

I. Read II Corinthians 5:20-21

- A. The Apostle Paul speaks of himself and his co-workers as “ambassadors for Christ” in verse 20. In the *Oxford American Dictionary*, an ambassador is defined as:

“a diplomat sent by one country as a permanent representative or on a special mission to another...an official messenger.”

In what way might it be said that all believers are ambassadors for Christ?

The message of the gospel has been entrusted to those who have been reconciled to God (v. 19 “He has committed to us the word of reconciliation”). Therefore, they are *official messengers*. Further, their conduct and behavior bears directly upon the willingness of those hearing “the word of reconciliation” receiving it with joy. In other words, the believers’ behavior can either help or hinder the witness of the gospel.

In some specific areas of our lives, how should a believer conduct himself so as not to hinder the message of the gospel?

- as employers:

Christian men and women in authority over others have a responsibility to act with integrity and compassion. Christian employers should treat their employees as they themselves would want to be treated, particularly in regard to an employee’s dignity and receiving a just and fair wage.

- as employees:

Christian employees have a responsibility to be loyal, hardworking, and honest. They should treat their job as a calling from God and even when the circumstance is less than ideal, realize that their work can and should be rendered “as unto Christ”, receiving their ultimate reward from Christ himself.

- as husbands and wives:

Love, mutual respect, fidelity, support, and affection are the believing husbands’ or wives’ responsibilities toward their spouse. Their relationship is covenantal and should not be broken for anything less than biblical grounds. Even when grounds exist, divorce should only be a last resort, with reconciliation and forgiveness *always* being the best choice for the Christian. Christian marriages are not about what the culture says they ought to be, but rather about what God says they ought to be. Marriage is a proving ground, a crucible for purifying us, an anvil upon which God shapes us, and finally, a testimony that must honor God.

- as parents:

Christian parents are (humanly speaking) *the most important factor* in whether or not a child embraces Christ as Lord and Savior. Hence, their responsibility toward their children transcends *all others* with two exceptions – that to God and that to one another. Jobs, hobbies, money, friends, church work, retirement, and recreation all pale in comparison to the importance of Christian parenting. Further, no temporal sacrifice is too great for the Christian parent to see that his children embrace Christ, develop a Christian World and Life View, and step up to their own responsibility to serve Christ.

- as church members:

Genuine believers need to recognize that the work of the church is *not about them*, no matter how gifted or important they think they are. It is about Christ and the furthering of His kingdom. This means that the believer will always be willing to subordinate his

concerns and comfort to that of the ministry and peace of the church. In instances of conflict over personal or trivial matters, resolution will be pursued and love will determine our responses to others. Finally, bible-believing Christians understand that the outward appearance of a person or a circumstance may be misleading and hence, they will not act rashly or impetuously. Scripture is clear that there are tares amongst the wheat and wolves amongst the sheep. Consequently, believers expect some degree of conflict and disruption of the peace of the church. Genuine believers will learn to deal proactively with the challenges of church fellowship and ministry, putting the peace and purity of the church before all else.

- as citizens:

Christians understand that they have a responsibility to the country and culture in which God has placed them. However, they also understand that their greater fealty is owed to Christ – always. If there is a conflict of loyalty between the earthly and the heavenly kingdom, the kingdom of God will win the believers' allegiance. The cliché, "my country, right or wrong" cannot be adhered to by a true believer in any *ultimate* sense. True believers in Nazi Germany had a greater responsibility to God than to Germany, and they should have opposed Nazi rule. In God's providence, this same sort of choice may face any believer living in any nation, even America in our post-Christian age.

- B. When Paul writes, "as though God were entreating through us" (NAS), what is the practical significance?

The fact is that God uses men and women as the primary (not exclusive) means for sharing the gospel. It has been well said that you may be all that those around you will ever see of Christ. *God uses whom He chooses* to explain Himself to a dark and hurting world.

- C. In verse 21, it is explained that Jesus took our sins upon Himself. What does this mean, given the fact that Jesus was (and is) God, sharing the attributes and the same nature as God the Father and God the Holy Spirit?

It cannot mean that Jesus actually became a sinner, because God cannot sin! (See James 1:13.) It does mean, however, that Jesus took the penalty or consequence of our sin upon Himself. Theologian Robert Letham explains:

"That Christ was not made a sinner or sinful is obvious from the rest of the New Testament and from the immediate context (of II Corinthians 5:21), where Paul stresses that he knows no sin...The message is that the sinless Christ was made to suffer for sin, that he was subject to the full brunt of the divine curse that hung over sin, the weight of which fell crushingly upon his innocent person."

- D. How do we become "the righteousness of God in Him" (NAS)?

The same way He receives the consequences of our sin – by imputation. The *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (which everyone should have a copy of!) defines imputation thusly:

"A transfer of benefit or harm from one individual to another. In theology, imputation may be used negatively to refer to the transfer of the sin and guilt of Adam to the rest of humankind. Positively, imputation refers to the righteousness of Christ being transferred to those who believe on him for salvation."