

Christ's Love and the Church II Corinthians 5:11-21

In his commentary on this passage, John MacArthur writes “today’s church is confronted by a seemingly endless variety of ministry methods, strategies, and styles. Some argue that the church should agitate for social and political change to force cultural morality (moralism), or even help usher in the kingdom (postmillennialism). Others insist the church’s message should be inoffensive, upbeat, and affirming, to create a positive atmosphere in which nonbelievers can feel welcome and not threatened (pragmatism). Still others believe their church’s primary task is to defend its theological distinctives (denominationalism).”

“But there is no confusion in Scripture about what the church’s mission is to be – evangelism. This definitive passage clearly articulates the heart and soul of the church’s responsibility as it represents Jesus Christ in the world. God has called all believers, especially pastors, to proclaim the message of reconciliation.”

We are looking at the church and its role and responsibility in the world. We must realize that God has left us here for a purpose, otherwise He would just usher us through the pearly gates, which would solve a whole lot of problems for us, but that isn’t His intention. I think the church in general looks at the Great Commission like a deer looking at headlights – it freezes us into immobility. We have our marching orders but we look for direction on where to go or what to do, we look for confirmation that it is in fact what was meant or we look for other orders because these seem either too difficult and we don’t want to follow them or they must be for someone else. Last week we considered **Acts 1:8** and the role of the Holy Spirit who empowers us to carry out this mandate to witness to the world.

From today’s passage we want to look at the

motivation behind the role and responsibility of the church to one another and to outsiders. There is only one source that can help us carry out our responsibility – it is through Christ’s love. Turn to **II Corinthians 5:11-21**.

Christ’s love compels us to active service

Christ’s love changes us into amazing new creation

Christ’s love challenges us to advocate for reconciliation

I. CHRIST’S LOVE COMPELS US TO ACTIVE SERVICE – v. 11-15

Paul has just told the Corinthians that there is coming a day in which we will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and give an account for everything we did – good or bad. This has nothing to do with justification from sin. Our faith in Christ has fully and forever dealt with sin, so that is not what this judgment is about. This judgment is about what we have done since becoming a Christian. That may be a fearful day for many who have not lived as they should according to the moral principles of Scripture.

Every attitude from our heart will be judged.

Every action from our life will be judged.

Every word from our mouth will be judged.

Did I quarrel with my siblings or my spouse or my neighbor?

Did I cheat on my taxes or on that test?

Did I get angry at that driver who cut me off or my boss when I was not promoted or was let go?

Did I sing to glorify God or get attention to myself?

Did I use my spiritual gift that was entrusted to me?

Did I serve with gladness or did I grumble when I did something in the name of the Lord?

Did I – and you fill in the blank?

Everything will be judged and we will receive what we have coming. How does that make you feel?

Paul then begins verse 11 by saying that because of the judgment to come we ought to know what it is to fear God. That He is the one we give an accounting to should motivate us to reverence Him

more and serve Him better. I think if we really understood verse 10 we would change a lot of our ways and words. If we really understood the Judge we will stand before we would be more careful.

In retirement years my Dad serves as bailiff for the sheriff's department. He sometimes talks about the guys who come in to court with an attitude and have no respect for the court or for the judge, until the judge lays down the law and snaps the defendant back into some semblance of reality. They come in a "tude" and leave with a "tude" adjustment because the judge has commanded reverence for the office he holds.

If we truly understood the gravity or ramifications of our actions and words for eternity and that we will one day give an account of them before a holy and just God, we would change our behavior.

Paul was someone who understood that. Everything he did was for God and for God's glory. Yet there were some who attempted to convince the Corinthians that Paul wasn't who he really claimed to be, that he had ulterior motives, that he was a phony. In this section Paul reminds them that he is the true apostle, not these other false teachers. He says that what he is is very plain to God and he hopes that they will also be convinced of his true intent. He wanted them to consider his actions and words in comparison to the others in an effort to persuade them that he was the real deal. It wasn't as he said in **verse 12** in an effort to pat himself on the back. The Message reads **"We're not saying this to make ourselves look good to you."**

Paul was sharing his past actions as a way to convince them that what he did, he did for the Lord. It didn't matter what other people thought of him. From **verse 13** it is implied that some thought he was crazy. If you read **Acts 19:30** and **21:35-40** who in their right mind would face an angry mob intent on doing him bodily harm. That happened both in Ephesus and Philippi and in Jerusalem.

Who in their right mind would go back into a city where he had just been stoned and left for dead (**Acts 14:19-20**). Some of the things Paul did don't make sense to us, they don't seem like rational decisions, but then he didn't care about the opinions of man, he was called by the Lord to preach the gospel.

It was not the actions of someone insane, but rather someone who was totally sold out to Christ. **I think it was Albert Einstein who said "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."** That was Paul. Even though he might get beat up again, his hope was that one more person would get saved by hearing the message of grace through Christ. **"It is for the sake of God."**

Paul exemplifies our first point that Christ's love compels us to active service. We see that in vs. 14. **Think about that for a moment and then ask yourself what has Christ's love compelled me to do lately?** If I were to ask each of you to tell me how Christ demonstrated His love for us, I think you would all give me the same answer. He showed His love by dying on the cross. **"For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died."**

Now he isn't talking about physical death. Unless or until the Lord returns we are still bound to that part of the curse. **"It's appointed unto men once to die."** (**Hebrews 9:27**) Paul is referring to spiritual death, death to self. When I come to Christ for the first time at salvation, I died to self and accepted His way as the only way to be saved. There after I must die daily to self. **"I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice..."** (**Romans 12:1**)

Every day I need to die to self. Why? I need to die to self because self wants to sit on the throne, self wants to be exalted, self wants to be served. Self wants what self wants. Self thinks only of self. Self will not serve.

Paul is saying that because of Christ's great demonstration of love for us in dying for us our response out of gratitude for this great love is to go out and serve Christ. Notice **verse 15**. **“And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.”** That's how Paul lived. He served Christ, by serving others. That's how we should live too.

Philippians 2:3-4 “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

Christ's love for us in giving the ultimate sacrifice on the cross should compel us to serve Him by serving others. He is our great example. He didn't come to earth and demand obeisance, that people fall down and worship Him. Some did out of true reverence, but mostly out of fear and I don't mean reverential awe. Whenever He cast a demon out they didn't ignore His command, they had to obey Him. When He was in the garden at the time of His arrest, the guards came and He asked them who they were looking for. They said they were looking for this guy Jesus. He told them they had found Him and when He spoke they all fell down. Many ridiculed Him, mocked Him, beat Him, condemned Him. Even though He could have commanded their worship, in fulfillment of Scripture He came not to be served but to serve and it was out of His love that He came to die for them.

Does knowing what Christ did for you and me compel us to serve Him? That is part of the responsibility given to the church. **Romans 12:1** reminds us that our service is an act of worship. Paul's ministry was one of integrity, an act of service to the Lord. As a church, as an individual, as followers of Christ that should be our desire as well.

A ministry like that will have an eternal impact doing kingdom work here and now because Christ loves us and we show our love in return.

1. Such service has a clearly defined mission that they pursue with clarity and purpose.

Purpose: “The purpose of this Church shall be the edification of the believers, the evangelism of the non-believers, and the fellowship of its members through worship, preaching and teaching, and Christ-centered activities.”

Mission Statement: “Gathering in Christ, Growing with Christ, Going for Christ.”

2. Such service is internally motivated. It actively seeks out opportunities to serve.

3. Such service is courageous. Its people are dedicated to its tasks and goals; dedicated to godly living; don't allow obstacles to stand in their way; refuse to back down in adversity and stand for the truth of the gospel.

4. Such service is enthusiastic generating a contagious excitement about missions and vision and ministry encouraging and enabling others to support it and be involved in it.

5. Such service is creative in its ministry ideas unwilling to remain in the status quo.

Is that us? Are we compelled to serve because of Christ's love? There are needs all over both within the body of Christ and outside where we can serve.

Not only should Christ's love compel us to active service, His love changes us into an amazing new creation.

II. CHRIST'S LOVE CHANGES US INTO AN AMAZING NEW CREATION – v. 16-17

In this section Paul makes a confession. He admits that there was a point in time in which he held the popular view of Christ. His perspective was based

purely on common opinion – Jesus was not who He claimed to be. He was either a great liar able to deceive many that He was God incarnate or He was a lunatic, self-deluded into believing He was the Son of God. But it was on the road to Damascus that his opinion of Jesus had a 180 degree turn around. Confronted with the very Jesus He thought was just a fake, he realized quickly that Jesus was truly who He claimed to be – He was the Son of God, He did die for sin, He was resurrected. His perspective about Jesus changed. When that happened so did his heart and as we see in vs. 17, he became a new creation. **“Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold all things have become new.”**

That is only possible through Christ. Psychology wants to change your mind, the way you think. The world wants to change your outside by getting toned and tanned or by purchasing the latest toys, the fastest cars, or the newest trendy clothes. Jesus wants to change your heart. The big band wagon these days is gun control. We have to stop the violence by controlling guns with tighter regulations. That’s like throwing some logs into the Niagara Falls hoping to stop the river from flowing. What needs to take place is for the heart to change. When Christ enters into a life at salvation, the darkness of the heart is transformed. There is an instant miracle that takes place where I become a new creation. Everything that I was has now changed. God sees me as holy – He sees me wrapped in the righteousness of Christ. That is my position. Over time my practice needs to become like my position and someday it will.

I John 3:2-3 “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be but we know that when He appears we will be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. Every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

We are a new creation. We are no longer held in bondage to the sin that controls us. We are made new in Christ. This means new in quality. The believer’s old self has been put to death and we are new. Old values and plans and ideas and desires and beliefs have been changed. You will sometimes read or hear a commercial about some product that is **“new and improved.” Well, which is it? Is it new or is it improved?** When we trust Christ as Savior we are not improved, we are new on the inside. According to Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 when we become new we have laid aside the old self. We can no longer use the excuse about sinful practices and attitudes that **“it’s just the way I am.”** To that I say baloney. It’s the way you choose to be because in Christ you are a new creation.

Romans 6:6-14 (NLT) “We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin.

7 For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin.

8 And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him.

9 We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him.

10 When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God.

11 So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.

12 Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires.

13 Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God.

14 Sin is no longer your master, for you no

longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace.

In Christ, new things have come. In the Greek it is in the perfect tense meaning that it was a past act that has continuing results in the present. I am holy in position, and I am becoming holy in practice.

Ephesians 2:10 "we are God's workmanship ..."

Only through Christ in us can we change and that change takes place inside with the heart and is seen on the outside through our life actions. As I see it, the church not only serves one another it also helps each believer grow in his faith, to mature the practice of the new creation.

Ephesians 4:13-16

Ephesians 4:32-5:2

Only through Christ's love working in us can we see such a dramatic change like that.

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III. CHRIST'S LOVE CHALLENGES US TO ADVOCATE FOR RECONCILIATION – v. 18-21

Notice that reconciliation starts with God. It doesn't come from us. God doesn't need reconciling. We do. We need reconciliation with God because we were the ones who destroyed our relationship with Him through our sin.

Reconciliation is simply the restoration of friendship and fellowship that had previously been severed by some act on the part of one of the parties involved. Reconciliation means that someone is completely altered and adjusted to a required standard and the hostility is removed. Since we were the ones who committed the act that led to the alienation and hostility, we must be the ones to

change. But God knew that we could never change enough on our own to meet the standard that was required, so He made a way possible for us to be reconciled to Him. It was through the death of His Son. Jesus makes reconciliation possible. He has done His part. Our part is to seek peace with Him through faith in Christ, the provision for reconciliation. Reconciliation is not possible through our own efforts like religious pursuit or good works. It can only be accomplished through Christ.

Now notice a very important responsibility that has been given to us as a result of our being reconciled to God. It's in **verse 19 – "He has committed to us the message of reconciliation."**

We have been entrusted with this message for its care to keep it right and pass it on.

The role of the church – you and I, is to share with non-Christians that they need to be and can be reconciled with God. We share with them that this is possible through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and our faith in Him to bring about this reconciliation between us. That's the only way to get to heaven. That message of hope has been given to us to proclaim. Why? Because as verse 20 says we are His ambassadors, His representatives. We bring that message of hope and assurance to those who desperately need to be reconciled with God. We are God's representatives to proclaim the message of reconciliation.

Does the church also need the message of reconciliation today? More than ever. With strained relationships within the church, it's no wonder the message we proclaim isn't appealing to the non-believer. **Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 4:13** compel us to forgive as God has forgiven us. It is an extension of His grace. His grace truly is amazing. **Max Lucado writes that "God's grace has a drenching about it. A wildness about it. A white water, riptide, turn-yourself-upside-downness about it. Grace comes after you."** Without God's grace

reconciliation is not possible between God and man or between individuals.

Matthew 5:23-24 makes it very clear that we should seek reconciliation with another believer with whom we may be at odds and this should take place before we come to worship. Today we'll be observing communion. It might be time to be reconciled with a fellow believer – a parent, a sibling, a spouse, a neighbor, a co-worker, or other relative.

There is a story about two brothers who lived on adjoining farms, but had developed a deep quarrel. They had often shared their resources, but that practice stopped; and there was nothing left but bitterness. One morning there was a knock on the door of one of the brothers. It was a carpenter asking if there was any work to do.

The farmer said did have something he could do. He took the carpenter to where the two properties met and showed him how the other brother had taken a bulldozer and created a creek where the meadow used to be. He told the carpenter his brother had done it to make him angry and so he wanted a big fence built so he would never have to see his brother's property again.

So the carpenter worked hard all day. When he reported back, the owner noticed that instead of a fence the carpenter had built a bridge over the creek. The other brother saw the bridge and was quite moved that his brother would do such a thing. The two brothers met in the middle and embraced. They saw the carpenter packing his tools and asked him to stay and do more work. The carpenter told them he had other bridges to build. **Do you need to build such a bridge of reconciliation in your life?**

Shortly after the turn of the last century, Japan invaded, conquered, and occupied Korea. Of all their oppressors, Japan was the most ruthless. They overwhelmed the Koreans with a brutality that would sicken the strongest of stomachs. Their crimes against women and children were inhuman.

For a long time many Koreans lived with the physical and emotional scars from the Japanese occupation.

One group singled out for concentrated oppression was the Christians. When the Japanese army overpowered Korea one of the first things they did was board up the evangelical churches and eject most foreign missionaries. The conquerors started by refusing to allow churches to meet and jailing many of the key Christian spokesmen. The oppression intensified as the Japanese military increased its profile in the South Pacific. The "Land of the Rising Sun" spread its influence through a reign of savage brutality. Anguish filled the hearts of the oppressed -- and kindled hatred deep in their souls.

One pastor persistently entreated his local Japanese police chief for permission to meet for services. His nagging was finally accommodated, and the police chief offered to unlock his church ... for one meeting. It didn't take long for word to travel. Committed Christians starving for an opportunity for unhindered worship quickly made their plans. Long before dawn on that promised Sunday, Korean families throughout a wide area made their way to the church. They passed the staring eyes of their Japanese captors, but nothing was going to steal their joy. As they closed the doors behind them they shut out the cares of oppression and shut in a burning spirit anxious to glorify their Lord.

The Korean church has always had a reputation as a singing church. Their voices of praise could not be concealed inside the little wooden frame sanctuary. Song after song rang through the open windows into the bright Sunday morning. For a handful of peasants listening nearby, the last two songs this congregation sang seemed suspended in time. It was during a stanza of "Nearer My God to Thee" that the Japanese police chief waiting outside gave the orders. The people toward the back of the church could hear them when they barricaded the doors, but no one realized that they had doused the church with kerosene until they smelled the smoke.

The dried wooden skin of the small church quickly ignited. Fumes filled the structure as tongues of flame began to lick the baseboard on the interior

walls. There was an immediate rush for the windows. But momentary hope recoiled in horror as the men climbing out the windows came crashing back in -- their bodies ripped by a hail of bullets. The good pastor knew it was the end. With a calm that comes from confidence, he led his congregation in a hymn whose words served as a fitting farewell to earth and a loving salutation to heaven. The first few words were all the prompting the terrified worshipers needed. With smoke burning their eyes, they instantly joined as one to sing their hope and leave their legacy. Their song became a serenade to the horrified and helpless witnesses outside. Their words also tugged at the hearts of the cruel men who oversaw this flaming execution of the innocent. Alas! and did my Savior bleed?
and did my Sovereign die?
Would he devote that sacred head
for such a worm as I?

Just before the roof collapsed they sang the last verse, their words an eternal testimony to their faith.

But drops of grief can ne'er repay
the debt of love I owe:
Here, Lord, I give myself away
'Tis all that I can do!
At the cross, at the cross
Where I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away --
It was there by faith I received my sight,
And now I am happy all the day.

The strains of music and wails of children were lost in a roar of flames. The elements that once formed bone and flesh mixed with the smoke and dissipated into the air. The bodies that once housed life fused with the charred rubble of a building that once housed a church. But the souls who left singing finished their chorus in the throne room of God. Clearing the incinerated remains was the easy part. Erasing the hate would take decades. For some of the relatives of the victims, this carnage was too much. Evil had stooped to a new low, and there seemed to be no way to curb their bitter loathing of the Japanese.

In the decades that followed, that bitterness was passed on to a new generation. The Japanese, although conquered, remained a hated enemy. The

monument the Koreans built at the location of the fire not only memorialized the people who died, but stood as a mute reminder of their pain.

Inner rest? How could rest coexist with bitterness as deep as marrow in the bones? Suffering, of course, is a part of life. People hurt people. Almost all of us have experienced it at some time. Maybe you felt it when you came home to find that your spouse had abandoned you, or when your integrity was destroyed by a series of well-timed lies, or when your company was bled dry by a partner. It kills you inside. Bitterness clamps down on your soul like iron shackles.

The Korean people who found it too hard to forgive could not enjoy the "peace that passes all understanding." Hatred choked their joy.

It wasn't until 1972 that any hope came. A group of Japanese pastors traveling through Korea came upon the memorial. When they read the details of the tragedy and the names of the spiritual brothers and sisters who had perished, they were overcome with shame. Their country had sinned, and even though none of them were personally involved (some were not even born at the time of the tragedy), they still felt a national guilt that could not be excused. They returned to Japan committed to right a wrong. There was an immediate outpouring of love from their fellow believers. They raised \$25,000. The money was transferred through proper channels and a beautiful white church building was erected on the sight of the tragedy. When the dedication service for the new building was held, a delegation from Japan joined the relatives and special guests.

Although their generosity was acknowledged and their attempts at making peace appreciated, the memories were still there. Hatred preserves pain. It keeps the wounds open and the hurts fresh. The Koreans' bitterness had festered for decades. Christian brothers or not, these Japanese were descendants of a ruthless enemy. The speeches were made, the details of the tragedy recalled, and the names of the dead honored. It was time to bring the service to a close. Someone in charge of the agenda thought it would be appropriate to conclude with the same two songs that were sung the day the

church was burned. The song leader began the words to "Nearer My God to Thee."

But something remarkable happened as the voices mingled on the familiar melody. As the memories of the past mixed with the truth of the song, resistance started to melt. The inspiration that gave hope to a doomed collection of churchgoers in a past generation gave hope once more. The song leader closed the service with the hymn "At the Cross." The normally stoic Japanese could not contain themselves. The tears that began to fill their eyes during the song suddenly gushed from deep inside. They turned to their Korean spiritual relatives and begged them to forgive. The guarded, calloused hearts of the Koreans were not quick to surrender. But the love of the Japanese believers -- not intimidated by decades of hatred -- tore at the Koreans' emotions.

At the cross, at the cross
Where I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away ...

One Korean turned toward a Japanese brother, then another and then the floodgates holding back a wave of emotion let go. The Koreans met their new Japanese friends in the middle. They clung to each other and wept. Japanese tears of repentance and Korean tears of forgiveness intermingled to bathe the site of an old nightmare. Heaven had sent the gift of reconciliation to a little white church in Korea.

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It challenges us to advocate for reconciliation