Introduction

In Chapter 5 Paul speaks of his confidence of heaven (vv.1-8); and his concern to please the Lord Jesus (vv.9-13); and Christ’s love for us as the controlling passion for Paul’s endeavors (vv.14-17). Now Paul adds yet another motive; his commission from God (vv.18-21). Paul has been made an Ambassador by Christ for Christ. That includes a message of regeneration (v.17); reconciliation (vv.18-19); redemption (vv.20-21).

The role of the Ambassador is to act in the interests of the Sovereign.

Someone has said that an ambassador is a good man sent abroad to lie for his country. This is not what Paul has in mind!

Paul has come with a message of peace. God is calling sinners to cease hostilities; the Lord Himself as paid the price for peace. Human beings need not be at war with God.

Our Message: Regeneration (v.17)

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV)

17Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

The expression “a new creation” or “a new creature” is related to the Greek word ktisis-which has the root meaning “the act of creating” or “that which has been created”. Arndt and Gingrich write: “The Christian is described by Paul as kaine ktisis--a new creature; and the state of being in the new faith by the same words as a new creation (Gal. 6:15).

“. . .old things have passed away. . .all things become new”; are passed away (aorist tense) parelthen--which indicates a crisis experience--are becoming new (perfect tense)--gegonen--indicating a continuing satate--NASB ‘the old things passed away; behold new things have come’.

When Jesus invades our lives He does more than change our outlook or perspective; we are regenerated; born again made new. People have used the illustration of a cocoon and a butterfly where there is a total metamorphosis. Whatever the worm or caterpillar used to be is dissolved in the cocoon and the butterfly appears to be an entirely different creature.

People may argue that the DNA has not changed; but everything seems different.
So it is with the person who is Born Again. Our relationships and value system and outlook is transformed. Our worldview dissolves and is now restructured by Christ. We look at reality on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done in our lives.

This is different from simply taking off a set of soiled clothes and putting on fresh garments.

Something has to be different on the inside.

Some of you remember the story of Dr. Christian Barnard; the first man in the world to perform a heart transplant. The Doctor spoke to one of his transplant patients; Dr. Philip Blaiberg. Suddenly Barnard asked, “Would you like to see your old heart?” Blaiberg said he would. At 8:00 one evening the men stood in the room of the Groote Schuur Hospital, in Johannesberg, South Africa. Dr. Barnard went up into a cupboard, took down a glass container and handed to Dr. Blaiberg. Inside that container was Blaiberg’s old heart. For a moment he stood there in stunned silence—the first man in history ever to hold his own heart in his hands. Finally, he spoke and ten minutes plied Dr. Barnard with technical questions. Then he turned to take a final look at the contents of the glass container, and said, “So this is my old heart, that caused me so much trouble.” He handed it back, turned it away and left it forever.

Conversion is not simply a transplant. Our old heart (or nature) is not taken away and replaced by a new one; so that we can look back and say “There was a day when I had an old heart, and old nature, but now it has been taken away and can never again cause me any trouble.” The fact of the matter is that our old nature remains firmly entrenched, within us, incurably antagonistic to the things of God and constantly promoting “envious desires” (see John Blanchard).

We live in a world where people are quite content to have Church without a gospel; and Christianity without Christ.

A long time member of St. John’s church scolded the new pastor for his radical ideas and changes; “Reverend, if God were alive today, He would be shocked at the changes in this church”!

Prior to our conversion we judged people by human standards. But now everything is changed. Including the way we judge.

We sometimes make the mistake that if a person is saved old habits, old lusts, old patterns of sinful behavior are forever done away; but that is not the point of the passage.

The verse does not describe the believer’s **practice but the believer’s position** (see William MacDonald p. 67).
Ambassadors For Christ
2 Corinthians 5:17-21

The key is the phrase “in Christ”. “In Christ” old things have passed away and all things have become new. Unfortunately “in me” not all this is true--yet. But as we grow in Christ--as we mature in our Savior we should expect that our practice will more and more reflect our position.

And one day--when Jesus returns--the two will find themselves in perfect agreement.

Our Message: Reconciliation (vv.18-19)

18Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,

“Now all things are of God”--that is all these things are from God; the Lord is the author, the source; and so there is no grounds for human boasting or human accomplishment.

What kind of God is God? He is the kind of God who has reconciled us to Himself through the Lord Jesus Christ!

In the New Concise Bible Dictionary under the heading reconciliation we read; “By the death of the Lord Jesus on the cross, God anulled in grace the distance which sin had brought between Himself and man, in order that all things might through Christ, be presented agreeably to himself. Believers are already reconciled, through Christ’s death, to be presented holy, unblameable, and unreprovable (a new creation). God was in Christ, when Christ was on the earth, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses; but now that the love of God has been fully revealed in the cross, the testimony has gone out world-wide, beseeching men to be reconciled to God. The end is that God may have pleasure in man.”

There are two great passages in the New Testament on the theme of reconciliation; here and Romans 5:10-11.

The noun katallage occurs twice here and twice in Romans (5:11; 11:15); and no where else in the NT. The verb katallasso--is found three times here (vv.18;19;20) and once in Romans 5:10. The only other place in the NT is 1 Corinthians 7:11; it is used of an estranged wife being reconciled to her husband.

Buechsel says of Paul’s ministry of reconciliation; “It brings before men the action by which God takes them up again into fellowship with Himself (TDNT; 1:258).

What does the word here mean? Our sinful self-seeking ways are overcome and the fellowship with God is created in which it is replaced by living for Christ” (see TDNT 1:255).
Ambassadors For Christ
2 Corinthians 5:17-21

19that 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.

What is the ministry of reconciliation? This is Paul’s explanation. How are we to think about this statement? It may mean that God was in Christ (Deity)--that is certainly true. We can also understand this as God was in Christ--in the person of Jesus reconciling the world.

Whatever else it means it must include the thought that God was actively in Christ removing the cause of estrangement that had come between Himself and humanity. God does not need to be reconciled to man--but man does need to be reconciled to God.

At first glance the universalist reads these words and draws the conclusion that all human beings are in fact reconciled; reconciled apart from repentance and reconciled apart from belief and trust.

Universal salvation flies in the face of repeated warnings to turn from sin and believe the Gospel. Universal salvation makes the threat of condemnation an empty threat.

The ministry of reconciliation has also been entrusted to Christ’s faithful servants. We are entrusted with the privilege of going forth and preaching the glorious message to all men everywhere. Angels were not given this precious charge. Poor, broken, flawed, feeble human beings are given the sacred privilege is announcing that God has made a way for salvation and reconciliation.

How are we to think about this message? For the person who is really committed to reconciliation; there must be a willingness to talk and listen. The person wants to use logic and love and understanding rather than hostile imposition.

Our Message: Redemption (vv.20-21)

20Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’ s behalf, be reconciled to God.

Now Paul builds a summary or provides a description that extends all the way to chapter 6 verse 3. This is the summary of the “word of reconciliation”. We might think of this as Paul’s message that he preached to the unsaved! This is the message from people group to people group; country to country. I think it is important to remind the reader that Paul is not urging the Corinthians to be reconciled to God. They are already believers in the Lord Jesus. Rather Paul reveals the message which he preaches to the unsaved wherever he goes.

What are some of the unique functions of Ambassadors?
1. Ambassadors are chosen by their government or sovereign.
2. Ambassadors are protected by their government (usually Ben Ghazi). Ambassadors must be a citizen of the country they represent. In order to be an Ambassador of Christ you must be a Citizen of the Kingdom and of Heaven. The sending Nation provides for the needs of the Ambassador and stands ready to protect them. Likewise we as Christians are supplied our every need and appropriate protections.
3. Ambassadors are accountable. Ambassadors represent the interest of their country and say what they are told to say. Ambassadors know they must give an account of their actions to the host government.
4. Ambassadors are usually called home before a declaration of war (think North Korea). The Lord God has not yet declared war on this wicked Christ rejecting world. But war is coming. The Sovereign God has declared a truce and invited all men everywhere to be save. Paul himself preached that a Day of Wrath was coming (1 Thess. 1:10). There will come a day when God judges the wicked; but Christians will be called Home before that Day (1 Thessalonians 5:1-10). Some Bible teachers believe that some will be caught in the cross fire of an all out war. Not me.

Are all believers Ambassadors? Jesus said, “As the Father has sent me, also I send you” (John 20:21).

How did the Father send the Son? Did Jesus have the right message; methods and motives? Ambassadors spend their time on foreign soil. They sometimes speak a different language than the host country. The most effective Ambassadors learn the language of the people group they have been assigned to serve. The Ambassador knows he or she is a stranger; the Ambassador has an obligation to advocate for the Country that has sent them.

American Ambassadors are tasked with representing our interests, our ideals, our deeply held convictions; our policies and politics. **The reputation of the country lies in the actions and attitudes of the ambassador.** The ambassadors actions whether good or bad will leave a lasting impression on the host country. RVG Tasker:

“Ambassadors engaged upon human affairs are chosen especially for their tact, their dignity, and their courtesy, and because they are gifted with persuasive powers. The ambassadors for Christ show the same characteristics. They must never try to bludgeon men and women into the Kingdom of God, but must speak the truth in love, just because it is a gospel of divine love that they are commissioned to proclaim” (See The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians; Erdmans’s p. 90).

Paul reminds us that the calling of an ambassador is exalted and dignified. We usually do not think of an ambassador as pleading or beseeching as all that dignified. Yet the picture is of God--
on bended knee--pleading with the sinner--reminding that the hostility and enmity does not lie with God--but rather with human beings.

God has removed all the barriers between Himself and man! Why then do barriers remain? Human beings must lay down their arms of selfish rebellion. Human beings must cease their stubborn revolt.

William Barclay rightly points out that “Never once is God said to be reconciled to man: it is always man who is reconciled to God.”

Edward Kennedy: “It takes two sides to make a lasting peace, but it only takes one to make the first step.”

21For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Paul lays down the foundational doctrinal basis for our reconciliation.

How has God made reconciliation possible? How can he receive guilty sinners who come to him in repentance and faith? The answer is that the Lord Jesus Christ has effectively dealt with the whole problem of all our sins.

Paul states something so incredible--as to be almost unbelievable. God has made Christ to be sin for us--Christ innocent--sinless--faultless--priceless--that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

Not simply forgiven. But given all the privileges that are deserved by Christ. We are made the righteousness of God in Him.

God “justifies the wicked” (ungodly; Rom. 4:5) by imputing (reckoning, crediting, counting, accounting) righteousness to them and ceasing to count their sins against them (Rom.4:1-8).

Martin Luther: “Paul teaches us that the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel is passive, given to us in Christ. As this truth dawned, I felt I was born again, and was entering in at the gates of paradise itself. There and then the whole face of scripture changed. Just as much as I hated the phrase “the righteousness of God,” I now loved it--it seemed the sweetest and most joyous phrase ever written”.

We find ourselves in a place where it is impossible to plumb the meaning and application of this single verse.

Sin is more than an outrageous insult to God’s holiness and majesty. It is a threat to peace.
Conclusion

The great cleric Hugh Latimer said, “We must first be made good before we can do good; we must first be made just before our works can please God.”

Jesus saves us. Jesus justifies us. Jesus imparts His own righteousness.

One of David Livingstone’s first converts was an African chief, Sechale, who thought he could make his tribesmen believe by force. So he suggested one day to Livingstone, “I shall call my head man, and with our whips of rhinoceros hide, we soon make them all believe together.” He did not realize that the natural man is dead spiritually and that a rhinoceros-hide whip cannot make a man believer; only the Holy Spirit can do that.

We are ambassadors for Christ. Remember the Ambassador belongs to the One who sends. The Ambassador is commissioned to be sent out. The Ambassador exists only for the message of the sender. The Ambassador as the power and the authority to speak on behalf of the one who sends. We are given the greatest message of all. Be reconciled to God. And note: Paul pleads for Christ’s sake. The message would be unbelievable—unless of course God Himself came up with the message. Why in the world is God willing to save us? Because He loves us. Because He loves His Son. This is the only message that can save the sinner. The message of regeneration (v.17); the message of reconciliation (vv.18-19) The message of redemption (vv. 20-21).