

SECOND CORINTHIANS

5:1 - 6:2

Introduction

We are “**ambassadors** for Christ “(5:20). An ambassador is the official representative of one kingdom who is sent to communicate with the people of another kingdom. In your case, you are the official representative of the kingdom of heaven who is sent into the kingdom of this world to communicate with people who are perishing due to their unbelief. Wherever you work, wherever you go to school, wherever you live... You are an ambassador for Jesus Christ sent to communicate with the people around you who are perishing due to their unbelief.

Two words in this chapter describe the way heaven’s ambassadors should communicate: **Persuade** and **Plead**.

1. In verse eleven Paul says “...we persuade men...”
2. In verse twenty Paul uses the word pleading; he uses it again in verse one of chapter six.

You are an ambassador sent to persuade men, and to plead with men. You are an ambassador sent to persuade men that you are ready to die... And you are an ambassador sent to plead with men that they are *not* ready to die.

#1 You Are An Ambassador Sent To Persuade Men That You Are Ready To Die (5:1-11)

What one word would you choose to summarize life on earth? Paul uses the word **groan**. Once you are made aware of the glorious future that awaits you, life on earth is a continual groaning as you yearn for heaven. The more you look forward to your glorious future, the more you groan.

The glorious future that awaits you is two-fold: First, you will either be **raptured** or **resurrected**; second, you will be **rewarded**.

Your rapture or resurrection is the subject of verses one through eight.

2 Corinthians 5:1 For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Your present physical body is called an “earthly house,” a “tent.” A tent is a very temporary dwelling which is constantly being deteriorated by the elements. Deterioration leads to it being “destroyed.” Your physical body will one day give out; you are going to die.

Not to worry! Since you are a Christian, you will have a new body. In contrast to your present earthly tent, your new body is “a building from God, a house not made with hands,” and it will be “eternal in the heavens.”

You will get this new body either at the rapture or the resurrection. The rapture **is** in this verse; it’s in the word “if.” **If** you die. Doesn’t everyone die? *No!* In First Corinthians Fifteen Paul says that,

1 Corinthians 15:51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—

1 Corinthians 15:52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

If you are alive when Jesus comes to take the church to heaven, you will not die. You will be transformed into your glorious eternal body.

Many have died; many might yet die.

2 Corinthians 5:2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven,

2 Corinthians 5:3 if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked.

2 Corinthians 5:4 For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

This mention of being “clothed,” “unclothed,” “further clothed,” and “found naked,” has sparked centuries of controversy. The issue is what happens to you if you are not raptured between the time of your death and the return of Jesus to resurrect your body. It comes down to this: Is Paul saying he is afraid to die because he will become an “unclothed” spirit until the resurrection? Or is he suggesting that you

will be “clothed” with an intermediate “habitation” body until the resurrection?

There are many arguments on both sides. Let me just say that I have a hard time thinking that we should in any way fear death; and the idea of an intermediate body creates certain problems at the resurrection. Let me suggest another way of looking at these verses.

Pastor Chuck thinks the answer has to do with our misunderstanding of time in its relationship to eternity. From our earthly, linear time point of view – you die, your body waits in the ground, Jesus returns and resurrects you. But from the point of view of eternity, the “eternal now,” it could be that you receive your glorified resurrection body the moment you die on earth.

Whatever the answer, you have this assurance:

2 Corinthians 5:5 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

God has made a contract with you that He will complete the work He began in you at your conversion. The indwelling Holy Spirit is your “guarantee” of His faithfulness. The “thing” that God “has prepared us for” is the future resurrection of your body. At that time you will be “fully clothed” – you will be as God originally intended you to be.

2 Corinthians 5:6 So *we are* always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:7 For we walk by faith, not by sight.

2 Corinthians 5:8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

You cannot be in heaven in your current body. But you are certain of heaven, walking by “faith” and “not by sight.” The moment you are “absent from” your current “body,” you will be “present with the Lord.” At the precise moment of your death on earth, you will be absent from the groanings of your current body and immediately, consciously present with Jesus in heaven.

When Jesus returns for His church all the deceased believers of the church age will be resurrected and the living believers will be raptured. The next event in your glorious future is **rewards**:

2 Corinthians 5:9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

This “judgment seat” has nothing to do with salvation. It is a place where saved people who are in heaven will receive rewards for “the things done” while you were on earth serving the Lord “in the body.” The word “appear” means *made manifest*. It’s not just that you appear there; everything you have done to serve the Lord will be made manifest there. Everything that is “good,” done from right motives using right methods, will be rewarded. Everything that is “bad,” done from wrong motives using wrong methods, will go unrewarded. It will, in fact, be destroyed. The mood, however, will be one of great relief and joy as you enter upon your heavenly service to Jesus.

Paul applies all of this in verse eleven:

2 Corinthians 5:11 Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

Ray Stedman paraphrases the idea of “the terror of the Lord” by saying,

“Knowing that God will deal honestly, squarely and faithfully yet lovingly with me, I want every moment of my life to count. I do not want to waste my life. I do not want to spend it pretending to be something I’m not... Whatever I am is known to God, and I hope you can see it, too.”

You are to long for your rapture or resurrection, and live for your rewards. The more you do, the more unbelievers will be persuaded that you are ready to die. They will be persuaded that there is something more important than life – eternal life.

#2 You Are An Ambassador Sent To
Plead With Men That They Are Not Ready To Die
(5:12-6:2)

Twice Paul says you are to “plead” with men – in verse twenty, and in verse one of chapter six. In verse twenty you read,

2 Corinthians 5:20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.

There is a sense of urgency in these verses which the word “pleading” captures. Unbelievers could die at any moment, *but they are not ready to die!* “God” is “pleading through” you to unbelievers to “be reconciled to God.” He is pleading through you for them to “receive the grace of God,” to receive salvation before it’s too late.

These verses are a good example of pleading with men. As we work through them, you will see the two alternating aspects of proper pleading: Love and truth. Because the love of Jesus Christ compels you, you communicate the truth about Jesus Christ with those who are perishing.

2 Corinthians 5:12 For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have *an answer* for those who boast in appearance and not in heart.

2 Corinthians 5:13 For if we are beside ourselves, *it is* for God; or if we are of sound mind, *it is* for you.

2 Corinthians 5:14 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;

Some of Paul’s critics at Corinth were saying that Paul was “beside [himself].” They were saying he was crazy. He doesn’t need to “commend” himself, but he wants his supporters to be able to give an answer to the false teachers who criticized him. He acted like a fanatic for God because “the love of Christ compelled” him to communicate the truth that could save men from perishing.

Here’s some truth:

2 Corinthians 5:14 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;

2 Corinthians 5:15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

When the Scripture declares that “One died for all,” it means that the death of Jesus on the cross is sufficient to pay the penalty for the sins of the entire human race. “Those who live” refers to those members of the human race who by faith receive Jesus as their resurrected Savior. They are saved and sent to share with others so that they, too, may be saved.

Here is more love:

2 Corinthians 5:16 Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him thus* no longer.

“According to the flesh” means from an earthly point of view. You once knew Jesus from an earthly point of view – the way the world portrays Him. But now you know Him from an eternal point of view. As you encounter unbelievers, you no longer see them from an earthly point of view, but in light of their eternal destiny. You are compelled by love to share with them.

Here is more truth:

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

We like to say that Christianity is not a *religion*, it is a *relationship*. Religion is an attempt to reform by outward works; relationship is the power to be transformed by inward grace. When you receive Jesus Christ, your spirit is born within you, and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within you. You are a “new creation.”

More truth:

2 Corinthians 5:18 Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,
2 Corinthians 5:19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

What’s the key word in these two verses? **Reconciliation** – used four times. The word means *changed completely*. Reconciliation is God’s act of changing completely mankind’s relationship to Him by removing, through Jesus Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, the barrier caused by sin. Salvation is now possible for the entire human race because God has already “reconciled the world to Himself.”

Reconciliation is not salvation! It makes salvation possible. God has given the “ministry” and the “word of reconciliation” to His ambassadors to proclaim that, since He is reconciled with mankind, they can be saved.

How can God, Who is infinitely holy, be reconciled with sinful men?

2 Corinthians 5:20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

God can be reconciled with man because Jesus took upon Himself the sins of all mankind and offers all mankind His righteousness. Paul calls this process **imputing**. It is a word borrowed from banking; it simply means *to put to one's account*. When you deposit money in the bank, the computer or the teller puts that amount to your account. When Jesus died on the cross, all of your sins were imputed to Him - put to His account. He was treated by God as though He had actually committed your sins.

As a result, all of your sins have been paid for and God no longer holds them against you. When you receive Jesus as Savior this transaction becomes effective. Something more happens as well: God **puts into** your account the "righteousness" of Christ!

Reconciliation is based on imputation: because the demands of God's holy Law have been fully met by Jesus' sinless sacrifice on the cross, God is reconciled to sinners. If you believe on Jesus Christ as your Savior you will never have your sins imputed against you again (Psalm 32:1-2; Romans 4:1-8). As far as your heavenly bank-records are concerned, you share the righteousness of Jesus Christ!

God has reconciled the world to Himself. All men everywhere can be saved. But until they are saved, reconciliation does them no good. They are not ready to die. We love them too much to let them perish when salvation is so close. So Paul says,

2 Corinthians 6:1 We then, as workers together *with Him* also plead with *you* not to receive the grace of God in vain.

2 Corinthians 6:2 For He says:

*"In an acceptable time I have heard you,
And in the day of salvation I have helped you."*

Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation.

Notice that the word "you" is italicized. It does not appear in the manuscripts from which the Bible has been translated; it was added to give the sentence a better flow in English. It's better, though, to leave the word out in this case, because Paul is not addressing the

Corinthians. He's not addressing believers at all. He's addressing unbelievers, saying in effect, "As an ambassador you plead for unbelievers not to receive the grace of God in vain." The "grace of God" is the fact that He has reconciled the world so all men can be saved. But it is "in vain" unless men personally receive it and are saved.

The quote in verse two is from Isaiah chapter forty-nine. It proclaimed that a day of salvation was coming. Paul applies it by saying that the day of salvation is **now**, it is **today**. Unbelievers are not ready to die. If they die in their unbelief, they perish eternally. We are God's ambassadors sent to plead with them and to proclaim the word of reconciliation that they might receive Jesus Christ and be saved.

Conclusion

Ambassadors have embassies in foreign countries. The whole world is your foreign country. Your embassy is anywhere you find yourself – where you live, where you work, where you go to school.

Are you ready to die? You will be as you grow in the Lord and groan, looking forward to your rapture or resurrection and the rewards that follow.

Do you see that unbelievers are not ready to die? The love of Christ compels you to communicate God's truth to them.