not immediate, but a distant relative tell me, Wayne, it's the stupidest thing in the world I can find that you would go into the ministry when you could be so productive in other areas of the world. And I constantly hear people say, well, Wayne, welcome to the real world. I would love for those people who say that to take in my shoes for one week and find out which side is really real.

But, you see, they think it's stupid. "He's lost his mind. He's crazy". And Paul says it doesn't matter to me if that's what they think. I understand they don't understand. He knows why. If they mistake our fiery devotion in which we've conducted ourselves, if that's so far over your head don't worry about it. God already has it figured out. He knows what it's about and He's going to reward us one day when we stand before Him. We're not here to make everybody understand who we are. We're here to persuade men as to who He is.

But then he says, "You also found us to be of sound minds." Certainly most of you have seen that in us that if you can surely see that "it was for you." Paul said there's certain things you can understand. You can't understand a lot of what we do. You'll agree with the skeptics. You'll think that we're crazy, but at the same time there are certain things you do understand. And Paul is saying, listen, when the critics come, camp out on what you do understand. Stay, speak to them in the face of hostility and tell them what God has done in your life. There's certain things you can understand and that was for you.

Well, nothing new under the sun is there? Instead of defending the man God used or the lady or whoever that God used to persuade them and change their life, the worth of his message and of his life, the silent majority, I'm so sad to say, listened to the critics. So Paul's telling them "I'm giving you something that you can say to them. I know you're afraid. I know they intimidate you. But understand that there's grief to being an ambassador for Christ." You can't even depend on the people sometimes closest to you. You can't depend on the people that have been persuaded and their lives have been changed to stand with you. In 2 Timothy Paul says "Demas has left me." And he said "when I stood before my accusers no one stood with me." That's pretty tough. That's the last part of his ministry. He's going to die in this imprisonment and he has nothing that he can hold on to.

But the thing that he hangs on to is God knows, and soon and very soon he'll stand in His presence and the works that God had done through him will be there. The building however it is, whether it's a garment or whatever it is will stand there and God can say, "well done, good and faithful servant." The people down there didn't have a clue what was going on, but I did. And Paul said that's enough.

An ambassador for Christ has a goal. Reason with men, which means he's disciplined to study, but be in the power of the Spirit to see them persuaded. But the grief to that man is he cannot depend on men at any time, even the saved, even the persuaded, many times because of fear will not stand with him. But he says that's okay. That's okay, God knows. You see the devil himself cannot stop God's work. You know that. Nothing thwarts the purposes of God. He cannot stop the way it goes on or the work that's done, but what he can do, he can get inside the body and find weak people who don't have the gall to speak correctly. And what he can use them for is to try to discourage the ones that God is using. But so what? An ambassador for Christ shouldn't expect to be pleasing to men ever, any man, but be pleasing to God.

So if you want to be an ambassador for Christ know that the goal of an ambassador for Christ is to persuade men, not please them. And the grief of an ambassador for Christ is that he cannot depend upon those whose lives have been changed to defend him in the face of his critics. His solace is that God knows.

The world is crying out, where are the ambassadors for Christ? Yeah, it's costly. It's very painful, but it's worth it all. I wonder if you're an ambassador for Christ. Everywhere you go Jesus in you is passing that way and God through you is drawing other people to Himself. Is that what your life is like? Listen to what happened to the disciples just to make sure you understand. James, the son of Zebedee was beheaded in Jerusalem, the first of the apostles to die during the Easter season in about the year AD 44. Matthew was slain with the sword in the city of Ethiopia. Mark was dragged through the streets of Alexandria until he expired. Luke was hanged on an olive tree in Greece. James the Less was thrown from a pinnacle, or wing of the temple and killed. Philip was hanged up against a pillar in Perga. Bartholomew was whipped alive until death. Andrew was scourged and tied to a cross where he preached to the people for two days before dying. Jude was shot to death with arrows. Thomas was run through the body with a lance. Simon the Zealot was crucified. Peter was crucified upside down. Mathias was stoned and beheaded. John was exiled to the penal island of Patmos and later became the only apostle to die a natural death. But every one of them knew what Paul said. The pain that we go through in this life is momentary compared to the eternal weight of glory, His life manifested in us that's going on at the same time. Paul said, "Buddy, when you look at what's coming it's worth it all. There's no regrets."

2 Corinthians 5:14-17

The Character of an Ambassador for Christ-Part 2

Turn with me today to 2 Corinthians 5, and we're going to be looking today beginning in verse 14 and going down through verse 17. We've been talking about being ambassadors for Christ and this is part 2 of that little mini-series in the midst of this study through 2 Corinthians. And today's message is entitled, "The Character of an Ambassador for Christ." What's he like? What's his character? What do you look for in an ambassador for Christ?

Let me just get you into this by reviewing a little bit. But it's such a wonderful thing when a believer realizes that part of his assignment here on this earth is to be an ambassador for Christ, an official representative of Christ, wherever he goes, whatever he does. And as an ambassador for Christ he carries with him a message. Not a message from man but a message from God. And this message has the power in it, the power of the gospel. For Paul said, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel for in it is the power of God." The power to save souls. Can you imagine? We're ambassadors on a mission. And everywhere we go we carry a message from God that's able to transform people's lives. The responsibility of an ambassador is to simply share this good news with all who will hear about the Christ that lives within him. And then he allows Christ to make His appeal through him to the lost people around him. All we do is reason with them, but God makes His appeal.

Second Corinthians 5:20; we're not even there yet, and yet that verse carries us right along. It's like the current of a river. It says in verse 20, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ," and here it comes, "as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." Paul as an ambassador for Christ was totally unafraid to speak truth in the face of whoever was hostile. It didn't bother him; death was not a problem to him. He says in 4:13, "we also believe, therefore also we speak." He understood the awe, the divine respect, the honor for the Lord Jesus who lived within him. He lived to persuade men never to please men. It says in verse 11, "Therefore knowing the fear" that word means awe, respect, honor, "of the Lord, we persuade men."

Now we saw the last time how Paul understood that two-fold responsibility in persuading men. He knew that he could only convince men, he knew that, he could reason with them. But only God could convict them. You say, "Show me that in Scripture." Oh, I'm so glad you asked. Romans 15:18 says, "For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed." God did that. He didn't do it, he just reasoned with them in the Scriptures, but God the Holy Spirit brought these people to conviction.

You see, Paul lived in the power of God's Spirit. He told the Corinthians in his first epistle, "I don't come to you with eloquence of speech and with wisdom. I come in demonstration of the power of the Spirit of God." He knew that God knew how he was doing what he did. It says in verse 11, "Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men," and then he makes that statement, "but we are made manifest to God." Boy, that's powerful. He knew that God knew and that's what kept him going. Men criticized him, they thought he was nuts, but he knew that God knew.

But the problem he had was not with God at all. The problem he had was with the believers there at Corinth who wouldn't even stand up and defend him in the face of his accusers. Verse 11, the last part of it, "and I hope that we are made manifest also in your

consciences.” He says, “We’re not again commending ourselves to you. But we’re giving you an occasion to be proud of us so that you will have an answer for those who will take pride in appearance and not in heart.”

Oh, the grief that comes to a person who wants to be an ambassador for Christ, a person who represents Christ, a special representative with a message that can transform lives. The grief is that the very people that are persuaded by the God that lives within this individual who is an ambassador, they’re the very people that will not stand and open their mouths to defend him, and he can’t depend upon that. He’s got to know that God knows and that’s good enough.

Last part of verse 12 says, “that you may have an answer for those who take pride in appearance, and not in heart.” I don’t know a lot about the living translation so I’m not putting my stamp of approval on it, I just don’t know a lot about it, but I do like the way they translate this verse. It says in verse 12, “Are we trying to pat ourselves on the back again?” Is that what I’m doing? He says, “No, we’re giving you a reason to be proud of us so that you can answer those who brag about having a spectacular ministry rather than having a sincere heart before God.”

I can only imagine what spectacular things these false teachers use to so convince these people that they wouldn’t even open their mouths to defend a true servant of God like the apostle Paul. Does this remind you of anything that is going on in the 21st century? The spectacular versus the sincerity of heart? Paul’s humility and his total devotion to Christ stood out in stark contrast to what these false teacher, those who were criticizing him, those who were tearing him down, those who had so enamored the people there in Corinth that they wouldn’t even speak up for Paul. What a difference in the two groups. And he’s made reference to this all the way back to chapter 1 if you follow it through.

So he says to them, “For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God.” In other words, if we appear to be nuts, if we appear to be crazy by the way we live, if the devotion of our heart, if the sincerity of our motives, if this somehow bothers you, the fact that we’re not tied to this world but we’re anchored to the Lord Jesus Christ, then so be it. We’re not living to please you. We don’t have to have you understand us. We know that God understands. We’re living to please him.

But then he says, “if we are of sound mind, it is for you.” What he says is there are some things you do understand that we’re doing. You understood the message we preached. Take these things and use them to defend us in the face of those who are trying to tear us down and not giving us credibility.

Well, Paul did not draw attention to himself or to man’s ability in what he did. That’s why he says that in Romans. He said, “I would not dare speak of anything that I’ve done. I would only speak of what Christ has done.” He always pointed to the adequacy of Christ, never to the adequacy of his own, that he’s come up with something. But again, the believers at Corinth couldn’t seem to get it. They were so infatuated with the way the world does things, that if it looked good on the outside that seemed to appeal to their flesh. Well, nothing new under the sun, is there?

Well, today Paul is going to show us what it means to have character which is so different from the false teacher, so different from those who use church and use Scripture for their own gain. I want to show you the character of an ambassador for Christ and he’s continuing again to draw that line between the humble sincerity of a true servant of God and those who are only out to get a crowd and then to fleece a crowd. He tries to make the difference and he’s trying to tell the Corinthians, “Why can’t you see the difference? God knows, I just wish that you could know.”

Well, there are three things about the character of an ambassador for Christ and I want you to just be asking yourself the question, I’ve had to go through the pain of asking myself this and now you have to suffer with me. Are you an ambassador for Christ?

An ambassador for Christ has a selfless heart

Well, first of all, an ambassador, we want to look at his selfless heart. His selfless heart. Verses 14-15, “For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died.” Whereas the false teachers who were critics of Paul were spectacular in their methods, drawing attention to themselves, Paul wasn’t that way. Paul and his team were much more concerned that all that was done, we sang it awhile ago, is done out of the love of Christ which motivates them, and for the spiritual benefit of others.

He says in verse 14, “For the love of Christ controls us.” Now I want you to make sure you understand this phrase. The word “control,” *sunecho*, which literally means “to hold together,” but figuratively in the sense that we’re using here, it means to control, to constrain, or to compel. It comes from the Greek word *sun*, which means “together” and the word *echo*, which means “to have or to hold.” The picture here is that something is constraining and helping a person to where he’s so focused that nothing else, there’s no room for anything else. God’s love has so captured the individual.

We sang awhile ago, “Lord let Your love surround me, saturate me.” This is what the idea is. When you start living in the love of Christ, it focuses you. It pushes out all the fleshly garbage that is there and suddenly it gives you a direction in life. The actual love of

Christ is not a quality, it's who God is, was operating in Paul, constraining him, controlling him, holding him together, causing him to live the way he lived. No wonder he said in Ephesians, "That you be strengthened in the inner man so that you might comprehend what is the length and the breadth, and the depth, and the height of God's love," because it's going to be that love that is going to focus you. It's going to be that love that's going to cause all the flesh that is dropped to the side, it's going to be that love that is going to give you the motivation that you do everything for the benefit of others.

The love of Christ is a selfless love; it's not human. It's not anything like a human love. It's so divinely different. He gives an example here. He says Christ has so unselfishly loved the world that He died for all, for the love of Christ controls us. And then he said, "I'm going to build a point here:" "having concluded this, that one died for all." By saying, "having concluded this," Paul uses the word *krino*, which means "to make a judgment about something." In other words, by mentioning what Christ has done for us on the cross, he's bringing up the supreme example of what this love is. And he's made a determination here that this love is what's going to focus his life and this becomes the foundation of the point that he's making.

It can be translated "that as," "that as one died for all." Christ paid a debt He didn't owe when mankind owed a debt it could not pay. "One died for all." Now it's important in this phrase, "one died for all" to realize that Christ did die for the sins of the whole world, not just the elect. I understand what people are saying. No, the elect are the ones who've experienced it, but you've got to move away. He died for the sins of the whole world. "Show me that in Scripture." Thank you for the challenge. First John 2:2, "and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." We understand that He died for the sins of every man that was ever born. But does that mean that every man that was ever born is going to receive it? No! It does not.

The phrase "therefore all died" in verse 14, "that one died for all, therefore all died," has the definite article right before the word "all." Now you have to stay with me, don't let me lose you here. "Therefore, [the] all died," and by using the definite article, he's referring to a particular group. Everybody that He died for is not going to receive that. He wishes that they'd be saved, but He doesn't will it to happen. He knows that a lot of people will reject that. However, there's a particular group that has died with Him. "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all [the] died."

Anytime you see a definite article in Greek, it identifies something and it's trying to tell you something. When it's not there it qualifies, but when it's there it identifies. This group that has died with Him is referred to in verse 15. We find out who these people are. It says, "and He died for all, that they who live [there's the ones he's talking about] should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."

Now these that live are the believers that are the ones who now, because of having been crucified with Him, they've died with him. Perhaps you don't understand this: it's salvation. You died; that's why Paul says, "I've been crucified with Christ. I'm not the same person anymore. That old man that I used to be is dead, it's gone." And now what he says here is those who have been set free, those who live—and you can't live unless you've been to the cross and at the cross you die so that you might be raised to walk in the newness of life—the people that have been crucified with Him are now free from the selfish old life that they used to live. They're set free from its power; it doesn't have to control them anymore. The love of Christ now controls them. Living selfishly for oneself—and this is tough for a believer who sometimes lets his flesh rule his life—it's the mark of a nonbeliever.

A person that lives selfishly, only for himself, is an unbeliever. It's habitual in his life. Verse 15, "and He died for all, so that they who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf." Paul and his team lived for Christ and not for themselves, and this meant in order for them to do that they had to die with Christ, to the old person that they used to be. Christ in them had given them a brand new motivation in which to live. You see, a person that doesn't know Christ has none of this in his life.

"Well, I've seen selfless people out there that are pagans." Listen, if you could milk it down and they stood before the divine standard of God, you would see a selfish agenda hidden in there somewhere. Christ in us is what gives us the privilege of never again living for ourselves. You see, when you are saved you're not just set free from sin. You're set free from yourself. It's self that is causing us all the problems and He separates us from it. He breaks its power and puts a new motivation within us. It's the very heart of God.

All that they did now, Paul and his team, was for the benefit of others because they lived for Him and they lived through Him. First John 4:9 says, "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him." God's love in them, and His love in us, is a selfless love and that causes a divine motivation to do what we do only for the benefit of others. Now what a contrast, what a contrast to the false teachers who were the critics of Paul in Corinth. The very people wouldn't even defend the apostle Paul.

Look at the difference in the heart of what they did. Verse 15, "and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves." Now, use this as a subjunctive mood—I know this sometimes doesn't appeal to some people but I'm just going to quit saying that. I'm just going to go on—the subjunctive mood means "it's iffy." In other words, you're going to have Christians, like at Corinth, many of which have never chosen to yield to the One who is that love. And therefore they're not controlled and constrained

by His love. They're moved and controlled by their flesh. They have chosen to go back and submit to its power which is such a mistake. It's such an error.

This means that it goes on today, doesn't it? There are a lot of believers in the church of Jesus Christ to this day that still live for themselves. Get all you can, can all you get, sit on the can and poison the rest. It's that selfishness; it's that self-motivation that salvation has set us free from. So if you're living selfishly, you've had to make a choice to do that because the divine nature you've partaken of that Peter talks about, the very nature of Christ, lives within you and His nature is to live not for yourself but for the benefit of others. And a person who lives for themselves is a person who is negating the power of God and the constraining, controlling, compelling power of His love to motivate them in life.

Well, He who died, He died for all "so that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf." So if you're a true ambassador for Christ today there is a selfless motivation in your heart. You don't live for yourself; you live for the spiritual benefit of other people. And that's not because of who you are, that's because of whose you are and who He is in you. That's Him, that's who He is. When Christ is ruling your life, that's how you know because you never think of yourself, you're thinking of other people, you're thinking of Him, and you're allowing Him to be who He is in your life.

And when you're around people like that it just overwhelms you, doesn't it? I've been in Romania so many times. I got to thinking about when we went to a church and the Communists, when they would come to the services under Communism, they let you know who they were. I've shared a little of this with you before, where this particular church, a guy had dark glasses on in a night service with the lights that weren't bright to start with. You know, under Communism they didn't have any light, street lights or anything. And here he is wearing sunglasses in the service. And sat there and just stared at me. And I preached to him that whole night. I didn't even look at anybody else. I got his eye and stayed right with him and preached about the love of the Lord Jesus Christ and what the gospel is all about.

Well, that was the night that we left and the secret police were right behind us, on our bumper, no lights, four of them in the car. Quite a story but I won't go into that right now. What happened after the service, they had a member of their service that knew that an American was coming to preach the gospel and they just said, "What do Americans like to eat?" There was no food in Romania. When the government and propaganda people would come through, they'd put boxes in the store room windows to make it look like there was food but they were all empty. They didn't have anything. People would stand in line four blocks long just to get a loaf of bread.

And this man had gone a hundred miles—you have to understand, no money, they're poor as they can be; they took up a little offering to get him some gasoline money—he'd had to go 100 miles to buy food for us. Now there's one thing I hate to eat. I'm sorry, I just don't like it, and it's liver. I don't like liver. But this little fellow had gone to find something that wasn't rotten, something that was edible for us. They didn't have any refrigeration or power and electricity and so stuff would just spoil.

And he brought potatoes back because he said Americans liked French fries. But he had gotten chicken livers. It was the only thing he could find and they came back and fried up those chicken livers and didn't have anything else. And we had French fries and chicken livers and mineral water.

But that's all we had, but I tell you what, because of the sincerity, they wouldn't eat. They set us down first. We said, "No, no, you've gone to the trouble. You sit down and eat. We'll eat last." "No, you eat first, you're special to us." And there wasn't enough food for everybody and we saw that and they were offended if we didn't eat. And that was the best chicken livers I ever put in my mouth. You know why? Because of the sincerity and the purity of their heart. That's what an ambassador for Christ is. The love of Christ compels him. The love of Christ constrains him. There are a lot of people who still live constrained by their flesh and that's why there is all the garbage that takes place in people's lives.

An ambassador for Christ has a special discernment

Well, the second thing he mentions here about the character of an ambassador for Christ is his special discernment. He doesn't see people like everybody else sees them. He sees them differently; he sees them through the eyes of the Lord. He doesn't observe the world the way the world observes the world.

Verse 16, "Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh." Now that "therefore," keys right off of the verse. The love of Christ has so changed us, we don't see people the same anymore. He says, "we recognize according to the flesh." The word "recognize" there is the word *oidamen*. Eido we've looked at several times in this study. It means "to perceive something clearly." It means "to intuitively know something." Paul saw men as either sinners separated from God, or he saw them as believers who have died with Christ and now who live constrained by His love.

He didn't see the nice cars that they had in the garage like the world sees. He didn't see how big their house was and what subdivision they were from. He didn't see how successful they were in the world. He didn't look at their talent and their ability. He

could care less how well they could do something on their own. He didn't see them the way the world saw them, he saw them through the eyes of Christ because the love of Christ constrained and compelled him.

People were either lost and bound for an eternal hell or they were saved and there was no in-between. There was no gray matter. God helps us to see people for the way He sees them. Not for whether they are black or white or anything in an ethnic way. He looks at people's hearts and a person who is an ambassador for Christ, compelled and constrained by the love of God, sees through that old outer, spectacular stuff that the world is so enamored by and sees the hearts of people.

Paul lived to persuade man, and I want to tell you, he says in Romans 1:14, "I am under obligation." "I wake up every morning as if I'm up under a debt both to Greeks and barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish." He saw everybody, no matter where he went, kings or paupers, it didn't matter. He saw everybody as a candidate to hear the message that could transform their lives. God had so changed him and God was so changing him that he saw through God's eyes.

"Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer." Go back to that little phrase, "from now on." Now be really careful of that word "from now on," hence to mislead us and make us think that Paul had just come to that conclusion. The word is the word *apo*, and it does mean that there's been a separation from a former way of thinking, but it in no way specifies the time that this took place. Paul didn't just wake up one morning and decide, "I'm tired of looking at people the way the world looks at them. I'm going to change today. I'm going to start looking at them the way God looks at them." Heavens, no. Once he died with Christ, which is what salvation is, at that moment he got the mind of Christ, and at that moment his heart was changed. At that moment the love of God came to live within him and at that moment he was separated from ever again looking at men the way he used to look at men.

"Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer." Now, in the phrase "even though we have known Christ according to the flesh," Paul points back to the time he didn't know Christ in a spiritual way and he realizes he once lived the way he sees now is the wrong way to live. He refers back to a day when he was thinking of Christ the way men thought of Christ. He thought of Christ as a mere man. He estimated Christ from His outward appearance until that day in Acts 9 when he met Him on the Damascus Road and he was blinded for three days, and son, he never saw Him again that way.

That's why he said earlier, "I know the fear of the Lord. I've been in His presence. I've been in the third heaven for goodness sake. I know who He is. I don't see Him the way I used to see Him. I don't see Him as a human being. I see Him as a God-man and I see Him as the Lord of my life." "Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh." Paul had been there and done that. I like that last phrase, "yet now we know Him thus no longer."

When a person is an ambassador for Christ he lives to persuade men of the life-changing power of Christ who died for him and them, so therefore everyone is a candidate. Everyone is a candidate and he does not regard anyone the way the world regards them. They're either lost, bound for an eternal hell, or they're saved, living in the love of Christ, constrained by His love, or they're saved, having made the foolish mistake of letting their own flesh compel them rather than the heart, love, and motivation of Christ within them. He saw them as either lost or saved.

So his selfless heart, he didn't live for himself. He couldn't. The love of Christ constrained him. He lived for the benefit of others. His special discernment was that God now let him see the world from God's eyes and God's point of view, not from men's point of view. You know, we could bring a movie star here, we could bring a sports figure, we could bring somebody that the world thinks is up here somewhere, and I guarantee you there will be people at this church, in every church, not just ours, that would be so enamored. And they could know this much about the gospel and stand up and act as if they were preaching and everybody would applaud and just love the spectacular. They love the heroes, they see from fleshly eyes, but there would be many others and hopefully more than that who would see through it and they would understand how God is looking at this individual.

The book of James, he says, "What are you doing? Man, you're putting the poor people in the cheap seats and you're putting the rich people in the good seats. Is that the love of God?" You see, that's what happens when people start looking at the flesh. Have you ever made this statement, "Boy, if so-and-so ever gets saved, God could sure use him"? Have you ever made that statement? God could care less about that individual's ability, that individual's talent, God could care less. God is only impressed when He looks at me and you and sees Himself. And when you see a person that the world, they clap and applaud because of how spectacular they are, ask yourself how you see them. Can you see through the veneer? Can you see through the fake and can you see the heart like God gives that discernment to an ambassador for Christ? How would he know who to share with if God didn't give him the discernment to know and to see through? He doesn't look at people the way the world looks at them.

An ambassador for Christ has a spiritual change

But then thirdly, and finally, the spiritual change that has occurred in an ambassador for Christ. He says in verse 17, and you've heard how many times this verse? I wonder if you've ever heard it in the context and the flow of 2 Corinthians? I hadn't until I studied

it. "Therefore," what's the "therefore" there for? I know, you're going to get that part. Why is it there? Because of the selfless heart that God has given him, constrained by the love of God who cannot do anything for his own benefit, always looking out for the benefit of others, and then you see that discernment. He starts seeing people and he's overwhelmed at the lostness of people, but he's also overjoyed at the believers he's around. And I tell you, "therefore," making a point here.

"Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." In this world of 21st century, we have, I believe, the most watered down idea of what Christianity is in the history of Christianity. We have the most flimsy, egotistical view of salvation that I know I've ever seen in my life. And Paul is going to help them define "what is a believer." Therefore, what is a believer? Who is an ambassador for Christ?

"Therefore," and then he opens it up to anyone and everyone who claims to be a believer. "Therefore if any man"—it doesn't matter if you're a preacher, teacher, it doesn't matter who you are—"if any man is in Christ." He says if anyone is in Christ. Now why would he say "in Christ?" You know, it's amazing how many people are religious and still haven't seen this. They don't understand that when they're born into this world, they're born into Adam. You're either in Adam or you're in Christ. And when you become a believer, then you are taken out of Adam. Anybody who is in Adam fears death because after death comes the judgment and judgment means eternal separation from God.

But when a person is taken out of Adam, it's salvation. He's put into Christ. That's what salvation is. When you receive the Lord Jesus Christ you realize you're a sinner born in Adam—you live for yourself; you're controlled by yourself; you're compelled by yourself; everything the flesh wants, you pursue—but when you become a believer, God has taken you out of Adam and He has placed you into Christ. And when He places you into Christ, not only are you in Christ, saved forever, but Christ is in you.

Paul says in Romans 6:3, "Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" Let me explain that to you. If I had a big bowl up here today and it was a clear bowl and I put red dye in it and I took a white cloth, and I put that white cloth in that red dye and I submerged it, it's baptized into it. We're now in Christ. But something else has happened that you've got to understand. The moment I'm placed into Christ, the moment the white cloth is put into the red dye, something happens to the cloth. Not only is the cloth in the dye, but the dye is in the cloth. He's a brand-new creature. That's what he's talking about here.

If anyone is in Christ, if anyone who has died and that means that at salvation you die, the old man is gone. You are a brand new creature. "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature." The word "new" is *kainos*, qualitatively, totally brand new. Your wife has never seen anything like you before because the old you is gone. You're a brand new creature. Your Mama, your Daddy, your husband, your children, they've never seen anything like this. What a radical change has come in your life because you're not the same anymore. Not only are you now in Christ, having been taken out of Adam and all that condemnation is gone now, but now you're in Christ and Christ is in you. Totally brand new.

"Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature." The word "creature" means "creation." God has made you what you are as a believer. God has come to live in you. And Paul continues to explain, "the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." The "old things" is the word *archaios* we get our word "archaic" from it, "that which was from the beginning."

Now I know there are many things that you could add to this list and I understand that, but the narrow context that he's talking about has been those false teachers and the difference between a believer and a true ambassador for Christ and their heart. What is the one thing that marks the old things that were from the beginning? Listen, what we used to be in Adam—listen carefully—what we used to be in Adam was devoid of any possibility of ever living for the benefit of somebody else and that old way of living we have been now set free from. It's gone when we become a believer; new things have come.

It's lost its power to control us. It's lost its power. I tell you, if you're miserable here today for any reason, I'll tell you why. Because if you're burdened, that's something different. But if you're miserable, your flesh has compelled you. Your flesh has controlled you and God set you free from its power. He set you free.

False teachers who live day by day selfishly peddling the Word of God for their own personal gain, more interested in their spectacular ways of getting a crowd and fleecing a crowd than in the people who came to hear them and the hearts and the life change that could come into their lives, they show this selfish love. And it's amazing how the Christians in Corinth couldn't see the difference. They still hadn't got it. If we're going to be an ambassador for Christ, we've got to get a handle on this. The old life of living for one's self has perished in the believer, gone forever.

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. A brand new way of living has come when you say yes to Christ which is the way you received Him, and when you say yes to Him, His Spirit, which is the Spirit of love, produces His character in you and all of a sudden the world looks differently, the sky is bluer, the grass is greener, people are sweeter, it's incredible how you see people. You're seeing them the way God sees them, not the way you want to see

them. And we've been set free, free.

I'll tell you, down here on this earth I'm so grateful I've been set free from the penalty of sin. But even more than that, because I haven't yet understood all of that, even more than that, I'm so thankful I've been set free from Wayne. It was a long time before Simon Peter understood that he was set free from Simon Peter. He could give up his nets in a minute, but he couldn't give up Simon Peter. And that's what salvation does for you and me. It allows us to live compelled by His love.

We live by faith, yielded to God's Word, and the world looks at us as if we're crazy and people who take it for granted their Christianity and still live after the flesh look at us as if we're crazy and God says, "Son, keep on going. I know what you're doing and I know why you're doing it. I set you free from what you used to be and the world hasn't got a clue what's going on in your life. But you keep on living, son, you live for Me and if you live for Me, you'll live for the sake of other people, selfish people. Selfish people have no clue about what salvation is all about."

God says, "I've set you free from that lifestyle. You're free now to live for Me and for the sake of other people." And anytime that you see that old self raise its head, you know it's there and it will be critical, it will be judgmental, it will be so arrogant as if it actually thinks it knows what God is doing. But thank God for the grace of God.

You know, most of us have lived long enough to understand and appreciate this. But I'll tell you the younger generation scares me. They can't see beyond their own arrogance, and I guess that's the way God designed it, you reckon? I've thought about it. When I finally could travel, I'm older and don't feel like it. If I could have done that back when I was 30 and had the ability, I would be a mess by now. I guess God just designed life that way; isn't that funny? Get a motor home and can't even feel like putting the gas in it. Use it as an extra closet or something.

The character of an ambassador for Christ: he has a selfless heart. This may take years for this to generate but I believe when he begins to see God and he begins to let Jesus be Jesus, the love of Christ constrains him. He has special discernment. He just doesn't see people the same way. He's not enamored because somebody is rich and he's not put off by the fact that somebody is poor. He sees people and he sees hearts because he's been spiritually transformed. He's been radically changed. He's a brand new creature.

So my question to you is: Are you an ambassador for Christ? My Uncle Jake, when I was growing up, I loved him. We got a phone call one day when I was about 10 or 12 years old, somewhere in that area and said Uncle Jake had gotten saved. And the first thought I had was, "Right. There's no way he's going to get saved. There's no way." He was rough as a cob. And we never could go on vacation, never had a car that would go 25 miles outside the city without breaking down. And we finally got an old car that made it and we went on a vacation. A real vacation and went to to see Uncle Jake.

And at that age I was real interested. Is he really different? Well, he walked out the door, I've never forgotten this, I didn't know this verse at that time, he walked out the door, hair combed, clean shaven, I think he wore a tee shirt his whole life. I don't think he ever even owned a real shirt, but it was clean. And I remember as a young boy sitting there for three days on that weekend, listening to him talk, and never hearing a cuss word come out of his mouth. And I didn't understand the radical change that verse 17 is trying to say to us.

"Brother Wayne, I know I used to drink and now I'm saved and I'm still struggling." I know that is going to be a problem. But I want to tell you something. There's a radical change that comes. We can't be an ambassador for Christ until first of all we're a child of God. My biggest fear is that we're living in a generation that so many people have joined the church and missed Jesus by miles. Billy Graham said, "If I could just believe that 20% of all the crusades that I've ever done were saved. If just 20%, I could go to bed at night and sleep. They came forward, they made the signal, but their life never showed up.

You see, where there's a root, there's going to be fruit. Yes, the Corinthians took a while. Where are you today? Are you an ambassador for Christ? What's your heart like today? Do you see people like God sees them, or the way you'd rather see them, the world sees them? Is there a radical transformation in your life?

2 Corinthians 5:18-21

An Undeserved Mission of an Ambassador for Christ

We're going to finish up chapter 5, 2 Corinthians 5,. And we've been talking about "Ambassadors for Christ," and this is part 3 of that little series that we have as we move through 2 Corinthians. Tonight we're going to talk about the "Undeserved Mission of an Ambassador for Christ" as we look at verses 18-21.

Now, let me get you into this tonight. In Roman times there were two kinds of provinces. There were the senatorial provinces and there were what was called imperial provinces. Now, you have to know the difference. The senatorial provinces were made up of people who were peaceful, and they were not at war with Rome. But the imperial provinces were not that way at all. They were dangerous because at any minute they could be triggered and they could fight against Rome. So it was necessary for Rome to send ambassadors to these hostile imperial provinces on a mission that would help bring peace and would cause rebellion not to break out.

Now Paul, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit of God, took a word that they would understand in a minute and used it in our text that we're going to be looking at today. He purposely chose this meaningful word "ambassadors," which in the Greek text is in a verb form. It's not a noun, it's a verb. It's in the present indicative tense. It means he was constantly, always being an ambassador on a mission for Christ. And that's the idea he's trying to convey.

The word for that word "ambassador" is *presbeuo*. It's the word that implies an older person or an elder person in a group who was always appointed as a spokesman to represent the king, a ruler, or a community. In Jewish cities this person was one who could speak the exact words of his sender. In other words he had a message to bring, but he could put no input of his own into it. Similarly today an ambassador represents governments, we know that. You've been in other countries, gone by the US Embassy. We've seen the ambassador that lives there. He represents countries and governments or prime minister that has appointed him.

Now, as soon as an ambassador begins to speak out of line from the one he represents, immediately he's relieved of his post. Now, Paul was an ambassador for Christ. Paul has felt the cruelty and the hostility of this world, this imperial province if you please, that we all live in. He had felt the hostility of them when he had simply told them the words of the One who had sent him. He uses the term "ambassador" two times in his epistles, and the other time that he uses it is in Ephesians 6:20. Look what he says, "for which I am an ambassador in chains." Now Paul wrote Ephesians from prison, as he did Philippians, as he did Colossians, as he did Philemon. He understood that to be an ambassador in an imperial province was to face hostility, and he had felt the pain that had come from that. Now believers, you and I, are sent into this world into a hostile imperial province, and we're sent to bring a message of peace to all that will listen to us. That's what our role is on this earth. It's not to get older and retire and get a motor home and see the world.

We're here for a purpose, and that purpose is very focused and very clear in Scripture. Paul begins in chapter 5:11 with what an ambassador for Christ is. We've already seen this, we're just reviewing. We saw that the goal of an ambassador is to persuade men. He understands that he has to know the Word of God so that he can reason with the minds of this world, but he knows that he can't persuade anybody. Only the Holy Spirit of God makes that appeal through him as we'll see in the message today. He's the One who changes hearts.

But we also saw the grief of an ambassador. Here's a man who lives his life as an ambassador, representing the One who sent him with a message and he wants people to hear that message that will set them free, but the grief of an ambassador was, especially Paul, he couldn't even count on the people that had been persuaded by the very message that he was sent to tell them. He couldn't count on them to stand up for him when he was unduly criticized and accused, falsely accused. They wouldn't stand for him, but that's just part of it. We understand that.

Then Paul has also shown us the character of an ambassador for Christ, one who has to go through what he has to go through, in the fact that he has a selfless heart. We saw in our study how the ambassadors for Christ are constrained, they're controlled by the love of Christ which is a selfless love. We have seen that God gives His ambassadors a special discernment. They don't see people like the world sees them. An ambassador for Christ sees people the way God sees them: they're either lost or they're saved. And even if they're saved, maybe they're walking after the flesh. They see more of the spiritual condition of man rather than the color of their skin or the wealth or poverty that they experience. They don't see through the eyes of men, they see through the eyes of God.

An ambassador for Christ has had such a radical, spiritual change in their life that Paul even calls them and himself a "brand new creature." He says in 5:17, "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

Well, today we're going to see the mission, that undeserved mission of an ambassador for Christ. We're going to look even deeper. We are, as ambassadors for Christ as we've already tried to say, we're sent into this world. If you think that you don't have a purpose being a believer, listen, you're missing the whole point. God works through His people. God is still on this earth. He lives in us and we're in an imperial province, one that is hostile to God. But we're bearers of His message of peace: peace with God first, then we can have peace with men.

Today we're going to discover that our mission has within it a ministry, a message, and a method, but all of it is undeserved. I want us to understand that what we do have is such a privilege. So many believers are ho-hum about what they say they believe. Oh my friend, if you can just see into Scripture, let God open your eyes, let Him open your heart to what God wants you and me to be about

in these days before He comes for His church. Let us rejoice together as we understand, even in a deeper way, what it means to be an ambassador for Christ.

The mission we are on involves a message that is undeserved

First of all, the mission that we're on involves a message that is undeserved. Look at 2 Corinthians 5:18. He says, "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ." Now, when Paul says, "all of these things are from God," he's referring to all that God has done to reconcile us to Himself. The context has been very specific and very clear.

The word "from," and I've used this word with you many times, is the little Greek word ek. Now that's important. My pen right now is in my pocket. I want to take it out of my pocket. This pen originated within my pocket. It's taken out of it, ek. It denotes the source, the origin, the author of something. That's what that little word means. Salvation is not in any way, shape or form from man. And this is theology that we need to put our feet down on, it will hold us up. Nothing of man has anything to do with salvation. It all comes from God. It is out of God, it originates with God, God is its Author. It was God who out of His great love for mankind that sent His Son into this hostile world to die for our sins.

Now all of these things are from God. And then he says, "who reconciled us to Himself through Christ." God reconciled us to Himself through Christ. I want us to think about that for a second. If you don't ever meditate or think about what God is saying, we should be the initiators of reconciliation because we are the offenders. Always the offender is the one to go to the one that he's offended. In apostolic times, even the Jews believed that man had to initiate this reconciliation with God through prayer and confession of sins. They understood that. But as we seen in the New Testament, which sums up all of the Old Testament, we see that it's God who is the One who has initiated reconciliation with Himself. And He did this through His Son.

It was His Son that came to us to die for us. The word "reconciled" implies our separated condition from God. It implies the hostility that mankind has towards God. Now you have to understand something about reconciliation. You don't need reconciliation unless there has been a separation, unless there has been an enmity that has built between you and someone else. There's no need to reconcile people that are at peace with one another.

Have you ever been at enmity with someone else because of what you've done? Have you ever done anything that has caused enmity or hostility? When I was in college, I just loved college but I hated class. But I was in this one class and I'd had this professor for four years. I loved this guy; he liked me. He was a hunter. I'd go squirrel hunting in the morning and I'd come running into class late. We'd take up 40 minutes of the class; the class loved me, because we could just kill a whole class hour talking.

Well, here I was sitting in the class and this gorgeous girl comes in. She was second runner up, Ms North Carolina. She was Ms Highpoint. She sat right next to me. Well, I could tell she was a freshman because she wrote down everything the teacher said. He didn't give his tests on notes; I knew that. I was drawing pictures, looking out the window, trying to keep myself entertained. He always told you what he was going to give on the test the week before. All you had to do was study that and you'd do fine.

But she didn't know that and she's writing down everything he's saying. Everything he's saying, and finally he said something too quickly and she looked over at me and she said, "What did he say?" I created a hostility between the two of us when I said back to her, "Kiss you! I don't even know you!" That caused a separation from the two of us. In fact, it took me a long time to make that one right.

You see, you don't reconcile with somebody that there has not been a break in fellowship, a break in relationship. And this is so important to understand what he's saying here. We've been separated from God. That's his whole point.

The word reconciliation is the word katallasso. Now that's the word meaning to radically change something from this to that. And in the context, when we're reconciled to God, we're changed from being his enemy because of our sin we have offended Him, we've sinned against Him, we've been changed from being His enemy, we've been "reconciled" to becoming His friend. That's what the word means. It's a beautiful word picture.

Paul uses the word "reconciliation" in Romans 5:10 to show how desperate we really were for this change. He says in Romans 5:10, "For while we were enemies"—you see, some people don't seem to understand that without Christ you're an enemy to God—"we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." And by the way, that little phrase right there is the Christ-life that God has offered to us.

Isn't it interesting how many people you hear on television and they make this statement and I shudder every time they say it. They think that man is basically good. If you want a picture of what man's like apart from Christ, just go back and read Ephesians 2:1-3. That will tell you what we're like. It says in verse 1, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and

were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." Now that's what mankind is apart from salvation, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ.

It was only through the supreme sacrifice of Christ that we could even entertain the thought of being reconciled with God. Before reconciliation had to take place, God did something. He made the move. Salvation, reconciliation, is from Him.

So Paul says in our text, "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us," we didn't do anything to get reconciled; he reconciled us, "to Himself through Christ." Christ came into this hostile world to reconcile people like you and me. The word "reconcile" is in the aorist active tense. You say, "Well, thanks. Now what does that mean?" Well, what it means is that God did this of His own choice and of His own free will. Nobody threatened Him; He didn't do it out of any other motivation. He did it out of the character of who He is because He loves the creatures, He loves mankind. He loves what He had created. God, out of His great love, sent His only Son into this hostile, hateful world to die for our sins. Why? So that we, enemies of God, might be reconciled to Him.

I just don't want to go too fast. I know you say, "You never go too fast," but I want to slow down even more. Let's make sure we get the picture because so many people do not see themselves as unrighteous. So many people do not see themselves as enemies of God. They don't have a clue that they're dead. This is why so many times I have said the seeker-sensitive mentality, and maybe they mean something else with it, is really non-biblical. Men are not seeking after God. What are you talking about? God is seeking after man.

And Isaiah said that. "No man seeks after God. No, not one." The picture of Scripture is not of a man seeking for God, the picture of Scripture is of God seeking after man. God did not abandon us when Adam plunged us into the depths of sin. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Instead of abandoning us, God took the initiative to restore the relationship. He gave us His only Son to die on the cross for the remission of our sins. He reconciled us to Himself by having Christ pay the debt He did not owe when we owed a debt we could not pay. And Christ, only in Christ is the enmity, the separation removed. And when you receive the Lord Jesus, and I love the testimony tonight, when you receive the Lord Jesus, then He comes to live in you.

And as Romans 5:1 says, "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." So we have a message. What a message. It doesn't matter if a person is rich, it doesn't matter if they're poor, it doesn't matter if they're black, it doesn't matter if they're green. It doesn't matter what color they are. God sees hearts and we are His representatives, we are His ambassadors if you have received and tasted of this. If you have Christ in your heart you now become a vessel that God wants to use to take this undeserved message to people who have no clue what we're talking about.

We were isolated without His fellowship, but He invited us to joyful communion with both the Father and the Son. Now that's a message that is undeserved. Vance Havner said, what's happened to us in the 20th century, we have lost the wonder of our salvation. I'll tell you what, every day you take a breath when you wake up, it ought to overwhelm you. Only by the grace of God did you even take that breath. And do we understand that salvation is not a mockery, salvation is not a game, salvation is not something, listen, salvation is reconciliation. We have been reconciled to God. There's no enmity between us. We have a message that is undeserved.

The mission we are on involves a ministry that is undeserved

But the second thing, why we're on this mission as ambassadors for Him, we have a ministry that is undeserved. Look at verse 18 again, "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." He gave us the ministry of reconciliation. The word "gave" there is the word *didomi*, which means to give out of one's good will and good intention. Again, this expresses the heart that God has had in salvation. Again, it is in the aorist active tense. It means again, that God not only initiated our reconciliation, but out of His own goodwill toward us, He wants to include us in His divine plan to take this message to all of the world.

Now contextually the word "us" would have to refer to Paul and to his team, and would help us to understand why he defends his apostleship, because that was a part of God's divine plan in the ministry of reconciliation, of getting the message to other people. But in a much broader sense, no way in the world you can limit it to that, because every one of us has been brought in. We're all ministers now. The moment you say yes to God you become a minister. And so God has that on His mind also. Paul is not just talking about himself and his team; we have to see it in a broader sense. Every one of us has been given this ministry. We're actually usable to God.

I don't know about you, maybe some of you have arrived. You kind of look to me like maybe you're already there, but I can't imagine how God uses me. I cannot imagine, you can put me in the car going home and I act like the worst pagan that ever lived with some of the people that are driving in front of me. Is that you? You can give me half a second and I'll realize my flesh and I'm thinking, "How in the world, God, do You use people like me?" And I'm sure you've said the very same thing before Him. That's the

undeserved part of this. God gave to people that He has made reconciliation with, gave to all of us the ministry of reconciliation.

Just think about it, He not only reconciles us to Himself and He has a divine plan of reaching to others, so He uses us in His divine plan. If you'll look down in verse 1 of chapter 6, you're going to see where we're headed. And all this just flows together. He says in verse 1, "And working together with Him," and that's what this whole thing is all about, "we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain." Now that's the picture right there.

The moment you get saved, you're in a yoke with the Lord Jesus Christ. I've used this before, but this is a miniature picture of a yoke. The neck of one ox goes over here and they bring these things up and they click it. The neck of another head goes through there, and that's the way they work together. It's like they're in a team. It's a 200% relationship. It's 100% the power of this one ox, because they always put the younger ox over here, the one that hasn't got enough sense to get in out of the rain. They put the one that's been around awhile over here. He knows what he's doing. So they have this younger one who is in a yoke with this one right here. And when they walk together, now you can imagine if this one over here chooses to go his own way, and chooses not to obey, it's going to cause some real scars in his neck.

When I was in the Philippines in Manila they showed me some of those scars on those oxen's necks. And they said those were the rebellious ones. And I thought about Scripture. That's exactly the way we are. So we're working together with Him. So what does that mean? That automatically implies that we need to be surrendered to Him at all times. The very moment I say yes to God, I've said no to my sin; at that very moment that I am yoked together into His purpose, and then He then can begin to use me to reconcile others to Himself. He gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

The word "ministry" is diakonia. We can also translate it "servant," or "service." If you want to know what service you can render to God, say yes to Him. Be a mouthpiece, be a vessel through which God can make His appeal to other people. That's what we're here for. Can you imagine the people that you're around in one week's period of time that maybe you'll never even see again, how many people has God sensitized you, in the midst of your busy schedule, to see people the way He sees them. And when you see them that way and you're obedient to Him, He prompts your heart and then He's the One making His appeal through you as you're reasoning with them in the Word of God.

The best way in the world a believer can serve the Lord is by saying yes to Him and share the message, live the message. We are ambassadors for Christ in this hostile world, in this imperial province that's rebellious and hostile towards God. We're aliens, we're strangers, we don't even belong here but we're just passing through. And while we're passing through we have a treasure in these earthen vessels. And what Paul is saying is, "Oh, listen, the joy of it all is He hasn't just reconciled us out of that hostility, He has put a message within us so that we can now reach others who are hostile toward Him."

And the message that we share, verse 19, we keep coming back to it. He says, "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." Oh my, the theology that is in these passages. I hope you're not missing it. God was in Christ. How many people have told me, "Jesus, He's okay, but He's not God. He never claimed to be God." Oh, my goodness, wake up and smell the roses. Jesus repeatedly said, "I'm in the Father and the Father is in Me." John 10:38, "but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father." John 14:10, "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works." John 14:11, "Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me; otherwise believe on account of the works themselves." John 14:20, "In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you."

That's the next step. And then he says in John 17:21 in his priestly prayer, "that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send me." God was in Christ. Second Corinthians 5:19 says, "namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." Now that phrase right there not only sums up all that Christ did for us but especially points to the cross and His atoning death for us.

Now the cross was God's way of reconciling the world to Himself. The debt of sin had to be paid. Paul says God was "not counting their trespasses against them." That's amazing to me; He didn't count our trespasses against us but instead sent His Son to pay the penalty of man's sin; "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."

Now because Christ has done what He's done, we are now entrusted with this ministry, this message of reconciliation. That overwhelms me. God inaugurated reconciliation in the coming of His Son, but not only that, God continues reconciliation by entrusting people like you and me with the message, "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."

Now let's make sure we understand that little phrase "the word of reconciliation." The word for "word" is the word *logos*. Any time you

see this word and it's used particularly in 1 Corinthians 12 and to differentiate he changes the word in one verse from *laleo* to *logos*, and what he's talking about is people that babble around and make no sense. The word *logos* always means the "intelligent, communicable, thought-through Word of God." It never is anything other than that. It's understandable, it communicates, it's intelligent. Jesus was the living Word, in the beginning the Word was with God, the divine intelligence was with God.

And then verse 14, and the word, that divine intelligence, that understandable, the intelligence, was made flesh in Jesus and Jesus of course is the personification of that. The definite article is used before the word "word." You say what does that have to do with anything? When a definite article is used, it means a specific word of reconciliation. What it is referring to here is the Word of God. I want you to know something, the Word of God from cover to cover is the gospel message. You say, "Everybody knows that." Are you sure? You see, what he's talking about here is not the "Roman Road" that people used to lead people to Christ. They think that's the gospel message and so somehow they confuse the gospel message with a passage here and a passage there, here a verse, there a verse, everywhere a verse, verse.

And somebody came up with a tract and said this is the gospel message. No, sir. This is the gospel message: God has given us the Word of reconciliation. I love the missions groups called the New Tribe Mission. I got to know them real well when I was pastor of a church in Mississippi, and they were about ten miles away. They had their jungle camp nearby, and when I was there they invited me to come over. And I want to tell you something, they didn't invite many preachers. They said you're kind of rare to be able to come into a jungle camp.

In a jungle camp they go to unreached tribes. They drop them off the edge of the world and they go to people who have never heard the gospel before. And they have to make their chairs, they have to make their tables, they have to learn how to make their own houses. They had to learn how to make their own stove out of a barrel they cut in half and they had to cook on it. And I got to go for one of their meals and I want to tell you what, put it on your forehead, your tongue would slap your brains out. That was the best stuff I've ever eaten. Biscuits that were made in a barrel; it was awesome.

And you know what I love about the New Tribes Missionaries? They go to people that have never heard anything, they don't take a bunch of tracts and cram it down their throats. They take the Word of God and they start in the book of Genesis and they go to the book of Revelation. They show how man was created by God in the book of Genesis. They show the fall in Genesis 3, they show what happened when the fall occurred and then they show the promise that is veiled in Genesis 3 that "you shall bruise his heel but he'll bruise your head," talking about the Lord Jesus that would come one day. They take them through the covenant, they show where Abraham was pulled out of the land of Chaldea and how that Abram was given the name Abraham, which was God's name, and God covenanted with him; and Abraham had Isaac and Isaac had Esau and Jacob. Jacob, the younger son, became Israel and Israel had twelve sons and out of the tribes of Israel the tribe of Judah, the line of David, the Lord Jesus got His humanity on this earth and they explain to them why this had to take place. And Isaiah 53 that He was bruised for our sins and He died for our sins. And then they walk them through the gospel and then they turn right around and say, "Do you have Jesus Christ living in your heart?"

What did they just do? They didn't take the Roman Road. Man, they took the Bible road from Genesis to Revelation. That is the Word of reconciliation; this whole Bible is the plan of salvation. This whole Bible is the gospel; the whole Bible is the Word of reconciliation. And our mission that God has given to us as ambassadors is to know this Book so we can reason with the minds of people, so that we can help them understand from God's Word, knowing that it will be God that will persuade the hearts of men.

I want to tell you something: Not only is my reconciliation and my salvation undeserved, you just don't know enough about me to appreciate that. The gospel message from the Word of God, as ambassadors in this hostile imperial province that God has placed us in, it is Christ living in us that accomplishes this task of reconciliation. That's so undeserved: knowing that "I can't, God never said I could; but He can and He always said He would."

Verse 20, "Therefore," now any time you see a "therefore" you always look to see what it's there for, "we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating [making an appeal] through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." The words "as though God," be careful, that's an English translation. A much better translation is "as in fact God is making an appeal." You see, it takes it off that iffy state and it's very absolute. It's a very strong phrase.

Paul knew his place in that he was only a vessel. He knew that. He understood that. But it was God making His appeal through him. Paul made the plea, saying "We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." But it was God that was truly making the appeal through the apostle Paul.

The word "appeal" is the word *parakaleo*. Now listen, it literally, if you took it apart etymologically and looked at it, it would mean "come alongside." But it can be, and you have to be very careful, it can be translated "to call for," somebody making an invitation, somebody making a call for someone. So what is God's appeal to all mankind? That appeal is to be reconciled to God. So God lives within us. We beg men, "listen to the message, listen to the message." But God in the message is appealing to their hearts. He's coming alongside the lost and those who are in enmity with God, He's coming alongside them but He's making the appeal. We're

reasoning with their minds through the Word, but God, behind all of that, is making His appeal.

“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.” This is God’s plea to all mankind without any exception. God wants a relationship with us. That’s so awesome to me. He has His ambassadors, and He has them in place all over the world. Remember back in chapter 1 we realized God put you where you can be best used? Remember that message? How many people said, “Why did He put me out here with no humidity and flat-roofed houses?” But God puts us where we can best be used for Him. We’re ambassadors; He knows where to place us as we share His message and His Word, He makes His appeal to those around us to be reconciled.

I just wish I knew the world that you live in. I can’t reach a tenth of the people that you can reach. I’m not in their circles. I remember going to a deer camp one time and I just went to be an ambassador, just to see what God would use me for. They found out I was a preacher and every time I walked toward the men that were gathered, “Oh, here comes the preacher.” And everybody would just get quiet. I can’t touch a lot of people, but you can touch a lot of people. You’re His ambassador.

You say, “Wayne, I don’t even like the place that I work.” Well, I wonder why God has created that uncomfortable situation that you’re in. God wants to use you in that. You’re in a hostile place, but you’re His ambassador. To reason with the minds of men so that God might persuade and change their hearts. Every time the Word of God, the word of reconciliation is preached, taught, shared, whatever, God is appealing to men through His Word, His love. The Word of God is the message that all mankind is desperate for in our day and in every day to hear.

Verse 21 it tells people that “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” I think this is one of the epistle’s most outstanding verses that summarizes all of God’s good news to sinners. It really helps us now understand the meaning of reconciliation even though we kind of have it; it seems to be more fully explained in this one verse.

The apostle explains that God took His sinless Son and made Him the sin-bearer in our place. Christ redeemed us by taking upon Himself the curse that rested on us. Galatians 3:13 says, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree;’” Christ wore our sinful robe of humanity to the cross so that we, as imperfect as we are, might wear His robe of righteousness. “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

And to think, to think, He’s made us as His ambassadors to carry a message to the lost and to the dying world. We’re on mission for Him. If you’ve ever wondered about a purpose in your life, you’re on mission for Him. We have a message that is undeserved, we have a ministry that is undeserved and why in the world would He choose us, but He did. And we have a method that is totally undeserved.

The mission we are on involves a method that is undeserved

We have a method that is totally undeserved. All we have to do is be obedient and open our mouths and share what God has told us to share. He’s the One who brings about the persuasion and the reconciliation. So everything that we do somehow lands right there. It doesn’t matter what it is. Even though we’re equipping church and we equip believers, why do we equip believers? Because an equipped believer becomes a true ambassador for Christ. All of it works together in God’s economy.

Last week when the choir did what they did, I tell you, I was overwhelmed. I cried through about half of it. It was just incredible. But you know what I really enjoyed even more than what the choir did? I was so excited and so filled up. I walked down the steps and was standing right there. Two young men came. One of them came to me, stopped me right out here, and he said, “I’ve seen you on television and I’ve been here one time before, this is our second time. Can you help me with something?” I said, “Well, if I can.” He said, “How can I have Jesus in my heart?” “That’s something I can help you with.” And he had a friend with him, I realized then they were together and he said, “This is my friend,” and he gave me his name, and said, “He wants to know how he can have Jesus in his heart.” Boy, we were right over there, they prayed to receive Christ last week and I thought to myself, “When the Word is sung, when the Word is taught, when the Word is shared, when the Word is proclaimed, it’s the Word of reconciliation.”

And in the midst of all of it even though we’re enjoying it or not enjoying it, in the midst of it, God, through the human personalities and frailty of man, through all of that, He’s making His appeal to the hearts of people that He knows is there that needs to hear what’s being said. And I’ll tell you what, that excites me beyond anything else. What has God said to you about the assignment He’s given to you in the world in which He’s placed you? What has He said to you?

You are an ambassador for Christ and we’ve been sent into an imperial province, a hostile world with the message of God’s peace. And that’s what Christianity is all about. And one of these days, hopefully it might be in the midst of teaching, singing, sharing, proclaiming, right in the middle of it, you take about a final breath and as he says earlier in chapter 4, we go right into the presence of the Lord Jesus. Wouldn’t that be awesome? And we live that way down here. That’s what it’s all about.

