

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

II COR. 5:11 Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.

12 For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart.

13 For whether we be beside ourselves, *it is* to God: or whether we be sober, *it is* for your cause.

14 For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:

15 And *that* he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

16 Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea,

though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we *him* no more.

17 Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

18 And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

21 For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

NOTES

Ambassadors for Christ

Lesson Text: II Corinthians 5:11-21

Related Scriptures: Romans 10:5-15; I Corinthians 3:5-9;
Ephesians 2:11-22

TIME: probably A.D. 56

PLACE: from Macedonia

GOLDEN TEXT—"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Corinthians 5:21).

Lesson Exposition

MINISTRY OF PERSUASION— II Cor. 5:11-13

Respect for the Lord (II Cor. 5:11). One of the most neglected topics of current Christian teaching is the fear of the Lord. So many fail to recognize that we serve a God of holiness and power.

God is not trying to scare us into loving Him. To fear the Lord means to respect Him and to come to Him with a sense of awe and wonder at His power and beauty. It is that proper fear of the Lord that spurs us to go out and try to persuade other people to come to Christ.

Respect for the gospel (II Cor. 5:12-13). No matter how vigorously he proclaimed and explained the gospel, Paul was always defending his apostolic authority to the Corinthians. Why? Because in order for people to listen to our gospel message, we need their respect. Paul was not trying to gain their blessing or approval for his own self-esteem. He had all the confidence he needed from the Lord. However, he wanted the Corinthians to understand that his authority came from Christ.

Paul might be called a fool by out-

siders, but he wanted the church to know that if he was a fool, it was for the Lord. If they could see that he was in his right mind, then it would be to their great benefit. Either way, he was not trying to convince them because he feared man's opinions but because he wanted people to listen seriously to the gospel message.

MINISTRY OF LOVE—II Cor. 5:14-16

The love of Christ (II Cor. 5:14-15). Paul said that the love of Christ constrained him to persevere in these relationships. It was the love of Christ for the Corinthians that compelled Paul to be relentless in his proclamation of the gospel in Corinth.

Since Jesus died for all, then all who trust in Him have died with Him. All who believe are now dead to sin. What a remarkable change from being dead in our sins as enemies of God (cf. Eph. 2:1-4)!

A change in perspective (II Cor. 5:16). Paul had determined that he would no longer see people through the eyes of the flesh, but would see them as human souls in need of redemption. It is important for us to do the same.

MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION— II Cor. 5:17-21

New creations (II Cor. 5:17). The great news for the believer is that once we come to Christ, our past sins are erased, and we are made new.

The power of sin has no dominion over us any longer because Jesus has set us free. Knowing this, it does not make sense that we would feel free to keep on sinning.

Reconciliation (II Cor. 5:18-19). God reconciled the world back to Himself through Jesus Christ, His Son. Through the work of Jesus, we have been reconciled with God and can now freely enter into His presence.

Ambassadors for Christ (II Cor. 5:20). As ambassadors of Christ, we represent the interests of God and proclaim His message, which is for the salvation of man.

God has declared a peace treaty because of the finished work of Christ on the cross, and it is up to His ambassadors to go out and make known the terms of this treaty. People need to know that their sins will be forgiven if they repent and trust in Christ.

The great exchange (II Cor. 5:21). The chapter closes with Paul's explanation of exactly how God reconciled man through Jesus Christ. This is the ministry of reconciliation: Jesus Christ, who never committed any sin (cf. I Pet. 2:22), was made by God to be sin for our sake so we might be reconciled with our Heavenly Father. It was not for His own sake that Jesus died, but for ours.

God took the sins of the world and put them on Christ, and in turn took the righteousness of Christ and gave it to us. It was the most one-sided deal in all of history. Jesus Christ took our sins, and we received His righteousness.

When two people or two companies work out a deal, both sides are looking to receive something of equal or great-

er value than their concessions. God, however, did not work along these lines at all. Jesus did not receive anything of value from us, yet we received the most precious thing imaginable.

There is no point in trying to be self-righteous. Self-righteousness is, in fact, an oxymoron because there is no righteousness in us. We all need the righteousness of Christ in order to go to heaven, and that is exactly what God gave us. Without it, we cannot come into His presence at all. But with it, we are reconciled to the Father, and our relationship and fellowship with Him is restored.

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to fear the Lord?
2. What do we need from people if we expect them to listen to the gospel message?
3. What does it mean to be constrained (II Cor. 5:14)?
4. What was it that constrained Paul to preach the gospel?
5. What does it mean that "if one died for all, then were all dead"?
6. How did Paul see people from a different perspective after his conversion?
7. According to verse 17, what is erased when we become new creations in Christ?
8. Why is it nonsensical to continue living in sin after we have been set free by Christ?
9. What does it mean to be an ambassador for Christ?
10. What is the ministry of reconciliation, and how did God secure it?

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Awareness of the coming judgment should motivate believers to share the gospel (II Cor. 5:11).
2. People may choose to deride and harass you for your faith, but only God's approval matters (vss. 12-13).
3. Jesus died for us, so believers should now live for Him out of gratitude for His love (vss. 14-15).
4. Jesus does not fix up our old lives; He gives us new lives when we trust in Him (vss. 16-17).
5. Since God has reconciled us to Himself, believers should share that message of reconciliation with others (vss. 18-19).
6. You represent Christ everywhere you go; be careful how you represent Him (vs. 20)!
7. God has given us Christ's righteousness; Christ bore our sins on the cross (vs. 21).

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Why do our motives for witnessing and Christian service matter? Discuss.
2. Why might the Corinthians have been under the impression that Paul was not of sound mind?
3. What does it mean to be a new creature in Christ?
4. How would you describe the Christian's ministry of reconciliation?
5. Why is verse 21 significant?

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

Golden Text Illuminated

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (II Corinthians 5:21).

This is one of the most decisive verses in the New Testament on the substitutionary atonement of Christ. It tells us that Christ's death was much more than merely exemplary; Christ's death was a blood sacrifice that paid the penalty for the sins of all who would believe on Him as Lord and Saviour. But even more than that, Christ's perfect righteousness is also imputed to those same believers to secure an eternal standing before God.

We ourselves do not have the power to reconcile with the Lord. We may try through our good works and religious acts, but these are merely “filthy rags” before the God of absolute holiness (cf. Isa. 64:6). No, we cannot come to God on our own merits, no matter how righteous we might think we are.

Paul uses the word for reconciliation in only four verses in all of his letters (cf. II Cor. 5:18-19; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20), but this does not diminish its significance. The Greek word means to exchange one thing for another. In a transactional sense, Jesus took our sins away and gave us His righteous standing with God; our enmity with God was exchanged for friendship with Him.

As God's ambassadors, we are to proclaim His priceless gospel to the world, as well as demonstrate it through our lives of Christian holiness.

In this way, we seek to reconcile lost sinners back to the holy God whom they have offended. The gospel we proclaim is their only hope!

—Mark Winter.