

2 Cor 5:18

Membership: Proclaiming the Good News

20180930

Reconciled to Christ we are commissioned to proclaim the ministry of reconciliation

Introduction

In 1936 the world was tuned into what was happening in Berlin, Germany. This was the place and time for the Olympic games. Of course, Germany and its leader Adolf Hitler were putting on a front for the world. A front that was to display that what they were doing was upright and progressive through their hosting of these games, it was all part of the Nazi regimes propaganda effort. But despite of all this world significance was the simple truth that young athletes from around the world were coming – having each prepared to compete in their respective events.

In fact, not far from here was where 9 of these athletes had been working together to form a team that could compete for the gold medal in rowing. These young men were from the University of Washington's rowing team. It is the sport of rowing that I want to focus on here for a few minutes because as I recently listened to an audio book documenting this sport and this team that went to Berlin in 1936 I thought - this is like the functioning of a church.

You see each of the members of the team had their unique strengths, but their ability to propel the boat forward through the water depended upon their ability to work in unison. They were committed to each other. The bonds that they had with each other were remarkable. These young men relied upon each other and pushed each other – in so doing they overcame insurmountable obstacles to win a gold medal.

This week our focus upon membership is turns towards evangelism. Our ability to take the message of the gospel outside the walls of the church and share the good news of Jesus Christ with others. This will be developed though the remainder of this sermon, but in finishing up our look at the rowing team – they were able to spread a message with their efforts. They didn't race on their own, they competed on the world stage. They left their training lake near the university and traveled to other unknown waters. The world took notice of this rowing team and they literally helped propel the sport of rowing in Seattle, in Washington, the west coast, and across the country. Kind of like being witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the world ([Acts 1:8](#)).

Now when I start mentioning this Biblical concept of being witnesses or evangelizing, a mandate that Christ gave to his first disciples, a mandate that has been carried out by successive Christians over time and even remains to this day. It is here that we begin to ask ourselves how exactly is this to be carried out? We hear the term evangelism and think can't that be done by the pastors of the church?

This passive view towards evangelism is held by many in the church today. So, why has this become the status quo position of most Christians in the western church? Doesn't this sentiment reflect that we are not fully convinced of our position before God or of our acceptance in his body, represented by the local church? Frankly we have become afraid to tell others about Christ. As this stance is held it becomes comfortable and normal but it is also devastating to the sharing of the gospel.

Of course, this couldn't be further from the truth, and as we study God's word together this morning we will clearly see:

As those who have been reconciled to Christ we are in turn commissioned to proclaim the ministry of reconciliation.

It is absolutely amazing the God of all things, the Creator God has a love so great for us, for his people that he has made a way of Salvation through Christ. We as the church are given the responsibility to take this treasure, the treasure of the gospel, and share it with the lost and dying. **Scripture Passage: 2 Corinthians 5:16-6:10**

Claiming our Commission 2 Cor 5:17-18a, 2 Cor 2:14a, 1 Peter 2:4-5a, Matt 28:18-19a

1. To begin in claiming our commission, it is necessary for us to know what we have been called to do...what it is we have been commissioned for.
 - a. **2 Cor 5:17-18a** "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself..."

- i. This passage states that our commission is one of newness. When we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior, when we are in Christ – our old life has passed away. That means our fears of rejection have been fundamentally dealt with by our acceptance by the Sovereign Lord.
 - 1. I’m not indicating that fear is removed from our consciences, but the fear is dealt with at its root. This is important in our carrying out of our commission.
 - b. **2 Cor 2:14a** *“But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession,...”*
 - i. This is a spiritual reality, much like the verse we just looked at. As you live here on earth as a sinner and amongst sinners it may NOT seem like Christ is leading you in triumphal procession... but this is reality as God sees us.
 - 1. Realizing this truth helps to once again overcome our fear of sharing the saving work of Christ with others.
 - 2. Living in this truth allows us to experience Biblical Fellowship here in the church, and to find encouragement in the body of Christ.
2. This is what happens when reconciled lives are fit together.
- a. **1 Peter 2:4-5a** *“As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen,...”*
 - i. Our commission is stated as a life that is built on what has been rejected by men...but chosen and precious to God. As a church we see once again this vocabulary of different parts being fit together to form a whole and functioning unit.
 - 1. This commission is therefore to be held in the precious community of believers.
3. **Matt 28:18-19a** *“And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given,...”*
- a. Now we were not standing there with Christ, but it is widely accepted that this commission to go and make disciples is one that didn’t end with the original 11 mentioned in Matt 28.
 - b. So, we as new creations in Christ, rely upon his authority. Which in turn allows us to speak the truth of the gospel and be involved in the making disciples of all nations.
 - c. Paramount to this portion of our commission is “go and make” not “stay and they will come”
 - i. An important application here as we are thinking about evangelism is developing our understanding of making a disciple.
 - 1. To probe this let me ask the question: Is leading someone to Christ the same thing as making a disciple?
 - 2. I don’t believe it is, I’m not saying to avoid sharing the gospel not in the least. But part of our responsibility, part of our commission is making disciples. So, as we have opportunities to share Christ we need to not neglect our responsibility in helping the new believer connect with others who will carry on the discipleship if that is not something you will be able to do. This is where the church shines brightest as it carries out this commission together.
 - a. *“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.” (1 Cor 3:6)*

Transition: Along with our commission, as we just looked at in Matt 28, we are to go and make disciples, but what message is used to do this mighty work? It is of utmost importance that we Clarify our Message.

Clarifying our Message 2 Cor 5:18b, 2 Cor 5:19b, 2 Cor 2:14b, 1 Peter 2:9b

1. **2 Cor 5:18b** *"...and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;"*
 - a. We have been reconciled and we have been given a ministry of reconciliation.
 - i. This term reconciliation is used in a sense to make an account whole again. To purchase someone's debt and to give them a life they would be unable to obtain otherwise.
 - ii. This is the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we not only have this ministry, but in the next verse we read...
 - b. **2 Cor 5:19b** *"...and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."*
 - i. As we go about our living, this needs to be to continual meditation of our heart. Our prayer life should be in large part devoted to who this message of reconciliation is to be shared with.
2. **2 Cor 2:14b** *"...and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere."*
 - a. This is what is happening as we claim our commission, God is leading us in triumphal procession and as we go about he spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.
 - i. But my beloved this doesn't mean you don't say anything or live a distinct Christian life.
 - ii. No, rather we speak the message of reconciliation and we live as those who have been reconciled – eternally grateful for the salvation Christ has obtained for us upon the cross.
 - b. **1 Peter 2:9b** *"...that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness..."*
 - i. Our message is a message that is to be proclaimed and spoken. Sometimes it is our lives that are simply being lived out before others. But over and over again we see the importance of being able to speak, to proclaim, to make known the excellencies of Christ.
 1. Just read the next verse here in **1 Peter 2:10** *"Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."*
 - a. Our message is one of humility and recognition of a broken life that has received tender mercy from God. This is the message people need to hear, that God has died for them as sinners. Christ gave his righteous life for the reconciliation of the unrighteous (**1 Peter 3:18**).

Transition: So, from claiming our commission to clarifying our message we move to carrying out our charge.

Carrying out our Charge **2 Cor 5:20-21, 2 Cor 6:3-10, 2 Cor 2:14a, 1 Peter 3:15, Titus 2:8, Phil 2:15a, Matt 5:16**

1. If we know what we are commissioned to do and what we are supposed to proclaim we still have need to see how this is carried out in day to day living. Also, we have to see why it is that church membership is helpful in carrying out evangelism.
 - a. **2 Cor 5:20-21** *"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us..."*
 - i. In this verse is the term ambassador. When you simply think of the role ambassadors play, we quickly grasp what is being conveyed here by Paul.
 1. Ambassadors live in foreign nations as representatives of their native country.
 2. That means in order for us to carry out our role as ambassadors for Christ we have to leave the embassy. We cannot exist solely in the confines of the church and be legitimate ambassadors.

- a. I'm not trying to insinuate that we all camp out here all the time in the building that we meet in on Sundays and occasionally on Friday evenings. Of course, the building is not the embassy. Rather it is the assembly of believers, the church.
 - b. What I am saying is that we need to be known as ambassadors out in the community where we live our daily lives. In so doing we do not give up our citizenship, we don't even hide our citizenship (**Phil 3:20**), rather we represent Christ as his ambassadors.
 - i. This is a difficult role, just look a few verses down.
- 2. **2 Cor 6:3-10** *"We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry..."*
 - a. Now the gravity of carrying out our charge is taking shape. As we read this description of how we are to live out our ministry it is not portrayed in the least bit as a life of ease.
 - b. If this is the reality of living out a life of evangelism as Christians who would want to do this apart from being secure in a church?
 - i. It is only as we are functioning as a church, as a body of believers that it makes sense that even in the midst of this type of living just described in 2 Cor 6 that we are able to find refreshment. It is by our identification and our relationships, our participation, our discipleship and discipline, all the things we have studied these past three weeks, that we can brave the extreme conditions of carrying out our charge to spread the message of our sovereign King through evangelism.
 - c. **1 Peter 3:15** *"but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared..."*
 - i. It is from the environment of the church that our speech is shaped, that our actions are molded in love, and that we can speak truth – even in the midst of hostilities we learn to do this with gentleness and respect. The church is helpful in discipling us in speech and action.
 - 1. **Titus 2:8** *"and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us."*
 - 2. **Phil 2:15a** *"that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation..."*
 - 3. **Matt 5:16** *"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*

Transition: If we do live in such a manner that we carry out our charge, that we evangelize people with the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ with our words and with our actions should we expect to see any change in our community?

Changing our Community **Matt 5:13-16, 1 Peter 2:12, 2 Cor 6:2,**

- 1. This last main point should make us consider how much we truly love those God has put us in close proximity to. Is our heart breaking for the lost? or are we just glad that we are safe from the wrath of God?
 - a. The church needs to be the base from which we go out to share the good news of Jesus Christ.
 - b. The church is where we find the resources that are most helpful to disciple new believers.
 - c. The church needs a constant influx of new believers to remain relevant.
- 2. **Matt 5:13-16** *"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?"*
 - a. Church, in light of our commission, our message, and our charge does it make sense that the community we live in would remain unchanged if we are being obedient? No, it makes no sense! That is why this collection of verses is so helpful for us to see that an impact is to be made.

- i. If we are the salt of the earth, then it is the church that is responsible to preserve the moral integrity of the culture. It is our responsibility to make sure truth is not abandoned. Because if the truth of God's word is no longer the very source of our life then we will simply be gone. The salt will be thrown out as good for nothing.
 - 1. Brothers and sisters, we put no stock in the building we meet in. This building or any building that has an air of religious overtures in all reality can be a major obstacle to people seeking Christ.
 - 2. It is those of us who gather within the building that make up the church and it is us collectively that have the responsibility to share the good news of Jesus Christ with our families, our neighbors, those who we interact with frequently at work or school, and then our duty to share the gospel doesn't not end there but extends to our outer circles of acquaintances and then as the Holy Spirit leads you to speak to strangers you do not hesitate.
- b. The church itself plays a role in evangelism, not in just helping to strengthen individuals to share the love of Christ but the church serves as an example of what coming to Christ looks like. It is to be full of life and light as we are being sanctified and prepared for our eternal abode. As we represent the kingdom of heaven here on earth we have a witness as a church.
 - i. The way we conduct ourselves, the way we love each other, meet one another's needs, maintain purity, abhorring those things that would pull us away from Christ. Living in such a manner gives credibility to the message we are sharing with others.
 - ii. If the church is always affirming people in their idea that we are just hypocrites, saying one thing but doing another we are not being the salt and light that Christ has called us to be.
 - iii. It is vital therefore that we keep our conduct pure among those who are outside of the fellowship of Christ, remaining honorable to use the language of **1 Peter 2:12** that even the evildoers as they observe our conduct will have no choice but to glorify God on the day of visitation.
- 3. **2 Cor 6:2** *"For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you..."*
 - a. As Christ's ambassadors we do not know when our message of the kingdom will be received by those who are still outside of the kingdom. Our message is clear and our charge is to deliver God's message of salvation. The timing is up to him as to when salvation comes, our job is to faithfully and gently shine as lights in the world (**Phil 2:15**).
 - b. Glory be to God when souls do get saved! Oh how I long to see more sinners who are slaves of darkness set free! This of course is kingdom enhancing, it is God glorifying, and if more good could come from such fruitful witnessing it is the pumping in of new oxygen into the church.
 - i. When we get comfortable in our lack of evangelism it is like we have all climbed into a large balloon that has no inlet for air. We just get accustomed to stuffy, life draining, air starved living. But when we see people getting saved and brought into the church it is like we receive the invigorating breath of fresh air that we so desperately need to revive us in our pursuit of our first love.
- 4. **Matt 28:19-20** *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them..."*
 - a. This has to be the business of the church. We have to do as Christ instructed the 11 to do, we have to make disciples by evangelizing the lost with the good news about Jesus.

- b. As they receive the good news they are to be brought into the loving environment of Christ's body, into his church, being baptized, being taught to observe the commandments and affirmed in their new life.

Transition: The church has a tremendous opportunity to have an influence that would seem outside of its human capacity, and it does because the change that comes about through evangelism is not a human endeavor. Joining with God in the work that he is doing by being faithful to evangelize where we go is to bring the glory to God.

Conclusion

During the past four weeks we have taken a break from our normal course of study. We have stepped away from Acts to focus upon something we are seeing very clearly in Acts: that is the character of the church. By looking at church membership for many, I have heard it expressed that formalizing membership will not look much different from what you are currently experiencing. But what if you are mistaken, what if adding church membership actually enhances the church and its mission. I know for me after taking a significant amount of time to look at evangelism I have realized how I need the church to support me in carrying out this charge. Much like Seth used the vehicle on a road trip during last week's sermon to convey the importance of being in the vehicle to experience the journey I think of the rowing team that I mentioned during the introduction. Each member of that team had a different story, a different reason for pursuing a seat in that boat, but none of them would have experienced the victory of crossing the finish line first in 1936 if they had not fully participated as a team to row their racing shell on that day over 70 years ago. And oh how the gold of an Olympic medal pales in comparison to seeing God glorified when another soul is added to his kingdom! As those who have been reconciled to Christ we are commissioned to proclaim the ministry of reconciliation. The very ministry that brings about the glory God deserves and causes the angels to shout in exaltation. May we do what we have been commissioned to do.

Prayer

September 30, 2018

Family Discussion

1. It was God who planned and established the church. Therefore, we have been studying God's design for the church over the past several weeks. What have you learned about the church through this series?
2. Have you ever participated on a team such a sports team or a competitive club? What were some of the things that helped you identify with the organization? Did you have to commit to participation? How is the church similar and how is it different from something like a soccer team?
3. With the descriptions we find in Scripture of God's church (doing what it supposed to be doing) what we find is a precious treasure - and we get to participate with the church! Now it is important to recognize that what makes the church so special is the work that Christ has done to save sinners to himself. When was the last time you told someone about the saving work of Jesus Christ? Who is someone you could be praying for an opportunity to share Christ with?

GOD'S TRUTH

As those who have been reconciled to Christ we are in turn commissioned to proclaim the ministry of reconciliation.

Key Verse

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;"
2 Corinthians 5:17-18 (ESV)

TABLE READING

Lead your kids into
God's Word...

1. 1 Peter 2:4-12, Matthew 16:15-19
2. Ephesians 2:19-22, Philipians 3:20, Acts 2:42-47
3. 2 Corinthians 5:16-6:2, 1 Timothy 1:15-16, Matthew 13:44, 2 Corinthians 4:7



Scripture Memory: Ephesians 4:14