You Are Jesus' Ambassador
“Standing true in a post-truth, post-Christian society” series – principle 5
2 Corinthians 5:18-21 (v 11-21)

Last week I mentioned that God warned us 3,000 years ago not to wish we could go back to the good old days – or why were the old days better than now. That is not WISE. In fact, we can not even ask the question wisely. We then cry out, “well then how can we learn or change?” and we miss the whole point because God has always told us to remember the past. It is the longing for the past, rather than longing for the glory He has for us in the future & the opportunities we have to serve Jesus now, that messes up thoughts in this area.

We are now living in a time in our country which is “post-Christian”. That simply means Jesus, Christians and the Bible don’t have home court advantage in the culture anymore. You can say to those around, “The Bible says” and that has no more influence than “this is what I believe”. We are also in a time we say is “post truth”. That does not mean people say truth is bad, it is just that truth, especially eternal truth, is not as relevant as feelings, what the group thinks, or what seems to be helpful at the moment. Now we have a choice every day – Do we can constantly complain that those non-Christian neighbors around us are acting like non-Christians OR do we take on the eternally valuable responsibility that God has put us here in an ethical “foreign land” as Jesus’ ambassadors.

Every Christian is a witness – we are missionaries to the people who live near us, go to school with us, play on our sports teams, and/or work with us. Here in Vermont, we are not going to people who have never heard the name of Jesus Christ. But we are going to a people who have heard a lot of lies and half-truths about Christians, the Bible and God’s ways – that we want to turn the world into a theocracy like the Ayatollah in Iran, the Taliban in Afghanistan or ISIS in the Middle East. They have been told we are historic oppressors, that most if not all wars are over religion, that we hate anyone we disagree with, that we want to force people to act the way we want, that we want to enslave people, and the list goes on. There is a spiritual blindness around Vermont that is no different than the hidden tribes in Papua Guinea. What is different is that our mission field has one of the highest standards of living in history and simultaneously is often prejudiced against Christians, the church and the straightforward reading of the Bible.

PROPOSITION: In a post-Christian world, we will be ambassadors to foreign tribes, behaving diplomatically towards neighbors who have been told the worst about Christianity.

I. God has placed us in our area to be an ambassador for Jesus 2 Corinthians 5:20
That is, in a post-Christian, post-truth culture, God has called us to be His ambassadors to those who think & live very different from the Bible. We don’t waste time lamenting that people have a false view of Christians or Biblical Christianity, instead we are going to act and speak diplomatically like an ambassador in a foreign land. We are not going as Jesus’ police, Jesus’ judge or Jesus’ inspector – We are going as Christ’s ambassador!
A. An ambassador represents another in a “foreign” place“Christ’s ambassador”
Notice this in v 20, although I will start in v 18 for context. READ v 18-20. Who or what is an ambassador? An ambassador represents a country, school or organization in a positive manner among people who are different in some way seeking to foster good relationships with others. The US government sends ambassadors to most countries of the world and most countries send an ambassador here to the US. In organizations and movements, individual people are often said to be a “good ambassador” for that organization or cause. Ambassadors go to a place that is different in some way and represent another leader, company or cause.

So any good ambassador must see that they represent another. Any country’s, company’s or movement’s human leaders can’t be everywhere at the same time – so they send representatives who will speak, advocate and negotiate for them. In ancient Rome, an ambassador was a person of immense authority – it is not like they could-skype, e-mail, text or talk to someone in another location or language back then. The ambassador represented the ruler of Rome – speaking that leader’s message and standing in that leader’s authority. Can you imagine – Jesus sees us as His ambassadors where we live, work, study or play! We represent Jesus – knowing full well we don’t have the wisdom, knowledge, insight or power of Jesus in our own abilities, but Jesus has commissioned and will empower us to do that.

Every ambassador will be in a place that is “foreign” in some way. For governments, this is a foreign land. But for business, organizations and movements, that “foreignness” is simply those who are not as radically committed to whatever cause the ambassador is standing for. So if we don’t accept that God is specifically sending us to people who don’t believe as we believe, act as we act, live as we live, then we can NOT be an effective ambassador. American ambassadors don’t try to make all the people in the country they go to act just like Americans. Instead they seek to understand that culture so they can speak diplomatically and skillfully to bring their countries’ message.

B. An ambassador brings another’s message “making His appeal”
An ambassador always brings another’s message! READ v 20. Notice, God is seeking to make His appeal through us. The message we have been given to bring to other people is that they can receive “reconciliation with God”. (We will go into that message in more detail in point 2 of your outline.) A huge difference between being an ambassador for a human leader and being an ambassador for God, is that God can be everywhere at the same time. Paul signals this in v 20 by saying “as though God were making” because God is also working in the life of every human to bring them to repentance and faith so they can be reconciled with Him. Somehow, God wants to include us in this process even though we mess up so often. Don’t worry about messing up – instead simply seek to be a committed ambassador.

C. An ambassador is committed “We implore you”
An ambassador is committed. READ v 20. Doesn’t this verse just throb with commitment? To a foreign people who don’t agree or see things the same way, the early Christians IMPLORED others to be reconciled to God. “Please receive God’s offer of reconciliation,” they said. This is a passionate offer of peace because peace with God is the result of reconciliation. This fervency is for “Christ’s sake”. We want to bring Jesus’ message to others. And we are willing to go to places where Christians aren’t necessarily appreciated, listened to or thought highly of, to do that.

D. An ambassador is clear in their message

While being diplomatic, an ambassador is clear in their message. READ v 20. What is our core message? Interestingly it is not trying to convince people every word of the Bible is true, nor that it is best for the greater good to live God’s morals nor that they should go to church every week. Our message to those who aren’t currently living God’s way is first and foremost “be reconciled to God.” And we bring that message to them from Jesus Himself.

II. Our message is reconciliation

A. Our message is reconciliation

Our message is reconciliation. READ v 18. Then we continue in the second part of v 19b. READ. And if we haven’t gotten the main point yet look at v 20 READ. If reconciliation is needed for every human – then there must be some kind of serious problem, conflict and separation between all people & the true God. Reconcile means to restore friendly relations between two groups whether those be individuals, families, groups or countries. It is from 2 latin words put together which literally mean “again, make friendly”. (re = again and concilare = "to make friendly.")

According to v 19, the problem is sin READ v 19. Sin is when we disobey God – either doing something He asked us not to or not doing something He asked us to do. Our sin isn’t just a mistake, a less than best effort, or something we “fall into”. When Adam sinned he sinned willfully. He knew God’s prohibition against eating that particular fruit. But he wanted it and what he thought it would bring, just like Eve. So as he watched Eve take the fruit and nothing happened to her, he chose to willfully disobey God assuming there would be no consequences. That rebellion turned the whole world upside down. Eve followed the serpent, Adam followed Eve, and no one followed God. Cosmic rebellion! Adam and Eve fell from the pinnacle of closeness to God to the pit of guilt and separation. Every one of us has sinned willfully since. We have chosen what feels good at the moment over what God has called us to do. Like Adam, our sin is not a question of some minor misunderstanding that would easily be taken care of. Our rebellion is radical and self-focused.

B. God has taken the first step in this reconciliation(AND many more) 

Reconciliation never happens by itself – someone must take the first step. Around 2 weeks ago, someone told me about a person they have been encouraging to call their
parent (that is to take that first step since they weren’t communicating at all). The person talking to me had been encouraging this person to do that for a couple years! The response they received, “I wanted to call [the parent] a couple times this week, but each time I was ready to do that, more negative memories came into my mind, so I no longer wanted to call.”

Reconciliation can’t happen until someone takes the first step. While we are the ones who have disobeyed God, messed up His creation and brought additional pain into the lives of those made in His image – God is the One who takes the first step. READ v 17-18.

Notice God doesn’t just take the FIRST step, but every mention and action of reconciliation in this passage is God’s unassisted work. We don’t first bring presents to God or punish ourselves or do some sacrificial action or make our lives clean so God will possibly consider taking some first steps of reconciliation. God is the Creator of the messenger, the ministry, and the message of reconciliation. God is the mover of every mention of reconciliation in these verses. READ v 19. It is all about God’s initiative and God’s effort. The ministry of reconciliation is not telling people they need to go make peace with God, but telling them that God has made peace with the world. You have the choice of accepting that or rejecting it. As one has said, “At the core, the gospel is not good advice, but good news”. You can also see why someone can not “accept Jesus’ offer” and then it not change their actions and attitudes.

That is why many of our thoughts and statements are so off-based and false like: “God could never forgive me”. Really? Who is the One who has come and sacrificed so much so we can be reconciled – it is not us! Watch out for that insidious form of sinful pride where we are still trying to make everything right ourselves, when it is God and God alone who has reconciled us. We have two possible responses: we can humble ourselves in faith, repent of our sins and turn to follow Jesus OR we can ignore God’s efforts at reconciliation and continue doing what we want, when we want and how we want.

C. How God’s reconciliation works 2 Cor 5:21
So how does God reconcile us to Himself? How does God deal with our sin that has driven a wedge between us? READ v 21. God reconciles us through Jesus’ death on the cross for us and His resurrection to new life! God the Father put our sin on Jesus on that cross. Jesus became sin for us even though He was sinless before that. Then having died for us, Jesus could give His righteousness to us. That righteousness could be credited to our account if you think in bankers terms – or it could be credited to our standing if you think in relational terms. READ v 14-15.

D. This reconciliation transforms us 2 Cor 5:11-17
God’s reconciliation transforms us. How transforming? READ v 17. Saul had information about Jesus, but this was not transforming as when he truly believed in...
Jesus and became Paul. Mere information about Jesus cannot transform a person from self-centeredness to selflessness. Only true conversion BY God can have that effect.

The more we understand the efforts of reconciliation God does as the offended, the more we can rightly see our relationship with Him as most special. We are privileged to be His ambassador. Many years ago I loved a phrase that AW Tozer penned, “God is easy to live with.” Approximating his words, “Some think of the Christian life as a glum, unrelieved cross-carrying under the eye of a stern Father who expects much and excuses nothing. He is austere, peevish, highly temperamental and extremely hard to please.” Does that fit the picture of all the effort God does so we can be reconciled? NO! It is restful to come quietly into Jesus’ presence. God is regularly encouraging our soul. While we can never live up to His call for us to be totally holy until heaven, the Lord is not hard to please. I hope you often feel His pleasure in the little things you sacrifice for Him. God only expects of us what He has already supplied to us. I say all this so you don’t become like the elder brother in the parable of the wayward son – obeying the Father grimly, doing what is right without enthusiasm or joy and totally unable to understand the joyful celebration when the wayward son comes home in repentance!

III. What helps ambassadors succeed in less receptive lands?

When we understand this message of reconciliation, it frees us to face the changing world around us in a very different way. We can then be ambassadors in resistant places instead of always arguing and trying to straighten other people out!

A. Expect people to think different/have different values/live different than we do

An ambassador does NOT expect the people they are sent to, to think just like them. They know the people they are going to think different, have different values and live differently. If we are saying, “How can they think that way?” we will never be a good ambassador. It is a small change, but a powerful one to accept that people around us will think different. In a post-Christian world, let’s be ambassadors to “foreign” tribes, behaving diplomatically towards neighbors who have been told the worst about Christianity.

B. Understand how/what different people value/think

An ambassador seeks to understand what the people value and how they are thinking. Not in a judgmental or argumentative way. Not trying to find some “gotcha” to beat them. But ambassadors seek to understand the people they are going to so future communication can be clearer. About every 10 years of my life I have noticed a push in either our popular or Christian literature reminding people that men don’t think the same way as women and women don’t think the same way as men. We have to listen and ask questions without arguing or challenging everything that the other people say if we are going to understand. An ambassador is not afraid to go into an uncomfortable situation and meet the people where they are at. The ambassador is not there as the police, a judge or a state inspector. You realize this is how God treats each
of us all the time. The Lord is definitely working to free us from false thinking, selfish attitudes and harmful actions – but He generally is only working on one or two areas at a time. All the rest, He is sets aside to deal with at a later time. People used to ask me why God allowed polygamy – multiple wives – in the Old Testament. The short answer is because God was working on idolatry at that time. Before idolatry, it was only one man and one woman in marriage and then after the Babylonian exile in the Old Testament where idolatry was finally broken in the Jewish people, you find God working strongly again on purity in marriage – both sexually and in terms of faith compatibility. In a post-Christian world, let’s be ambassadors to foreign tribes, behaving diplomatically towards neighbors who have been told the worst about Christianity.

C. Be diplomatic in actions and words
Third, an effective ambassador is diplomatic in their communication – remember we have already said that communication must be clear. They are not there to scare, bully, intimidate or use any other heavy handed approach. Diplomatic is simply being sensitive in your dealing with others – seeking to achieve a peaceful resolution to conflict OR an open discussion on contentious issues. Diplomats are not responsible for how the recipients respond to the message, but they seek to deliver the message with tact and a lack of personal attack. In a post-Christian world, let’s be ambassadors to foreign tribes, behaving diplomatically towards neighbors who have been told the worst about Christianity.

D. Seek to love those who are different
Fourth, an effective ambassador seeks to genuinely love those who are different from them – whether those people end up cooperating with the ambassador or not. In v 14, it is “love that compelled” the early Christians to leave the comfort of their own group and get involved in the lives of others who didn’t believe. Jesus’ love initially calls us each personally to repent & follow Him, now we want it to motivate us to go out as an ambassador of Jesus with the message that God is reaching out to reconcile any who will repent and surrender in faith. In a post-Christian world, let’s be ambassadors to foreign tribes, behaving diplomatically towards neighbors who have been told the worst about Christianity.

E. Remain different (in some way) but respectful
Fifth, an effective ambassador remains different in some ways. Ambassadors don’t try to be exactly the same as the people they are going to. They don’t have a problem with remaining different in their actions, BUT they are respectful where these clash. In a post-Christian world, let’s be ambassadors to foreign tribes, behaving diplomatically towards neighbors who have been told the worst about Christianity.

As Jesus’ ambassadors we are here with a simply message, God invites all people everywhere to turn from the emptiness of sin, rebellion and wrong to be brought back into a genuine personal relationship with God through Jesus and receive the fullness
of eternal life. Anyone can receive this offer, which only comes through Jesus Christ—they can receive this offer through repenting of their wrong, believing Jesus is God come down in human form who died on the cross to pay the penalty of our sins and rose bodily from the dead to prove that and surrender to go Jesus' way instead of our own way. You are Christ's ambassadors to the people around you! You can't get any more significant than that—and free to bring real hope no matter how tough things look around you!