

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Introduction

Reconciliation between God and man is made possible through the Cross of Christ. When a Christian has been reconciled to God, he becomes Christ's ambassador, to preach, teach, witness and live for Him at home and work. We are going to look at the life and labour of the ambassador for Christ.

This chapter is one of the high peaks in Paul's writings and is a window into his soul. There is a problem for the preacher, however, because he uses 28 separate phrases about his ministerial life. Some may not sound very relevant to our present situation, though are meaningful to people in other countries. Going to touch lightly on the main thoughts without going into detail, and do not intend to explain all 28 items of ministry.

The ambassador's urgency in delivering his message

**As God's fellow-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain** (2 Corinthians 6:1). God had done so much for Paul – loved him, given Christ for him, saved him, changed him, Christ's love constrained him – that he was anxious for others to enjoy the same blessings. His hearers were hastening to the end of their lives, and would soon appear before Christ's judgement seat. They would hear God's verdict on their response to the Gospel and be assessed for quality of service. So Paul wanted his hearers to embrace that costly salvation before it was too late, to seek Him while they had the opportunity. The warning goes out to all those who refuse His call or delay answering:

*“Too late! Too late! Will be the cry,  
Jesus of Nazareth has passed by.”*

**Now is the time of God's favour (accepted time, AV), now is the day of salvation** (2 Corinthians 6:2). The ambassador is never off duty. There is an urgency about him. God's offer is real, and his love and compassion are genuine. But time is running out, and will soon reach the point of no return.

*“Tis all my business here below  
To cry ‘Behold the Lamb’.”  
Charles Wesley*

The consistency the ambassador must show in every situation

**We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited** (2 Corinthians 6:3). Paul was concerned not to say or do anything which would cause others to point the finger of accusation. He wanted to commend himself as a minister of God in every circumstance of life. It would be so easy for his hearers to claim inconsistency in the life of God's servant as the reason why they did not come to Christ.

Circumstances vary enormously, and there are so many different situations where we can be caught out. General trials which come our way are described in verses 4 & 5. Tribulations, life's troubles, sorrows, disappointed, needs, hardships, sorrow, bereavement, distresses, frustration, feeling shut in and suffocated, trials inflicted by others, stripes, beatings, physical pain, prison, riots... Some of these things we do not know much about, but they are realities for Christians in Sudan, China and Pakistan. But we may well have experienced being excluded from company and frozen out, receiving unpleasant social reactions, contempt and sneering, which are hard to endure.

There were also the hardships Paul inflicted on himself – his own hard work as a shepherd of God's flock had exhausted him in body and mind. He knew sleeplessness and discomfort because of being up late praying, teaching and helping. He also knew hunger from his periods of fasting. But Paul expected all these troubles in the world which crucified Christ. And he was concerned that in all these things he did not give offence, let the side down, and give an unbeliever cause to reject Christ. He persevered, determined not to give up or give in, but to live triumphantly. He passed breaking point, and did not break. He commended Christ and the Gospel by his consistent Christian living and pure motives.

There is a picture here of total commitment. "Commitment" is not a popular word today – we prefer to "keep your options open", and this mentality has spread to the church. Some regard church as a spectator sport, where they go on a Sunday to watch the experts do it. Others regard it as a supporters club, and are always on the sidelines shouting advice to the players on the field, but with no intention of putting on the kit and joining in. God is committed to the work of our salvation, and in return we need to be thoroughly committed to Him.

#### The Christian character displayed by the ambassador

The ambassador commends himself in various situations by purity, knowledge, patience and kindness (2 Corinthians 6:6). Purity speaks not just of moral purity, but single-mindedness and sincere motivation, leading to purity in thought, word and deed. Knowledge or understanding means insight into God and His truth, wisdom and tact, and sensitivity to God's will. The ambassador is long-suffering, bearing with people who are slow to learn, stubborn, stupid and obstinate. He does not act too quickly or look for a fight. And finally he commends himself by his kindness, thoughtfulness, consideration and gentleness, not rude or harsh, but always thinking of others.

Purity, spiritual insight, patience and kindness are to be pre-eminent in the ambassador's character.

*"You are writing each day a letter to men.  
Take care that writing is true,  
For the only Gospel that some men will read  
Is the Gospel according to you."*

#### Resources which are available to the ambassador

It is a tall order indeed, but if the Bible speaks of God's requirements it also speaks of God's equipment. Commands are always matched by God's enabling. Paul had with him a fountain of powerful divine supernatural life because he was in Christ.

Firstly he had the Holy Spirit, combined with the power of God. He is the great gift of God's grace and the great giver of all gifts and graces. He produces the life of God within us. If He fills us daily, we shall be good servants of Christ. If the flow of His power is not blocked in our lives, we shall be living like Jesus, whatever our circumstances. He already indwells, but we must appropriate His fullness. Only God's power can lift us above our weakness and fear and inability.

The Word of Truth is also given to us to help us meet God's requirements. The message which is in God's word, we must reproduce accurately and faithfully. All we need to know is in that book which He has given us. We need to lay hold of its inexhaustible riches day by day.

**Weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left** (2 Corinthians 6:7), so that we all well equipped for attack and defence. On the right hand is the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. On the left is the shield of God's faithfulness. Here are the means whereby we answer false arguments and protect ourselves from all assaults of the enemy.

We have the tools for the job, and this is our encouragement. These tools are available to anyone in whom Christ dwells because they are found in Him. No reason why we may not face life and all the adverse circumstances with complete optimism and confidence. **God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power, love and sound mind** (2 Timothy 1:7).

#### The reactions which the ambassador may expect

As we engage in the Christian life and service, different opinions are passed (2 Corinthians 6:8-10). From the world we receive dishonour, evil report, branded as deceivers, unknown, dying, chastened, poor and having nothing. From God's side we receive honour, good report, true, well known, living, always rejoicing, making many rich, possessing all things.

But perhaps Paul's meaning is not quite as neat as that. The world may be divided in its opinion of the Christian worker – popular with some and rejected by others. Some people may change their mind about you within 24 hours – that is how the crowds treated Jesus. Sometimes fellow Christians will have different opinions or change their opinions.

We will always be criticised in the Lord's work, usually, though not always, behind our backs. People do not know all the facts, do not always give the benefit of the doubt, will be jealous of or hostile to what we do. Spurgeon writes to his students, in a chapter headed "Blind Eye and Deaf Ear", "You cannot stop people's tongues, and therefore it is best to stop your own ears and ignore what is said." Over an old castle are inscribed the words, "They say. What do they say? Let them say." It is well for us to know nothing of criticism. It helps keep our peace of mind and does not turn us against the critics if we do not know whom they are. "Never hear what is meant for

you”. “Listeners seldom hear any good of themselves.” [unclear how much of this is attributable to Spurgeon]

When leaving his first church in a village for a large London Church, a minister heard one old man pray that he might be “delivered from the bleating of the sheep.” The minister did not know what this meant, but he soon found out, and often prayed the same prayer for himself.

Equally, flattery will only soften the mind and make the preacher more sensitive to slander. So best not to know what is said in praise or in condemnation. At the end of the day, we are all imperfect, and opinions and judgements are imperfect. All that really matters when all is said and done is the Master’s opinion. Therefore aim to steer a straight course and please the Master.

*“Some will hate thee, some will love thee  
Some will flatter, some will slight.  
Cease from man and look thee,  
Trust in God and do the right.”.*

Least of all should we worry about the world’s opinion of us. To the world we are beggars and to be pitied. But we have everything in Christ. We are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. We have everything that really lasts.

### Conclusion

The life and labour of the ambassador for Christ involves being urgent in proclaiming our message, being consistent in every situation, being concerned to display Christian character, being aware of the resources available, and being sensible in the face of various reactions. Wonderful blessing of two things which we often keep separate – a clear mind and a warm heart; truth and love; doctrine and experience; the Word and the Spirit. Not to be polarized. The Bible brings both together. “If we are all Word, we dry up. If we are all Spirit, we blow up. If we are Word and Spirit, we grow up.”