

Lesson Six

(5:11 — 6:2)

SECTION IX 5:11 — 6:13

11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men; but what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. 12 We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to be proud of us, so that you may be able to answer those who pride themselves on a man's position and not on his heart. 13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 14 For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. 17 Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. 18 All this is from

God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

6 Working together with him, then, we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain. 2 For he says,
 "At the acceptable time I have listened to you,
 and helped you on the day of salvation."

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

Without any question, our text is one of the finest in all Scripture. It presents the difference Christ makes. More than just speaking about a new man, the result of the conversion process that comes from God, it highlights the effect conversion has as stated especially in verse 16. Yet, additionally, the ever-encompassing power of Christ's love in one's life gives the daily strength to be about the business of persuading men, and that with the understanding that God knows our heart.

V. 11 — **fear** — that total attitude of the Christian about the God whom he worships, knowing that he must stand in God's presence to be judged (5:10), yet confident that it was God who provided Jesus (John 3:16) as the means of reconciliation (5:19). God is then viewed as both just and justifier (Romans 3:26).

we persuade — This was the work of Paul's life; the task to which he was called, and for which he suffered much at the hands of men unpersuaded. Note how often in the Acts history this concept of persuasion appears, and if the people being addressed were not persuaded, they were described as "disobedient." See Acts 13:43; 17:4; 18:4; 19:8, 26; 26:28; 28:23, 24. Texts using the idea/word would include Matthew 27:20, 43; 28:14; Acts 12:20; 14:19; Galatians 1:10; 5:7; Hebrews 13:17.

It is relevant to say that some take this text to refer to the preceding sections and that the "persuasion" Paul has in mind is in relationship to his apostleship and ministry, etc. Of course, that relates to his message which was given from God, and which was the major certification for his apostleship — so it is about the same way. In either case, the judgment of God was a controlling factor, since God would know the real motivation of any and all.

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conscience — The Greek word used here also means consciousness, the total awareness that is ours as a person. Here, it might be better to take it as consciousness, thus present the idea that the Corinthians, who are aware of the situation, would accept Paul for what he actually was: God's apostle, called and commissioned to a specific task.

V. 12 — If the people who were to read this letter were really Christians, then their measure/standard of judgment should be "other-worldly" as verse 16 states. If so, then they should also perceive that Paul was not bragging, but simply giving them every opportunity to thwart his opponents. He was giving to them an occasion to "boast," and thus provide an adequate defense for those who boasted in outward appearance rather than the effect of God in Paul's life, 12:12; Hebrews 2:4. Those opposing Paul were tearing his character down, to bring about disbelief of his message. He was trying to help those who should have been defending him.

V. 13 — This verse provides one definite argument: the (true) apostle had a self-sacrificing ministry: for God, for others. This must be the case, since Jesus was their example; he gave himself (v. 14), and demanded the same of them (Matt. 16). One's perspective is important in every situation of life—some thought Jesus "mad" (Mark 3:21) while Festus thought Paul "mad" (Acts 26:24). Paul would remind them that he was God's servant, and however they viewed him, they were viewing God's servant.

V. 14 — Whether sane or not, the controlling love of Christ for Paul was such that he could not do other than he was doing (Martin Luther caught that sentiment and so stated in the presence of his accusers). We would note that it is just as possible to take the verse as stating that it was Paul's love for Christ that was the constraining motivation.

In either case, the point is: my service is not for selfish ends, but rather in behalf of Christ for His sake (4:5). By implication, the attitude of those opposing him may be in the background since they apparently boasted in themselves and were also self-seeking.

V. 15 — Since all Christians die in Christ, and no longer live except in Christ, the change that follows is expressed in vs. 16-17 for all, and specifically illustrated by Paul's life, 5:18—6:13. The ensuing life will be "other-worldly" and expressed in selfless action, just as Jesus did, who tasted death for every man, Hebrews 2:9; was put to death for every man, Romans 4:25. On this basis, appeals are made to everyone that as redemption has been made by the precious blood of Christ, we ought to live holy, I Peter 1:15; Ephesians 4:17-23.

V. 16 — This verse simply states the transformation that takes place when one is begotten of the implanted word (James 1:21; I Peter 1:23) and thus regenerated by the Holy Spirit: the human soul is viewed as

God would view it, not as his creation in general views it. Even viewing the world through Jewish eyes as did Paul would not bring the same result as from the Christian side. Of prime importance then, would be the change that is wrought in one's view of Jesus, whom most of the world sees as something other than God's son. The force of the Christian's life is on the "inner" man which God sees, not the outer man which man sees (note Rom. 2:25-29). Consider how often Jews argued about the nature of the Messiah, or their genealogy, simply reflecting their misunderstanding of what God really wanted of them (cf. Matt. 23:23.).

V. 17 — Coupled with v. 16, this verse depicts the change "that's wrought by the touch of the master's hand." Nothing else would suffice to describe such change except the picture of old/new. Now read John 3:3-8. Certainly the character of the new covenant is responsible for this effect. Perhaps one of the reasons it is so effective is that it was to be written on the hearts of men.

V. 18 — All these effects are not of men (John 1:12-13), but rather from God and come by means of the conversion experience. If with Christ we have died (Col. 2:20) and been raised to sit with him (Col. 3:1), then we are to live to God (Rom. 6:10) and yield our members as instruments of righteousness, (Rom. 16:13, 19).

With the creation of a right spirit and a clean heart (Psalm 51), we being reconciled to God have one consuming passion in life: the service of reconciliation, of bringing men to God. We had sinned and broken the relationship with God, but have returned unto the shepherd and bishop of our souls (Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25). Now God who sent his son to bring us to him, and with Christ also gave all things, Romans 8:31-32, sends us to bring men to his son and thus to him.

V. 19 — The Christian faith is primarily concerned with man's relationship to God, the fact of his sin. God is not so far off that he is indifferent to man's situation, and he is definitely not ignorant of nor uncaring for man's lost condition. Therefore, he in Christ made provision for the righting of wrong relationships. Not only then has God loved us in Christ, but he has taken the initiative to restore what man, not God, tore apart.

In addition to making adequate provision for man's sins, God involved those who were restored to him in the task of bringing others to that same lovely relationship.

So it is God who has planned it all even though he was not the one who broke off the relationship by exchanging it for something else. Now he pleads with men to exchange (the actual meaning of the Greek term which is translated "reconcile") what they have, a life

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of alienation from all that is good, for what he in Jesus offers. It is a worthy undertaking for any of us to be involved in God's scheme of redemption as herein pictured. However, we should keep in mind that the text is talking primarily about Paul (and his fellow-apostles) and the message initially given to them. Secondly, any Christian is involved insofar as he/she can take God's revelation through the apostles and tell others how to be redeemed. We differ from Paul in that we have no revelation from God except what is in the Bible, and the New Testament in particular. Further, we do not need, nor are we promised, any corroborating signs as we deliver the message. We are not apostles — we can be, in a general sense, ambassadors.

V. 20 — **ambassadors** — From the Greek word meaning "older man" (so in Phile. v. 9; Eph. 6:20) then one chosen to act on behalf of another (as an emperor, country, etc.). Hence, the apostles, including Paul, were God's chosen representatives, imparting terms of forgiveness to all, for all time. See then Matthew 16:19; 18:18; John 20:23; and the book of Acts where these commissions were carried out. As Christians, we carry the message of the ambassador(s).

Paul sometimes would argue from this position of authority (as in I Cor. 9:1ff) and at other times disclaim any special privilege that normally went with an ambassadorship (I Cor. 9; II Cor. 12, etc.).

There was a great mystery revealed through these men initially (see Rom. 16:25-27; Eph. 3) and through Christians over the years that is summed up in the message: be reconciled to God. The whole Bible centers on the theme, developing it in one way or another, and concludes with the invitation to respond unto the call and be reconciled to God (Rev. 22). Note here Romans 3:10; 5:6-10; then 1:17 coupled with 3:21-26; 5:12-21 (all have sinned, are weak, enemies, sinners; all can be made righteous/sinless in Christ where God's grace abounds).

Here is summed up (again) the essence of Paul, who had no message of his own, no credentials of his own, claimed no honors for himself (see I Cor. 4), was but a servant (I Cor. 4:1-2) an earthen vessel through whom God made an appeal. We should probably pay attention to the fact that the appeal to be reconciled to God is the essence of the gospel message and intended for all men everywhere and yet is also directed at the Corinthian congregation.

we beseech — It is quite likely that the primary import of this text is that the plea to be reconciled was directed to some/all of the Corinthians, who needed to get right with God. This is so despite the fact that they were saints. Repentance is a lifetime process, and needed often. They had repented before, 7:8ff., and needed to do so again. However, the passage is also more generally applicable, as our comments indicate.

V. 21 —A great part of the ambassador's message is that God so loved the world that he came to live in it, be identified with it in many ways, and finally take the place of each and every person as a sinner; this last in the sense of taking the sins of (or the effect of the sins, so some) of all, thus suffering as a sinner in the sinner's place. Moreover, since God was just in punishment, he also provided in Christ the means of justification and reconciliation. By so doing, God became the justifier of man, Romans 3:26. One of the effects of this is that man was excluded from self-justification and shut up to the avenue of receiving by faith what could not be obtained by works. Hence, all the glory goes to God, I Corinthians 1:30-31.

Notice that it is affirmed that Jesus did not sin, even though in every way tested as we are. Check John 8:46; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; I John 3:5. Since this is so, we may share in his goodness, becoming righteous in him.

Consider the contrasts: 1) Christ as sinless; we sinners, 2) righteousness/sin, 3) in Christ/for us, 4) Christ was made/that we might become. Hence, the Scriptures make much of being "in Christ," since that is to be in the "state of acquittal" known as righteousness. As remarked before, only a faith-system can produce such; never a law-system.

6:1 — Restating one facet of an ambassador, that of a fellow-worker, (see I Cor. 3) rather than someone independent of others, he brings the appeal to "keep up" what had been started, the reconciled relationship with God. Further elaboration of how this is to be done is in 6:14—7:1. So the urging not to allow God's grace which made reconciliation a viable possibility to be in vain. God is our "fellow-worker" to do this, Philipians 2:12-13.

V. 2 — The idea of what God offers and the "now" imperative-ness of it causes Paul to divert his thoughts back to the service he was in, which was but the natural outcome of the dispensation of grace foretold by the prophet Isaiah, 49:8. Consider Hebrews 3:7ff. So, each Christian should recall that upon him have come the ends of the ages (I Cor. 10:11). Recheck Jesus' comments in Luke 4:16ff., and see Matthew 12:15ff. The acceptable time equals the whole New Testament age, prophesied of old, and actually in force at the time of writing.