

BRINGING HOPE TO A HOPELESS HUMANITY

SERIES: HOW TO LIVE CHRIST-LIKE IN A POST-CHRISTIAN SOCIETY

by Ron Ritchie

Recently we were told that the California Highway Patrol was being trained in riot tactics in order to deal with the possibility of civil disobedience promised by some of the inner-city gangs of Los Angeles as well as some gangs within other major cities, if they were dissatisfied by the jury's verdict in the Rodney King case. Thanks be to God and many civil servants and Christians who went into those neighborhood as salt and light and calmed the anger that was burning in the hearts of those who were stirred to violence and peace prevailed. This whole nation watched and read about the stand-off in Waco, Texas between the FBI and the evil messiah and then all of us were stunned when the cult compound went up in fire, killing all those innocent children and many deceived adults. The tragic civil war in what was formerly Yugoslavia also continues with no real end in sight. Meanwhile we hear daily reports of genocide, rape, and starvation of thousands of innocents such as we have not heard of since the days of Hitler. And just a mile away from here is the city of East Palo Alto, recently called the murder capital of the nation because of drug wars, which cause the deaths of not only the criminals but also innocent victims who are caught in the cross-fire. As a result many police officers will not accept duty there.

Everywhere we turn we find ourselves confronted with a hopeless post-Christian humanity desperately trying to put bandages on one wound after another without ever confronting the real spiritual problem: When humanity loses God, it loses itself. And when humanity loses itself, it is left in a world of hopelessness. The only hope is to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

We can become very discouraged by such circumstances, and yet as we continue to draw on the life of Christ within us we discover that "we do not lose heart." The apostle Paul in his pre-Christian world in 56 AD was surrounded by corrupt politics, government, and religion. Further, after he and his disciples by the power of their risen Lord Jesus had established a church in Corinth, he was attacked by false teachers from within the body of Christ. But in 2 Corinthians 4:1-5:10 he told his spiritual children that he had not become discouraged and hopeless because (1) ever since he had placed his faith in Jesus as his Lord and Savior he had become a servant of the new covenant, which meant he was daily drawing on the power of God for his life and ministry; and because (2) he had learned to fix his eyes on the unseen, fix his mind on his eternal home, and fix his heart on pleasing the Lord Jesus. Now in 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2 Paul will continue to share the motivating factors behind his life and ministry and remind us of our identity and calling in a hopeless humanity. He will begin by explaining to us that...

We are New Creatures in Christ

2 Corinthians 5:11-17

Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences. We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, that you may have an answer for those who take pride in appearance, and not in heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

The false teachers were accusing Paul of boasting about himself and of not keeping his word to the Corinthians, and as they watched his ministry some thought he was crazy. With this in mind the apostle is reviewing for his spiritual children three motivating principles behind his life and ministry to them and to the hopeless world.

As we saw last week, Paul was first aware that as he ministered his motives were coming under the searchlight of the Lord and his word. Those ministries that were motivated by the flesh had to be judged as worthless, while those ministries that were motivated by the Holy Spirit produced eternal consequences. In that sense the judgment seat of Christ was open for business even while Paul was on earth. But then once Paul "folded his tent" and appeared before the judgment seat of Christ in eternity, our Lord would review the apostle's motives that he had not dealt with on earth (mainly because he had not been able to see as clearly as the Lord). The judgment seat of Christ in eternity would be a time of evaluation (see 1 Corinthians 3:12-15), encouragement (see 1 Corinthians 4:3-5), and rewards (see 2 Corinthians 4:17).

Now Paul shares a second motivating principle behind his life and ministry: "...knowing the fear of the Lord...." This is not the kind of fear a whipped dog feels. Rather, Paul knew who God was and felt respect and awe for him; he honored him. As Moses wrote to the Jews in the wilderness, "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul...." (Deuteronomy 10:12-13.) Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to understand that he sought by the power of the Holy Spirit to live out his life and ministry in the sight of the one and only living God whom he loved and respected. This fear of God kept him ministering in sincerity (literally "without wax") and in transparency (without masks), with motives open before God and the Corinthians so that the gospel would not be lost. (The false teachers, on the other hand, depended on the outward appearance of righteousness because their hearts were far from God.)

Further, the honor of the Lord and the respect Paul felt for him gave Paul a strong desire to "persuade men" in the spiritual community of Corinth to choose, as he did, to live out their lives with spiritual integrity so that they would be of eternal consequence. Paul's spiritual zeal for the Lord caused the false teachers and the fleshly Christians to think that he was mad and also that he was looking for another way to be invited back to Corinth (see 2 Corinthians 3:1-3). But Paul's response is, "For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you." He is saying, "If we appear to be mad, remember that our motive is to honor God even if it makes us look crazy. But if you realize that indeed we are of sound mind and not mad, then I hope you will understand that we want to serve you."

Now Paul gives his third and most important motivation for serving his risen Lord: "...for the love of Christ controls us...." The love of Jesus guarded him, controlled him, and pushed him out. He was at all times aware that Jesus loved him. He was overwhelmed by the unselfish, self-sacrificial love of the Messiah for his people Israel as well as for the Gentiles. If he looked crazy it was because of the love of God; he had no hidden motives.

Paul goes on to define the depth of God's love: "...that one died for all...." Romans 5:12 says, "Therefore, just as through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned...." The sinless lamb of God was willing to come to this earth in the form of our humanity and take on himself our sin, that basic sin of Adam that we all inherited when he rebelled against God in the garden so long ago, in order for the alienation between God and man to be healed. For once Adam sinned he could not save himself or regain his fellowship with God on his own terms. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." That sin of rebellion against God was so deep that it has continued through each successive generation to the present. On the opening page of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, the statement is made, "We are all gods and we might as well get good at it." Man is still reaching for the fruit from that forbidden tree.

"...Therefore all died...." All of us who put our faith in Jesus and in his sacrifice on the cross on our behalf are then spiritually placed on that cross with him, so that when his flesh died as a result of the wrath of God against all sin, our flesh died, too. "...knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin"

(Romans 6:6-7). Our old life, the life in the flesh that we all lived out of until we bowed our knee to Jesus as Lord and Savior, was found by God to be worthy of death.

"...And He died for all...." That is, he died for all who are willing to place their faith in Jesus as their only sin-bearer and Savior. His death sets free from the power of the flesh and the sin nature all who place their faith in him and his sacrifice on the cross. But the best news is yet to come:

"...That they who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf." Romans 6:8 says, "Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him [and for him]..." Our old nature and all of its power over us are now dead and buried with Christ. But it still has influence over our memories of our old life. Now our new resurrected life filled with the Holy Spirit and his power gives us the choice for the first time to no longer live to please ourselves but to live to please the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul now demonstrates an immediate effect of his new resurrected life in Christ: From now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. "...Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer." Paul seems to indicate that before he became a Christian he himself saw Jesus in Jerusalem. He may have been present on Palm Sunday when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a colt as the long-awaited Messiah and Prince of Peace, and seen the people laying down palm leaves before him while they sang from Psalm 118:

"Hosanna to the Son of David;
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord;
Hosanna in the highest!"
Matthew 21:9.)

He may have been among the chief priests and scribes in the temple area when they watched him chase out the money changers and then heal the blind and lame as the children kept crying out, "Hosanna to the Son of David," causing the priests and scribes to become indignant. It may have been that at that time he saw Jesus as a blasphemer and political rebel. This may have been the seed of hatred that caused Paul (then Saul) to persecute the new body of Jewish believers even as far away as the city of Damascus. But he came face-to-face with that same but then resurrected Jesus on the Damascus road (some twenty years before he wrote this letter) and finally saw him for the first time as his long-awaited Messiah, Lord, and Savior. Ever since that day his spiritual eyes had been opened to see all men and women as being created in the image of God and greatly loved by him.

Paul continues, "Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature [in position as opposed to practice]; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." The word new here is the same word used in the phrase "new covenant" in chapter 3, verse 6. It means new not in time but in form or quality of life. This new creation can occur only when one places their faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Only God can take a person dead in their sins and make them alive in Christ (see Ephesians 2:1-10). Jesus told Nicodemus he must be "born again." When we are born again we become a child of God and a spiritual being who then is given the gift of the person and power of the Holy Spirit, who will enable us to live our new life in Christ to the glory of God and to our personal joy. Paul wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20.)

The fruit of this new creation is that "the old things passed away." In the immediate context Paul was thinking about his fleshly view of Jesus in his humanity, but in the fuller context he was thinking of how he had previously thought of all men and women. He had related to them based on their position, power, wealth, sex, race, religion, color, etc. because that is the way he had regarded himself, as we see in Philippians 3:4-6 where he gives us his fleshly credentials. But when he became a new creation by the hand of God, he began his spiritual transformation in which "new things have come" (2 Corinthians 3:16-18). Now he found that he was beginning to see all men and women as created equal in the image of God. He summarized his new understanding when he wrote to the Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28).

As children of God we find our hearts motivated to bring the message of eternal hope to a hopeless humanity. As ministers of the new covenant we know that we can choose to draw on the risen life of Christ each day to serve those around us in deed and word. As new creatures in Christ we are motivated to live the rest of our lives to the glory of God in light of the reality of the judgment seat of Christ, the fear of the Lord, and the love of Christ. Paul tells us now that we are also motivated by the daily realization that we are called by God to be...

Ministers of reconciliation

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

The basic problem with mankind is that all of us were born with the same nature as our father Adam, who willfully disobeyed God and sinned against him. Because of that sin he became an enemy of God; sin severed his fellowship with God and his blessings from God. Since God is holy and just, justice had to be served. All men and women who are born out of Adam are placed under the wrath of God; that is, they experience life without God. They are sentenced to this death because they do not conform to God's standards, "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." So how can mankind ever get back to God so that they can live once again in fellowship with him; how can they be reconciled to God? The good news is this: God, against whom man rebelled, initiated a solution to the problem of this alienation by sending his Son Jesus to die on the cross for the sins of his enemies. Christ's death opened the door for reconciling the world to God. It made it possible for you and me as individual sinners to be reconciled to God.

That reconciliation is possible when we realize first that we have sinned against God, and then that God sent his Son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. If we willingly acknowledge him as our only Savior, our only way back to a relationship with God, he will not only forgive us of our sin but then justify us in Christ in his sight. We will then become spiritually born again as children of God and new creatures in Christ.

As joyful recipients of the good news of Jesus Christ that has turned our hopelessness condition into a living hope, we are then called by God to turn around and share this good news with all those who are still living in their hopeless condition. Our message is that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them..." It is God who loves the world through Christ, and it is God, not having initiated the separation, who is still seeking to reconcile the world to himself in his Son Jesus.

I want to remind you of an important distinction here. While the *sins* of humanity have been dealt with on the cross by the death of Jesus, in John 16:7-11 we are told that the Holy Spirit has come to convict the world of *sin*, which is that, according to the words of Jesus, "...they do not believe in Me." Individual sins are not the issue between God and rebellious mankind. The only issue is, "What is your relationship with my Son Jesus? Did you place your faith in him who is the only one who can deal with your sins against me and the only one who can open the door back into fellowship with me? I desire reconciliation with you---do you desire reconciliation with me?"

That is why Paul wrote, "...if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed." (Romans 10:9-11.)

"...and [He] gave us the ministry of reconciliation..." What an incredible God we have! What an incredible ministry and message! As God's children we have a responsibility by his power to spread the good news. The Father's righteous and holy demands have been satisfied in the death of his Son for the sins of mankind. The door between us and God is open again. We can go home. Reconciliation is possible for each individual whom

God calls if they place their faith in and accept Jesus Christ the risen Son of God as their Lord and only Savior, with the realization that he is their only mediator, their only bridge back to God. That is good news!

How are we called to share the word of reconciliation? Francis of Assisi wrote some eight hundred years ago: "Preach the gospel at all times; use words when necessary." As children of God we find our hearts motivated to bring the message of eternal hope to a hopeless humanity by good deeds and words. As we walk into that humanity each day we know that we have the presence and power of the Holy Spirit who enables us to minister, and it is he who fills our hearts on a daily basis. He reminds us that our spiritual motivation for loving and ministering to those around us is the judgment seat of Christ, the fear of the Lord, and the love of Christ for us and then for all those around us who have never understood the gospel of Jesus Christ. We called to be ministers of reconciliation. Then we are also called to be...

Ambassadors for Christ

2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain--for He says,

"At the acceptable time I listened to you,
And on the day of salvation I helped you";
behold, now is "the acceptable time," behold, now is "the day of salvation"....

An ambassador is a diplomatic official of the highest rank, appointed and accredited as a representative of his country in a foreign country. He is appointed to reflect the character and policies of his leaders and people. In the same light God has appointed us on his behalf to represent his character and His message of good news to a foreign world.

"...We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who had no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." If those to whom we minister as Christ's ambassadors believe the good news and accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior, they in turn are placed into Christ and become the righteousness of God. In Christ they become all that God requires a person to be, all they could never be in themselves. As Isaiah (Isaiah 61:10.) tells us,

"I will rejoice greatly in the LORD,
My soul will exult in my God;

For He has clothed me with garments of salvation,
He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness."

Finally, "...working together with Him," Paul says, "we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain." Paul is appealing to his spiritual children as new creatures in Christ to not waste their new lives on anything else, but to fulfill their calling as ministers of reconciliation and ambassadors for Christ in God's wonderful plan of redemption. God loves us, and the proof of that love is the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ and also the change we experience in our lives. The apostle then quotes from Isaiah 49:8 "At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you...." In the context Isaiah the prophet tells the reader that God the Father is speaking to His Son who has been rejected by the nation of Israel which then lead to His death on the cross for our sins. "At the acceptable time I listened to you." The Father was telling His Son that He heard His cry on the cross "It is finished," the plan for Lamb of God to die for the sin of the world was finished. Then He was buried but on the third day, the Father said I helped You by raising You from the dead. It is because of that resurrection of Jesus Christ from the death that the "day of salvation" that Isaiah prophesied has already come and the door of salvation is now opened for all who will place their faith in Jesus. Paul then encouraged the Christian community to take that good news of our Risen Lord Jesus Christ into our hopeless world, the good news that all who place their faith in Him as their risen

Lord and Savior can be reconciled to God the Father. He also reminded them the door of salvation which is now opened will not always remain open so take advantage of this open door.

As children of God in this "day of salvation" we should find our hearts motivated by the Judgment Seat of Christ, the fear of God and the love of Christ to bring the message of eternal hope to a hopeless post-Christian humanity. We are servants of the new covenant drawing on the life of our risen Lord and Savior for the power and wisdom necessary to deal with the many hopeless situations we face daily. We are also called to step out by faith into our hopeless world understanding that we are now new creatures in Christ, ministers of reconciliation, and ambassadors for Christ bringing the good news that the door is still open to be reconciled to God through Christ Jesus...for now is the day of salvation!

Catalog No. 4340
2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2
Sixth Message
Ron Ritchie
April 4, 1993

Copyright (C) 1995 Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. This data file is the sole property of Discovery Publishing, a ministry of Peninsula Bible Church. It may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this data file must contain the above copyright notice. This data file may not be copied in part, edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Discovery Publishing. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Discovery Publishing, 3505 Middlefield Rd. Palo Alto, CA. 94306-3695.