

## **A PASSION FOR MISSIONS II CORINTHIANS 5:14-21**

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

The wife in the family was a faithful member in the congregation where I served. Her husband attended with her from time to time. He happened to come with her on a Sunday in which we were having a mission emphasis. Later that week Alice and I were a guest in their home for dinner and we discussion the church and the things that God was doing to our church.

In the midst of our discussion Joe explained to me his perspective on things. He said, “Pastor, I’m not in favor of sending money to people in Africa and other places around the world. We have too many needs right here at home. If my wife is going to give any money I want it to be spent here where we can see what it is doing.” I did not enter into a theological response to Joe’s observation because Joe was not a Christian. His words reflected the attitude of the world about us. They see missions as a program that is carried on by the churches.

Peter Wagoner, the well-know church growth expert says, “A Christian is someone who is committed to the person of Christ, to the body of Christ, and to the work of Christ.” When he made that observation in one meeting,

someone spoke up to say, “I do not agree. A Christian is someone who is committed to Christ and to Christ alone.” This person was reflecting a very limited view of what it means to be a Christian. To be a genuine Christian means that you have become committed to the work that Jesus Christ is doing in the world.

Let me read for you the words of one missionary who had a Christian perspective on what missions means. Missions for him was not a program to be funded but was a rather a passion to be fulfilled. In his letter to one of the churches that had been developed through his missionary activity, he seeks to stir up the passion for the work of Christ in the world. These words are found in the II Corinthian Letter, chapter 5.

Can you not feel the heart throb of passion in these words? The Apostle speaks of being “constrained.” This word has in it the picture of being fenced into something. The thing has laid such a hold upon you that you cannot escape it. In a case like this missions is a passion. Later, the Apostle says that “We prayed you in Christ’s stead,” these words mean to appeal, to beseech, to persuade strongly. The work has become a passion in the heart of the person.

As we look at this passage we can see the source of this passion. It is rooted in three ideas that are found in a major way in this text. Let me lift those ideas from the text and let's consider them together. I want us to recover that apostolic passion for the work of Jesus in the world.

## **I. THE CROSS**

The cross of Jesus Christ is the prominent thing in this passage. In order to help us consider the cross as it relates to the mission we have been given, let me just suggest three things.

### 1. The why of the cross.

The Apostle makes two statements that gives us insight to the why of the cross. The first of these statements is: "For Christ's love compels us because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died." The love that the Apostle is referring to is the love of Christ for us – not our love for Him. We do love Him but our love is a response to His love for us. The cross of Jesus Christ is seen by the Apostle as the place where the love of Christ was made visible to everyone. His very next statement indicates that when he says, "Because we are convinced that one died for all." You want

to understand the why of the cross you must understand the heart of Jesus Christ-He died for us because He loved us.

The other statement that takes us behind the cross to see the why is this:

“That God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ.” The why of the cross is found in the heart of God and in His concern in an alienated and broken world. The cross is the expression of a divine concern over the terrible plight that human sin has created. God was in His Son Jesus Christ working the work of redemption for us. He did it because of His love.

## 2. The who of the cross.

This is the second thing that gives us insight to the cross and its place in our mission. We have already noticed in our glance at the text that the cross is not about something that we did for God. The cross is about something God did for us. We are told that the triune God head was involved in this deed of the cross. The love of Christ was demonstrated there. This Christ is non-other than the one born to the virgin Mary in Bethlehem who lived His life out in the land of Israel and then at last died on a Roman tree on our behalf.

But we are also told that it was God who was at work in Christ through the Cross. It was God Himself who was reconciling the world unto Himself.

We are told later in this same passage that “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Notice the subject in that sentence. God was the action in this deed. The cross is the work of God Himself.

### 3. The what of the cross.

It is so important that we understand what happened at the cross. It is not enough to know why it happened. The Apostle states is so clearly in this text – God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” In the deed of the cross God the Holy Father made Christ the Holy Son to be a sin offering for the sins of the whole world. That deed a sufficient sacrifice to provide forgiveness for the sin of every human being that ever lived. The word translated, "sin" in our text, is better translated “sin offering.” Exactly how it happened none of us can ever understand. Someway in the economy of God on that day at the cross the sin of the whole world, all of them, were transferred to Jesus Christ, God’s holy Son. In that moment He bore the sins of the whole world in His body on that tree. He died as the substitutionary, sacrificial lamb for

the sins of the whole world. In that moment God was providing everything that would ever need to be provided so that he could forgive and be at peace with everyone of His creatures on the earth.

This is a part of the passion of missions. The eternal God did something in the deed of that cross that every human being on this planet needs to know. Can you imagine that someone for whom Christ died would spend a normal lifetime on this earth and die without ever knowing that the eternal God gave His son to die in their stead? It is unthinkable that that could happen and yet it does.

## **II. THE CHANGE**

This is another word that expresses a key idea that is in this passage that has an implication for our mission. I am referring to the change that becoming a Christian makes in the life of an individual. The Apostle states it like this: “If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All of this is from God who reconciled us through Christ.” These words reflect a radical change in the life of a person.

1. A changed relationship to God.

The word “reconciled” says it all with reference to this new relationship with God. The opposable of reconcile is alienation and enmity. Before the death of Jesus upon the cross that is who we were. In our sin we were at enmity with God and alienated from Him. God took the step that necessary through the cross to change that. When we came to the cross and accepted His gift of forgiveness, we were reconciled to God. When people are reconciled, then they are friends. When people are reconciled then they are at peace with each other. This is the thing that is new – we are now at peace with God through the cross of the Lord Jesus.

## 2. A changed view of the world.

In His first reference to the death of Christ on the cross the Apostle refers to this. And He died for all that those who live should no longer live themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. This is one of the things that has been radically changed. We now view ourselves as a person for whom Christ died and we view others as persons for whom Christ died. We view every human being on the planet as a person for whom Christ died. When we began to see the multitudes of the earth as persons for whom Christ died,

then there begins to be a passion in us – a passion to make sure that they know that Christ died for them.

Too much of the time still share the perspective of the world in which we live. We still see people as Russians, Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans. We see them divided along racial characteristics as Anglos, Orientals, and Blacks. We still see them along cultural lines. But as Christians the cross of Jesus Christ compels us to see them as persons for whom Christ died. We must make sure that everyone of them knows that they are a person for whom Christ died.

### **III. THE COMMITMENTS**

In the passage the Apostle takes us one step further as he discusses two great commitments that God has made to us.

#### **1. The work of reconciliation.**

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” The sovereign God who redeemed us in Christ has entrusted us with this special work of reconciliation. The ministry of reconciliation is that process by which we bring to others the knowledge of what God did in Christ so that they, too, can know the peace with God that we know. The Apostle describes this work like this, “We are therefore

Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God. We know about the work of an ambassador. In recent days the ambassador of the United States has been asked to take bad news to certain nations around the world. He has gone as the representative of our President and our government to say to them, "Unless you change your course of actions, the United States, along with its allies will take retaliatory steps against you." He was there to speak on behalf of our President and our government. This is our work. We have been sent to the population of this planet as the representative of the sovereign God and His Son the Lord Jesus to make an appeal to them to come and accept God's peaceful offer through the cross of His Son.

Is it not an awesome thought that you and I have the official kind of standing that belongs to an ambassador of a sovereign government? Is it not an awesome thought that we would be allowed to speak on His behalf?

2. The word of reconciliation.

This is the other commitment that God has made. "And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation." This message embodies what God did on behalf of the human race through the death of His son upon the cross. It makes known to them that God made His son to be a sin offering for us so

that we might have His righteousness as a gift to make us acceptable before Him. It is a message that shows the way to peace with God. It is absolutely the most wonderful message that any human ears have ever heard. And you and I have that message that the world so desperately needs to hear and God has entrusted it to us to make sure that they hear.

Can you even begin to imagine the consequence of us not being good stewards of this message? If we do not go and we do not share the message, then they will die in their sins. They will die without ever knowing that God was in Christ making peace available for them. They will die without ever knowing that God gave His only begotten son to die in their stead on the tree. We are stewards of this wonderful good news.