

## 2 Corinthians 5:12-21

### Verses 12-13:

--As Paul talks about having sincerity of heart and seeking to please Jesus Christ he wants to make sure his discussion about ministry is not misunderstood as personal boasting. He threw in similar expressions in **3:1+4:2**.

--That said, he did want the Corinthians to be able to learn from and boast in his example of a Christ-like minister. Paul wanted to **give you opportunity to boast on our behalf** and also know how to answer his critics who had very different ideas of ministry.

--The ministry Paul had been given from the Lord didn't boast in appearances and outward rituals like those who criticized him. They boasted in human letters of credentialing, circumcision, rituals, holy days, and outwardly spiritual works.

--In contrast, Paul's focus in ministry was showing the excellence of God through his weakness, sincerity of heart, love to God, faith in eternal reward, and a guileless ambition to please Jesus Christ. (The "spirit" of Paul's ministry was so different— **1 Cor. 4:1-13**)

--**(13)** Despite being one of the greatest Christian examples of humility in ministry and calm sobriety of mind—Paul was slandered and labeled as crazy! ***If we are beside ourselves. . .***

--No doubt his life and emphasis were different than the status quo—sometimes even in direct conflict with the false teachers in Corinth. A truly spiritual ministry will always make a man or woman look a bit odd. Still, we are in good company as Paul himself was only following Christ who was also called mad for His obedience to the Father.

**\*Mark 3:21: But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, "He is out of His mind."\***

**\*Acts 26:24-25: Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!" But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason.\***

--Ironically, Paul was accused of being crazy when he had the spiritual experience to exalt or glory in but purposefully chose to make his moderation known to men. Paul could have easily published and leveraged the supernatural reality of his ministry such as: miracles; casting out demons; revival; persecution; his stoning and likely death; visions of paradise; demonic powers sent to buffet him; and multiple supernatural meetings with the risen Jesus Christ.

--Yet he says, ***if we are of sound mind, it is for you.*** God, we bless You for this man who made his prayers known to You but his moderation to men!

### Verses 14-15:

--Now, Paul is certainly talking about the cross of Christ here, but the context cannot be forgotten as many able commentators do. Paul is still speaking about a faithful minister of the new covenant and how that ministry is to work.

--He is using the cross as the purest and greatest example of the nature of Christ and His followers. Jesus' nature was not to grasp for/act for Himself. \*We live in a world with billions of people who consider themselves and their lives the center of the universe—as we all did outside of Christ!\*

--Seeing this love in Christ, Paul is *compelled* into this life and ministry he has been describing.

--**The love of Christ** is only mentioned in two other Scriptures:

**\*Romans 8:35: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, of persecution, of famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?\****

**\*Ephesians 3:19: *To know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.\****

--That He loved us, in giving His life for us at the cross, is always the first and foundational motive of love to God and life to God.

\*Law (A Serious Call To A Devout And Holy Life): *“And the state of Christianity implieth nothing else, but an entire, absolute conformity to that spirit which Christ showed in the mysterious Sacrifice of Himself upon the Cross.”\**

--How does Paul see the love of Christ working? In that ***One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.***

--Paul is clearly thinking about the life and death of Christ here—pointing out His willingness to give His life that others can live—that is why he says at the end—***and rose again.***

--That Christ ***died for all*** (Said twice) means that He died *for* or *on behalf of* or *in the place of* all who were dead and in need of life. Paul is not trying to work out all of our modern systematic theology here. We cannot limit the *All's* to the elect or expand the *Those* to all of humanity. We simply need to say what the Bible says in context.

--Paul is asking, *Who did Christ die for?* Then he is asking, *Who do you live for?*

**\*1 Peter 3:18: *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the Spirit.\****

#### **Verses 16-17:**

--The connection here is clear. If we now live because Christ loved us enough to die for us, what type of life do we live in Him?

--Not our old fleshly life that is self-focused and flesh-focused. I don't think Paul is necessarily saying he saw Christ in the flesh—though he may have. Paul is pointing out the difference of natures in their understanding of Christ and life.

--What did the world do with Jesus when they only knew Him after the flesh (the flesh being what can be known of Him outside of the Spirit of God and new birth)?

**\*John 10:33: *For the Jews answered Him, saying, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.”\****

--His own people rejected Him, hated Him, slandered Him, and ultimately crucified Him. What did Paul himself do to Christ, knowing Him only after the flesh? The same.

--What is the attitude of the world we live in now? It is no different! What is the state of true Christians in the world? The same as Jesus' was! The Spirit of Christ has not changed nor has the spirit of the world. Christianity is still in the world that nailed Jesus to the cross!

**\*John 15:18-19: *If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.\****

--We have been chosen out of the world and given life different from the world. We now have nothing of the flesh that is our basis of knowledge toward others: Dress, Color, Wealth, Race, Position, etc. \*This is why those that only know and see us after the flesh cannot understand when we are born again.\*

--Our new basis of understanding all the life around us is the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of man, the death of Christ for all, the Great Commission and purpose of God for all nations, etc. In other words, the way God sees others.

--We are now a ***new creation***—something totally other than what this world alone can produce. We are a work of the love and life of God. This life is a miracle of God like we say a baby being born is a miracle. \*We are born again like babies—with no history—there is life present (not even the mature awareness of it) but not perfection! That life grows.\*

--We have the life of our Heavenly Father: ***that those who live should live no longer for themselves. . . all things have become new.***

--Do you recognize a new life in you? Movings, you have no answer for other than that Christ lives in you and you are born again? How does Paul describe this new creation in himself?

**\*Galatians 2:20: *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.\****

**\*Philippians 1:21: *For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.\****

--What type of Christ was in Paul? A living Christ! Jesus lives in us never to die again! He lives, and breaths, and speaks, and acts, and desires, and moves, and wills, and loves.

--The new creation reality that we live in also becomes the lens we see all of life through. It gives us compassion for the lost—those without the life of God.

--It also gives us a compelling force that binds us in loyalty and love to Christ and His purpose over all human fleshly ties. \*Believers all over the world are forced to choose loyalty to the Spirit and life of God over the fleshly connection of family and friends. We too often make an idol of these.\*

**\*Matthew 10:37: *He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.\****

### Verses 18-19:

--**All things are of God.** . . All of this is only possible through the work of God as Paul already taught them in **4:6**. There is no religious action that can make a man right with God.

--Notice, Paul does not say that Jesus Christ has reconciled us to God. Paul says that God **has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ**. God made a way for man. This is His work.

--Man does not make reconciliation. Man, as the enemy of God, experiences reconciliation.

**\*Romans 5:10: For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.\***

**\*Colossians 1:21: And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled.\***

--It was our **trespasses** that made us enemies of God. And God, **not imputing**, or not counting them against us, made friends of enemies. He could have justly judged us all and cleansed the world with a total flood! Instead, God so loved the world and He sent His only Son. **\*This is how God has dealt with the evil in all of us—on the cross—with justice and mercy and love.\***

--It is the glory of man, or the doom of man, to have been made in God's image with the high purpose of fellowship with Him. Now, there is a way for fallen man to be reconciled to God through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

--And twice Paul now tells these believers that they are a part of this incredible message of good news! **And had given us the ministry of reconciliation + And has committed to us the word of reconciliation.**

--What was once the ministry of angels is now ours!

**\*Luke 2:10+14: Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. . . Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill toward men!"\***

--Our message is good news to those who know they need a Savior! We are announcing friendship with God.

--Paul is making clear that the same God that worked *through Christ* to make reconciliation now works *through Christians* to announce it! Which is a point we should not overlook. The gospel is not simply to be taught. It is to be proclaimed to men.

**\*Stott (The Cross of Christ): The rule should be, "no appeal without proclamation, and no proclamation without appeal."\***

### Verse 20:

--Since that is true, **we are ambassadors for Christ!** **\*Whether you realize it or not!\***

--An ambassador does not come in his own authority or give his own interests. He personally represents the authority and interests of another. If an ambassador were to use his job to further his own interests and purposes we would call that ambassador corrupt. Let us not be numbered among such!

--On the positive side, always remember we do not stand before others in our own authority or with our own interests. It isn't you verses others. It is them verses God and His purposes in the world. I am not standing for my own beliefs. I am standing for the truth of God.

--This isn't always easy, and I am encouraged that even Paul asked for prayer!

**\*Ephesians 6:19-20: *And for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.***\*

--The message we have is simple: ***Be reconciled to God!*** The language there is passive. It is not something we do but something we accept. We embrace God's offer or gift in Christ.

--I am not called to *feel* reconciled. I am called to believe that I have *been* reconciled by the work of Jesus Christ! God will give faith the proper feelings at the proper time.

**\*1 John 5:13: *He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son.***\*

--So we *plead* and *implore* men. I beg you, in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God!

--This is how we first come to Christ and find new life, but it is also how we must continue to walk in Him. Though the context of this message is to unbelievers and enemies of God, I believe that I could say the same message to many Christians. We must remember that God did not send His Son so that we could be forgiven of our sins and then live at a distance from Him.

--To those that are caught up in the world and riches, to those that are backslidden and distant from God, to those that are hurting and bitter with God because of pain they do not understand, I say to them as well, look again at the cross and allow your soul to ***be reconciled to God!***

#### **Verse 21:**

--Here is the ultimate apologetic as to why. There is so much in this verse. No one can explain it all. The divine transaction at the cross remains a shrouded mystery.

--Fredrick William Faber wrote: *"How You can suffer, O my God, and be the God You are, is darkness to my intellect but sunshine to my heart."*

--Here is what we do know. The sin was not His. The righteousness was not ours. Jesus took my standing before God and punishment so that I could take His standing before God and reward.

--When man had no righteousness to present to God, God took it upon Himself to provide a righteousness for us. The law *demand*ed a spotless righteousness. The Gospel *proclaims* the free gift of a spotless and provided righteousness.

--This gift of righteousness was always the great and coming gift of the Messiah!

**\*Isaiah 45:24: *He shall say, "Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength."***\*

**\*Jeremiah 23:6: *Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.***\*

**\*Daniel 9:24: *Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy.\****

--We are to see in this two things:

1) First, that no matter how wicked I think my sin is, it is even more wicked than I could know. How can we measure the infinite cost of sin against an infinite God? We cannot! We only know that it has been measured against the infinite life, and righteousness, and perfection of Jesus Christ the Son of God and Son of Man!

--What God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit had to do at the cross proves to me that sin is incredibly hard to fix, even for God.

2) Second, that the love of God does not ignore my sin. It transcends my sin. And yes, we must believe in the work of Christ by faith, but I am also to respond to the love of the Father in new life and to the Person of my Savior with my life.

--It is possible to lose sight of the personal in the emphasis of the transaction.

*\*Tozer (Born After Midnight): "Popular fundamentalist theology has emphasized the utility of the cross rather than the beauty of the One who died on it. The saved man's relation to Christ has been made contractual instead of personal. The "work" of Christ has been stressed until it has eclipsed the person of Christ. Substitution has been allowed to supersede identification. What He did for me seems to be more important than what He is to me. Redemption is seen as an over-the-counter transaction which we "accept," and the whole thing lacks emotional content."\**

--But to Paul, the sinner saved by grace, this was no impersonal exchange. Paul saw the love of the Father through the Son, who knew no sin, who was the only true human ideal of all God's thought and desire in creation, the only One to never displease the Father in body, soul, or spirit, and yet was made sin—Saul's sin and our sin—so that we might be reconciled to God.

--This love, this divine selfless love, compelled him to live as an apostle by the will of God, to suffer for Christ, live for Christ, be an ambassador of Christ, and eventually to die as a witness for Christ.

--You can do business with any acquaintance but you must love someone very much to live and die for them.

--Does the love of Christ compel us to live for Him and not for ourselves? Has He made us new creations? Are we reconciled to God? As ambassadors, do we plead with others in Christ's place, saying: ***Be reconciled to God!?***

**\*1 Timothy 4:10-11: *For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. These things command and teach.\****