

2 Cor 5:16-6:2 Consequences of Living for Christ, part 3

We're looking at this passage for the third time now. We began working through this passage way back in the middle of December, and we completed part 2 last week. We are now ready to finish our consideration of the consequences of living for Christ.

In the previous section of 2 Cor, Paul exhorts us to live for him who died for us. (Read vs. 15).

What does that kind of life look like? What does it mean to live for Christ? How would your life change if you really lived for him instead of for yourself?

Note vs. 16a—"therefore, from now on ...". These words introduce several consequences or results of living for Christ. What would it look like if we did that? What would be the consequences if we lived for Christ "from now on"?

We've looked at three of them, all of which start with the letter "r."

- I. .16 We *regard* no one "according to the flesh." That is, we don't judge people on a superficial, external, worldly level.
- II. .17 We *relate* as new creations in Christ. The old, pre-conversion way of thinking and living is gone, and the new worldview and lifestyle has come.
- III. .18b -19 We *reconcile* others to God. We have the word and ministry of reconciliation—we tell people the message of vs. 21.

Today we'll finish up looking at this passage. The final two consequences of living for Christ, from this passage, are ...

- IV. .20 We *represent* Christ.
 - A. Ambassadors represent those that sent them.
 1. An ambassador is an official spokesman, a legate, envoy, or emissary. He represents and speaks for an authority of some sort—usually a king, emperor, or governor. His job is to speak for the one who sent him.
 2. An ambassador is a high ranking official; it's a great privilege to serve as an ambassador.

This time of year, I wouldn't mind being the ambassador to the Bahamas or Jamaica.

3. Ambassadors don't convey their own messages; they say what the one who sent them wants them to say. They don't speak their own opinions. They don't change the message. That would get them into big trouble.
4. Often, ambassadors are sent to make peace with hostile nations. The job of the ambassador is to extend good will, to make alliances, or to renew friendly relations.
5. Paul tells us there that we are ambassadors.
 - a) We are sent out with a message. Jesus told us to "go into all the world and preach the Gospel..."
 - b) We are representing Christ. We are speaking for Christ—he is pleading/beseeking through us.
Luke 10:16 He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me...
 - c) We are extending is an offer of peace, good will, and friendly relations between God and the sinner. The sinner can come into an alliance with God through Christ.

App: It really is a privilege to speak for Christ. Being an ambassador for Christ and proclaiming his message is a noble task; God makes his appeal to the lost through us.

This is a task that you can devote your life to. It would be reasonable to make this your life work. Perhaps some of us can do it vocationally.

Are you participating in God's great work of reconciliation, or are you keeping your mouth shut? Ambassadors speak for God; they communicate the message. If you are a Christian, you are an ambassador. You have a privileged position. We must participate in this great work of communicating/proclaiming the message. We must be involved somehow.

- B. .20b Ambassadors plead with and implore sinners to be reconciled to God.
 1. Delivering the message is only part of the task. We deliver the message and then fervently urge people to accept it.

2. Notice the words “pleading” (παρακαλέω) and “imploring.” (δέομαι). Earlier (vs. 11), Paul said that “we persuade men.” Now he says that we plead with them and beg them—we urge them and fervently invite them—to be reconciled to God. These words speak of an impassioned and urgent plea.

Ac 2:40 With many other words [Peter] warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

We deliver this message with fervency and urgency.

One thing we *don't* do in trying to persuade people to become Christians is to trick them or manipulate them into a decision. You are probably aware that some people use pressure tactics and emotional manipulation to coerce people to make a profession of faith. People coerced/manipulated in that way often make false professions of faith.

We present the Gospel, we invite people to accept it, we try to persuade them and compel them to be saved, but we can't force anyone to accept the message. Salvation is voluntary, not coerced.

Our responsibility is to proclaim the message, urge people to accept it, and pray that God would do a work in their lives. The HSp has to convict the sinner and draw him to salvation. We don't need to trick anyone into it or manipulate them into it. We simply proclaim the message, fervently urge people to accept it, and pray that God would convict them of their need for salvation.

3. .20c We plead and implore “on Christ's behalf.”

If we are speaking for Christ, we'd better be sure that we are speaking accurately and biblically. We don't want to convey the wrong message. It's a high privilege, but also a high responsibility, to speak for God. We must make sure that we are speaking God's message, not our own.

Just explain vs. 21 and invite people to repent and believe.

4. What is God's means of bringing sinners to salvation? How do people get saved? God uses his spokesmen to "preach the word." We urge people, exhort them, plead with them, pray for them, and try to persuade them to accept the message of the Gospel. This is what the HSp uses to convict someone of sin and to convince him to repent and believe.

Cf. Romans 10:14–15 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"

5. .20end And note the command/imperative here—"be reconciled to God."

Ac 17:30 ... [God] commands all men everywhere to repent

John 3:7 ... Ye must be born again.

Our responsibility is to make the plea, to communicate the appeal—God is willing to be reconciled to the sinner if he will repent and believe the Gospel. We urge and implore people to be saved, but ultimately, the choice is between them and God. We are responsible to communicate the message, but we can't control how people respond to it.

Sadly, most of the time, people reject it. The gate leading to salvation is narrow, and few are on the right road.

6. We might ask why Paul is saying this to a group of people who claim to be saved. He's speaking to professing believers here; he calls them "saints" (1:1). So why is he pleading and imploring them to be reconciled to God if they already are saved?

Given the context, it seems to me that Paul is concerned that some of his readers were not genuine believers; they had not been truly reconciled to God. So he's urging them to resolve that issue by being saved.

App: I could be true in our church as well; there could be people here who profess to be saved, but are not. They have never truly been reconciled to God.

Have you ever known anyone like that? Are you aware that some people in the church may not be saved? Why do you think I keep proclaiming the Gospel over and over again? It's because some people here this morning may not be saved. Even in the best of churches, it's likely that some people are not genuinely saved—even if they claim to be saved.

We need to repeat this message regularly—“be reconciled to God.” We need to invite people to accept Christ by faith.

Trans: Ambassadors of Christ *represent* Jesus by communicating the Gospel message to those who need to hear it. Those who are living for Christ are trying to do that.

V. 6:1-2 We *recommend* a speedy, sincere response of faith.

A. .1a Paul refers to himself and his colleagues as those working together with God. He sees himself as an ambassador, sent out by God to deliver the Gospel message.

App: Anytime we participate in Gospel ministry, we are working together with God. That's a great partnership. Who would not want to work together with God to fulfill his purposes?

And again I would recommend working together with God in the great task of reconciling sinners to God *as a full time vocation*. What a great privilege to be a co-worker with God in telling people that God loves them and pleads with them to be reconciled to him. It would be a great use of your life to dedicate yourself to this task.

B. .1b He warns them “not to receive the grace of God in vain.”

1. By “the grace of God,” Paul means the entire Gospel message of salvation through Christ. These people had heard it, but it was questionable whether they had genuinely received it. Were they truly new creations in Christ? Had the old passed away, and were they now living a new lifestyle? Had they been reconciled to God? Apparently, for some, it was questionable.

An ungodly or disorderly lifestyle brings your profession of faith into question. Some people deny their profession of faith by their lifestyle (Titus 1:15-16). Or if you are following false teachers, that makes your profession of faith questionable.

2. “in vain” (κενός) means “empty, without effect, useless.” If the grace of God had had no effect on them, if it had no results—if it didn’t make any difference—then they were not genuinely saved. Their profession of faith was worthless; it came to nothing.
3. Because of the false teachers who had crept into the church, and because of the false doctrine they were teaching, it was a real possibility that some in the church were not genuinely saved.
4. False professions of faith are fairly common. People claim to have received the grace of God for salvation, but then after a while it becomes quite evident that the grace of God had no effect on them.
5. What effect *should* the saving grace of God have on us? If you have received God’s saving grace—not in vain, but in truth—what are the effect/results?
 - a) It should result in sanctification, i.e., holy living, godliness, righteousness in daily behavior. Eph 4:22-24—put off the old, renew your mind, put on the new.
Cf. 5:17; Rom 12:1-2
 - b) It should result in virtuous attitudes like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control. I.e., the fruit of the Spirit should start showing up.
 - c) It should result in affirming the truth and rejecting error. If the people at Corinth accepted the false teaching of Paul’s opponents, that would imply that they had received the grace of God in vain. Cf. Gal 1:6 “another gospel”

App: Sadly, for some who claim to be Christians, the Gospel seems to have little or no effect. Nothing really changes. People claim to be saved, yet there is no evidence of that. The old has not passed away and the new has not arrived. Their lifestyle is virtually the same as unsaved people.

If that’s your experience—i.e., you say that you’re are saved, but there is no evidence of it—then you fit this category—you’ve received the grace of God “in vain.” It has had no effect on you; your profession of salvation is probably empty.

A change in spiritual status always results in a change of attitude and lifestyle. The old, pre-conversion way of living must pass away; a new, post-conversion lifestyle must follow. A great change happens when you are born again.

6. BTW, Paul is *not* suggesting here that it's possible for someone to lose his salvation. New creations in Christ cannot become unsaved. The concern here is that they had not truly received the grace of God in the Gospel. Their profession of faith in Christ may have been empty, without effect. They never were saved in the first place.
7. .2 The quote here is lifted from Isa 49:8. He's using Isaiah's words to urge the people to apply the grace of God to themselves; they should make sure that they are truly saved and that their faith is not "vain/empty/without effect." If the people in Corinth believed the false teachers and their false gospel, it would prove that their faith in Christ was empty/vain/without effect.
8. .2b If some of them are not saved, the best thing to do is resolve that problem immediately. He urges them not to postpone that decision—"now is the accepted time" – the word means "especially or truly favorable; it's a welcome time." We should sense the urgency of this command and invitation.
 - a) .2b He uses the word "behold" twice – "Look/listen carefully"—let me have your attention. This is an urgent matter.
 - b) It's urgent for us to plead with and implore people to be saved. It's urgent that the unsaved make use of this opportunity.
9. .2end "Now is the day of salvation." The best response to the Gospel is to accept it immediately. Don't put it off; today is always the best day to be saved. Now is the best time.

Cf. the expression "seize the day" (*carpe diem*). In order to be reconciled to God, you must make a decision to repent and to trust in Jesus. The best and most favorable time to do that is now.

The Bible warns us that our lives are like a vapor; we don't know when they may end. People unexpectedly lose their lives all the time. We have no guarantees that we'll live another day.

The best choice we can make is to get saved now and not put it off until later. You don't want to procrastinate when it comes to securing your salvation. Now is an especially or truly favorable time to be saved. And the implied warning is that we must not let this opportunity slip away.

That's the message that we press upon the unsaved. As ambassadors for Christ, we proclaim the Gospel message and show people the necessity of salvation.

In this passage, Paul urges us to live for him who died for us. What does that look like?

- .16 We don't judge others on a merely external, superficial level.
- .17 We are new creations in Christ. We are striving to put off the old, sinful way of living and adopt a new, godly way of living.
- .18-21 We are engaged in the ministry of reconciling others to Christ. We see ourselves as ambassadors who are sent by God to proclaim the Gospel message.
- 6:1-2 As we communicate the Gospel to others, we urge them to accept the message immediately and sincerely.

If we believe that Jesus died for us and rose again, the logical result is that we live for him and not for ourselves. Let's think about that this coming week.

How can we avoid judging others on a superficial, external level? How can we put off the old and live as new creations in Christ? How can we engage in the great task of reconciling others to God? Who around us can we urge and implore to accept the free gift of salvation through Christ? If we were living for Jesus this week, that's what we'd be doing. Let's give it a try.