

Text: II Corinthians 5:16-21

Title: “The Message of Reconciliation”

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles to II Corinthians 5:16. As you're turning I want to let you know that on Sunday, October 7, we'll be having a combined worship service. It will be an exciting time as we share the Lord's Supper together. We'll have parent/child dedication for about 15 families. And I'll have a challenge for us that day as we begin our intensive preparations leading up to the start of our new West Building. Now let's look again at a passage we've turned to repeatedly over the past few weeks to get us focused on "Reaching Your Circle." Read text.

God has placed you in a circle of relationships. They include your family, your friends, your neighbors, your classmates and coworkers. But there are more people in your circle than you may realize. Your circle also includes the people you encounter each day at the cleaners, at the coffee shop, at the doctor's office or at the gym. And every time your traffic pattern changes it brings different people into your circle.

ILLUSTRATION – A couple of weeks ago we had the memorial service for Dr. Roy Fish, the great evangelist and professor at SWBTS. In the days before he died Roy was in the ICU at a local hospital for a few days, suffering from severe pneumonia. He had a heavy oxygen mask to help him breathe, but he still made it a point to talk to the nurses and the attendants about the Lord. In one of his last days in the hospital Roy reported to his family that he had gotten personally acquainted with all of his nurses and attendants, and discussed their spiritual condition. And as far as he knew all but two of them were believers.

You see, Roy Fish's circle changed when he went into the hospital. And he went to work quickly to engage the people that God had placed in his circle.

This is what the Bible calls the "ministry of reconciliation." It all started in God's heart when He reconciled us to Himself by sending His Son to be our Savior. Then God gave to us that same ministry of reconciliation when we were saved. Therefore we are Christ's ambassadors. Being ambassadors means that we have a message to relay to those before whom we represent God. Paul calls this the "message of reconciliation." Today I want to talk about that message. What is it that we, as ambassadors, are to say in behalf of our King Jesus who has sent us?

Ultimately ambassadors have to say something. We are to live a certain way that communicates the heart and the way of God. But people are not saved by just *seeing* something. It involves our *saying* something. And this is where it breaks down for many of us. God has placed in a circle of people. And He is working through us in that circle to draw people to Himself through Christ. And most of us get it that we should act a certain way (hopefully you understand that!). But the whole process breaks down at the point where we need to say something.

2 Corinthians 5:20 - We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

God's appeal is made through our appeal. When it says, "We implore you..." it doesn't mean that we force people to believe. Obviously we can't do that. People have to decide for themselves. But we are responsible for giving them the important information (the Gospel) in the power of the Holy Spirit and with a heart of genuine love. We leave the rest to God.

An appeal has to be communicated with words; otherwise people won't know what to do. That's what I want to help you understand today. As a pastor I have seen through the years that this is where we freeze up ... when it comes time to speak up.

We need to *live* it out then (when God opens the door) we need to *lay* it out (for people to know how to be saved).

And when we lay it out, it's so important that we communicate exactly what the King wants people to know ... the Gospel. It's important that we understand and can clearly explain the Gospel. And there are counterfeits to the Gospel just like there are to anything else that is valuable.

ILLUSTRATION –A few years ago Nan and I were with some friends in New York City. One day the ladies wanted to go down to Chinatown to do some shopping for purses, and I went along. Now if you've been the NYC you know that there are parts of the city where you can go to get merchandise that looks like something really expensive, but upon closer examination it isn't the real thing. It may look like a Prada pair of shoes, but they're really just a knock off. It may look like a Gucci purse, but it's not really. And this is part of the tourist experience in NYC. So the ladies went down to Chinatown and we were stopped on a street corner waiting for the light to change and a lady walked up and quietly said "Gucci." Our friend whispered back, "Prada." The woman motioned with her eyes, "Follow me." We crossed the street and then went into what looked like an abandoned subway entrance, down a few steps and through a small door into a room. I thought we were going to get mugged ... or arrested! As we entered the room, there were hundreds and hundreds of purses, shoes, and sunglasses. And they looked like very expensive items from Nieman's or Saks Fifth Avenue, but they were just knock-offs or counterfeits ... cheap imitations of the real thing. I'm assured that we didn't do anything illegal that day, but it was all part of the tourist experience of NYC.

There are people who unknowingly misrepresent the Gospel, and there are people who knowingly pervert the Gospel with counterfeits. Either way there are severe consequences for those who neglect or pervert the Gospel. This was the problem in one of the churches Paul wrote to in the NT.

Galatians 1:7b - Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

Galatians 1:8 - But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!

Pretty serious words, don't you think?

So it's critical that you and I have as good an understanding of the Gospel as we can have. And that means we can spend our lives studying the Gospel and see its richness and beauty and value and

urgency. And in this way we will be able to recognize the knock-offs of the Gospel and the perversions of the Gospel.

Now what I'm about to share with you isn't new to some of you. And it may be brand new to others of you. Now it all starts with this...

1. GOD'S LOVE (vv.18-19)

In the beginning God created human beings so that He could lavish His love upon them and to have a love relationship with them. Now in creating us, God gave us the ability to make choices ... even the choice to reject Him. And that's what Adam and Eve, the first humans, did in the Garden of Eden. And so all humans are separated and alienated from God. But God still loves us so He did something incredible.

2 Corinthians 5:18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

2 Corinthians 5:19 - that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

The word "reconciled" means to change a relationship. God doesn't want us separated from Him for eternity because of our sin. He works to make it possible for us to no longer be His enemies.

And this reconciliation is for the "world." The Gospel relates to everyone. There isn't a different Gospel for the people in Asia and the people in Europe. The same Gospel is for the young and the old, for the rich and the poor, for English speaking and Spanish speaking, for Muslims and for Hindus, for religious and irreligious. Just one message covers them all. There is one message for the "world."

John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Romans 5:8 - But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

So in love, the Offended One came looking for the offending ones to reconcile us to Himself through the death of Christ on the Cross. So there is GOD'S LOVE. The next thing people need to know is...

2. OUR SIN (v.19)

These verses show us that the root of the problem is our sin.

2 Corinthians 5:19a - that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.

The word for “sins” there means literally “to step out of line.”

ILLUSTRATION – If you were watching football yesterday, you probably saw a receiver or running back running along the sideline, but the instant that he stepped on the line, the play was over. The line is the boundary; step on the line or over the line and it’s over. And that’s what our sin is. It is trespassing against the will and the way of God.

So our sins have separated us from God. Our sins are an offense to God. It’s our sin that causes us to need to be reconciled to God. And we all sin.

1 John 1:8 - If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

1 John 1:10 - If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

Our “sins” come from our “sin.” Sin is the disease. Sins are the symptoms.

Romans 6:23 - For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Why is this so important? Because if we do not understand our disease, we will seek the wrong cure. If I think I’m just a little off in the direction of my life, then I can just get right with God by doing better. But if I’m dead in my trespasses and sins, as the Gospel tells us we are apart from Christ, then I need someone who will give me a whole new life.

So they need to know GOD’S LOVE and OUR SIN and...

3. GOD’S SOLUTION (vv.19,21)

God has the only way to deal with our sin problem. And it’s a supernatural way. We can’t solve this problem on our own.

2 Corinthians 5:19a - that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.

So what God did “in Christ” or “through Christ” was to make it possible for an amazing transaction to take place. And that’s exactly what it is ... a transaction. When it says that God was “not counting men’s sins against them,” Paul is using a term from the world of accounting.

ILLUSTRATION – If you still keep a checkbook, there is a column for you to enter credits (deposits) and there’s a column for you to enter debits (checks written or charges made against your account). And what happens when we trust in Christ, God puts our sin on Christ’s account and He puts Christ’s righteousness on our account. Amazing!

And the result of this is that our sins (every single one of them!) have been paid for and God no longer holds them against us, because we have trusted Christ as our Savior.

At the same time there was something else happening:

2 Corinthians 5:21 - God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

So now God clothes us in the righteousness of His own Son Jesus. So that when He sees us, He no longer sees our sin, but His Son.

Now when it says God “made” Jesus “sin” this doesn’t mean that God made Jesus a sinful person. He was sinless in His earthly life and in His eternal existence. Christ had no sin.

1 John 3:5 - But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin.

And only in this way could He become sin for us. The sinless One become our Sin-bearer.

Galatians 3:13a - Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us...

1 John 2:2 - He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

And all of this is a gift from God that is to be received by faith. That’s what Paul meant in ...

Romans 3:22 - This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

So there’s GOD’S LOVE ... OUR SIN ... GOD’S SOLUTION ... but also there is...

4. OUR PART (v.20)

So God has made it possible through the death of His Son for us to be reconciled. But there is something for us to do. Yes, the Gospel includes something that we are to do. Our part is to respond to God’s appeal. Remember...

2 Corinthians 5:20 - We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.

The appeal we make to nonbelievers is the appeal God is making to all people ... Get reconciled to God. There’s something we must do.

And armed with the understanding and the knowledge of God’s love, our sin, God’s solution and our part, we can tell our non-believing loved ones and friends this is what God is calling them to do.

There is a simple outline that we like to use to make sure we cover all the bases ... ABC.

A – ADMIT

Admit what? Admit that I am a sinner. Remember, that's our big problem. If you don't admit that you have a problem, you will never find the solution.

Romans 3:23 - for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

B – BELIEVE

Christianity doesn't mean "go to church." It doesn't mean "act right." The message is "believe." Believe what? Believe that ...

Romans 5:8 - But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

But we not only "believe that..." something is true, but this also means that we "trust in ..." Someone who is true. And that means...

C – COMMIT

It's not just about committing to God that we are going to do better; it's about receiving what God has committed to do for us. It's not just about making promises to God; it's about receiving what God has promised to do for you. It's not about giving something to God; it's about receiving what God wants to give to you.

Faith means surrender.

Romans 10:9 - That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

ILLUSTRATION – Here's a great way to look at it. I have a stool here on the stage. I can walk around the stool all day long and say, "I *believe that* the stool will hold me up." I can sort of lean on the stool and say, "I *believe that* the stool will hold me up." That's not what we need. I have to put my whole weight on the stool. Then I've moved from "*believe that...*" to "*trust in...*"