

June 2011

Dear Brethren:

Paul put it this way: "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 5:20, *New King James Version*).

This is no small responsibility, but unfortunately many believers do not see it that way. They mistakenly think they may allow hypocrisy in their lives, sending a double message to the watching world. They fail to realize that their transformation in Christ should be highly visible to everyone.

At baptism, we are plunged into the Body of Christ, which is the Church of God. As ambassadors we need to represent Him, not a mere denomination. We must do our best to represent Him honorably. Paul told the Corinthians that believers should watch their behavior toward those both inside and outside of the church.

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God (1 Corinthians 10:31–32, *NKJV*).

This should be an eye-opening principle lived by church members toward unbelievers and the faithful alike. Ask yourself: Is my life bringing honor to God, or am I embarrassing Him? Do I "sell" Christ in conversation? Am I an advocate for pure biblical faith, or merely an inconsistent, occasional practitioner? Do I personally walk a way of life that is inviting to others, or is my conduct putting them off? Do I fudge on my Christian faith so that I am acceptable to non-Christians, or do I practice it wisely and without apology?

When those outside of the church view us, they see Christianity as a whole. If they encounter one believer who is hypocritical about his faith, they may assume that the entire church is full of that same hypocrisy. Many times they use this as a reason not to be Christian.

In reality, the standards of Christ are disturbingly high, and all believers struggle not to be hypocrites. We do not always practice perfectly what we preach perfectly. While those in Christ stand right with God by His grace, the perfecting of our walk is a process of becoming more like Christ little by little, one step at a time. It is not a present reality.

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:12, *King James Version*).

We can make progress in our public walk and talk as ambassadors for the Lord. Paul wrote to the church in Colossians 4:5: "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time."

From God's point of view, it does not matter where we have been or what we have done in the past; the power of Christ can transform us. The Apostle Paul wrote: "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9–10, *NKJV*).

We are called to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). The watching world should be able to witness our transformation. Our families should see a different person once we are converted. Remember, once we made the decision to follow Christ, the ability to hide our secrets disappears. For several decades now, the church of God experienced a massive assault on its credibility. Many high-profile scandals have occurred. The divorce rate within the church is higher than in the secular world. The church is split into fragments and fails to uphold biblical standards of conduct. Sadly, we often succumb to the influence of the prevailing culture instead of influencing the culture. If we are to be true ambassadors for Christ, we must represent authentically His teachings and lifestyle. We should keep in mind what Jesus said to the disciples: "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say" (Luke 6:46).

Wherever we go, we are part of something far greater than ourselves—the Kingdom of GOD. As Christ's ambassadors, let us do our duty until the Lord returns.

During these times, we must choose one over the other. This was the dilemma in which the Corinthian church found itself. It was trying to live in both "countries" (the world and the Kingdom of Heaven), and have full acceptance of both—and it was not working.

Now, this kind of situation could never happen in the church, could it? But just in case it could happen, and considering the fact that we have been appointed as ambassadors of the Kingdom of Heaven, let us listen to the words of chapter 5 of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians:

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.

For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. 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. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee (2 Corinthians 5:1–5, *NKJV*).

Paul is obviously speaking to true believers, for he assumes an understanding they could not possess unless they already had the Holy Spirit to give them this understanding. Yet, at the same time, Paul would not have had to say what he did if they had lived what they believed and knew to be the truth.

And in almost two thousand years, we are still very much like them. We have a tendency to look at our worldly life as the beginning and end of everything. We let our financial and health problems destroy us both physically and spiritually, and unfortunately most of these problems are of our own making.

We lose sight of the fact that our place in the Kingdom of God supersedes all earthly problems and circumstances. If what we have here is destroyed, we will have what is stored up for us in heaven when the Kingdom comes. And what we have here, even if it is not destroyed during our earthly lifetimes, will be lost to us at our death, when our bodies are destroyed. The only things that are forever are those that are heavenly. If we lose sight of this, and we lose what we have here on earth, we will be found naked. There will be nothing to cover us.

All things that are physical will pass away, either through death or destruction; but if we are true citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, then all things mortal are swallowed up when Christ returns. It is with this hope that we are clothed, and thus will not be found naked when things go wrong. For it is only in this assurance of eternal life that we can be true ambassadors of the Lord Jesus. And God has given us His Spirit as a pledge, or a token of the fact, that all that He has promised us is true and will one day come to pass.

Just suppose that tomorrow morning you awake to find yourself with a new spiritual body. If that gift is given only to the righteous, what should you have been doing previously? Would the people that met you in the past be able to say they had seen the Spirit of Jesus Christ in you and thus, want to have Him, too? For if that is the case, then the truth is in us now, and we will be a good example in whatever situation we find ourselves.

It is just as Paul reminds us:

So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:6–8).

Is this really the way we are? Do we do everything in our power to have God's heavenly will done in us? Or do we have a tendency to be overly concerned with what we have here and now, and to forget about God's promises and His Kingdom?

It all comes down to our attitude. Are we controlled by the situations in which we find ourselves, or do we step out firmly in our faith, doing what we all know the Lord wants us to do? For if we are living by faith, then we are living as Paul tells us in verse 9: "Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him." And whether or not we live by faith, or are controlled by the world, we will all be called to account for ourselves, as we are told in verse 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 is something that people who live by faith will accept as a matter of course, but that others will not want to believe.

The world does not want to accept the fact that if they continue to live in the corrupted ways that are all around us, without the Lord Jesus Christ, they are going to hell (the grave). They make up lies and false religions and try to convince themselves that the lie is the truth, but they will be accountable and will still go to the second death if they fail to repent when they are called.

But what about we who believe and step out with faith in that belief; do not we also have some responsibility? Yes, we do! It is as Paul tells us in verse 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."

Perhaps in this statement is the root of our problem as a church. Because we do not receive the full truth in our hearts, and truly desire to live by that faith, we cannot manifest that truth to others, as ambassadors should. Our very lives and lifestyles should convict others to repent of their ungodly worldly ways and to seek the Lord with all their hearts, souls, and might.

And in this ambassadorship, we must be careful of how we project ourselves so that our faith is not just a boastful attitude. Note what Paul says:

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. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; 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 (2 Corinthians 5:12–15).

These verses express the key attitude about ambassadorship. We cannot really be good ambassadors unless we are unashamed and excited about who and what we represent. We cannot encourage others to come to Christ if we look like we just rolled out of bed and sound like we wish we were still there. Nor can we have the "pride of ownership" of Christ. Both of these attitudes are wrong and actually turn people away. They are not the ways of an ambassador.

If the Holy Spirit is truly working through you and me, we do not have to do much more than live that life, doing the will of the Lord. Then others will see and hear the truth of the Gospel message, and if they are convicted in their own hearts by the Holy Spirit, they will repent.

Paul then goes on to tell us something else about how true ambassadors must see others:

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. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, 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 (2 Corinthians 5:16–19).

We are to see past the sins of each other to the person that God created us to become. Thus we can truly love the person while hating his sins, and hopefully he will do the same with us.

Most of all, we must realize that God is the one who reconciles us through Jesus Christ. It is not by or through us!

We, as ambassadors, have been given the Word of God which helps lead others to His saving grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Sure, God uses each of us who is willing to serve Him, but in that service we are to glorify Christ, just as the last two verses tell us:

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. For He made Him who knew no sin to be [a sin offering] for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (verses 20–21).

We can never manifest the righteousness of God through our own efforts or through the efforts of others, for God is sinless, and all of us have sinned. Thus, we can never achieve His righteousness in this manner.

The only way we can achieve the righteousness of God is through our faith and belief in Jesus Christ; because He died for our sins and paid the price in full, thus obliterating our transgressions before the eyes of the Father. Thus, we are accepted as being righteous, and given the duties of ambassadors, that is, if we are willing to walk away from the ways of the world. And it is the job of ambassadors to spread this good news—to live a life that so reflects Jesus Christ that others will seek Him because they want what we have.

Work hard and become a leader (in the Kingdom); be lazy and never succeed.

Your servant in Christ,

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Isaya Owak

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon W. Brisby', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jon W. Brisby