

THE STEWARDSHIP OF MINISTRY
Or
Our Stewardship Together

2 Corinthians 5:17-20

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (NASU)

Mohammed Ali was acclaimed as perhaps the greatest heavyweight boxer in the history of the sport. I met Ali in the Atlanta airport when he was still the heavyweight boxing champion of the world. It happened like this: Mrs. J and I were walking along the concourse on our way to our airplane when we came to a crowd of reporters with cameras clicking. I looked over the heads of the crowd and recognized Muhammad Ali. He was holding court with the reporters. I worked my way past some of the reporters and came up behind him. I stood there briefly and then said, over the hubbub of reporter’s questions, “Champ, I hear that you are a minister of Mohammed.” He instantly turned around and looking me in the eye said, “Yes I am! Who are you?” I replied, “I am a minister of Jesus Christ.” He stuck out his giant hand and I shook it and he held on and said, “I am going to resign as a minister of Mohammed because I run with a crowd that makes it hard to be a holy man.” And then he said, “Say, I’ve got a question for you: how could Jesus be virgin born when he had brothers and sisters?” I explained that Jesus was born before Mary and Joseph were married and the brothers and sisters were born later. He was sincere and we talked for a few more moments and then he said, “I’ve gotta talk to these other guys. Good luck!” And with that he resumed answering the reporter’s questions. Shortly after our encounter I read in the newspaper that he resigned being a minister of Mohammed.

He asked me. “Who are you?” I replied “I am a minister of Jesus Christ.” May I ask you that question? Who are you? Did you know that, if you are a Christian, you have been ordained a minister of Jesus Christ? Listen as I read from your certificate of ordination: “You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit...” (John 15:16).

What Jesus said to those first disciples He says to us. Every Christian has been ordained by Jesus Christ! You are in the ministry with me! We share in this same ministry! Isn’t that exciting? Let us see what that ministry is.

The passage of Scripture before us makes clear our call to the ministry and our obligation to minister. So, fellow ministers, let us examine this wonderful privilege that is ours.

THE MINISTRY THAT CHRISTIANS HAVE

“God...reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation”
(2 Corinthians 5:18).

The game of football has been described as “Eleven men on the field being greatly over exercised while thousands of spectators, who are greatly in need of exercise, applaud their heroics.” Like fans at a football game, 21st century Christianity has developed an audience of spectators who come to church to see a performance.

The longer I am in ministry the more convinced I become that the great need of most churches is not more members in the pews but more ministers on the field. The motto for the average American seems to be, “Don’t get involved!” “Let someone else do it”; “Play it cool and live for number one!”

Toby Keith, the Country and Western singer, released a recording entitled, “Let’s Talk About Me.” Here are some of the lyrics:

“I wanna talk about me
Wanna talk about I
Wanna talk about number one....

Chorus:

I wanna talk about me
I wanna talk about me
I wanna talk about me
I wanna talk about me.”

The song reflects the selfishness, self-absorbed, self-centeredness, self-infatuated culture in which we live. It is a culture that wants to receive, not give. Jesus said, “...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28) As long as we are self-centered we will not be servers. Ministering is serving others.

The truth about biblical stewardship is set in the context of community. We are in this together! Ministry has a community component – it involves others. Paul said:

- v.18 - “*God reconciled us*” and “*God has given to us the ministry of reconciliation.*”
- v.19 – “*He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*”
- v.20 - “*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ.*”

Therefore, we are not Lone Rangers doing our own thing. One cannot be an isolationist and be involved in ministry. By its very nature ministry is an “us” and “we” thing. We are part of a team of which the Lord Jesus is our Captain. Together we have a stewardship of ministry. Together we have ministry; divided we have misery!

We need to recognize that God has already said we are stewards. A “steward” is defined by Webster as “one who is a supervisor, administrator, manager or keeper of a trust.” A Christian steward is “one to whom God has given a trust, which is to be managed for Him and for which we must ultimately give an account.”

To every Christian is entrusted a ministry or ministries, not in isolation from others, but involved with others in corporate ministry. Every Christian is a minister individually and collectively! The Lord designed that all in His church are to be involved in this ministry.

Notice again v. 18 - *“Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”* Also, v.19 says, *“He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”*

It is abundantly clear from these verses that to each church and Christian is committed the ministry of reconciliation. That is why we have the stewardship of ministry together. What specifically is this ministry of which we are the stewards? What does it mean? What does it involve and how do I perform it?

THE MEANING OF THIS MINISTRY

The words *“reconciliation”, “reconciled”, “reconciling”* occur 5 times in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. What do these words mean? Basically, reconciliation means: “To restore harmony; to change from enmity to friendship; to restore to favor.” (Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words)

To understand the need for the ministry that we are talking about, we must go all the way back to the beginning. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, all of their offsprings thereafter were born alienated from God because of the sin nature inherited from the original pair. That is why reconciliation is needed.

It was God who took the initiative to accomplish reconciliation between Himself and His rebellious human creation. Romans 5:10 expresses God's reconciling work as follows: *“...while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son.”* Colossians 1:21-22 expresses that act of God in these words: *“And you, being in time past alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works, yet now has he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death.”*

There was a time when, consciously or unconsciously, we were enemies of God in our unregenerate state. We were not in harmony with God, were not His friends, in fact God considered us His enemies. There was a wall between God and us. Marvel of marvels and wonder of wonders, it was God, Himself, who Inaugurated the process to remove the wall and bring us back into friendship with Himself!

Reconciliation concerns our being brought into a harmonious relationship with God through the death of Jesus Christ. He took the initiative and provided the basis for reconciliation – that is the death of His Son – and now the believing sinner experiences reconciliation the moment he/she receives God's Son as Savior. Harmony is restored, the enemy becomes friend. That's the meaning of reconciliation.

THE MESSENGERS OF THIS MINISTRY.

Who are the messengers carrying the news about reconciliation to those who are not yet in harmony with God? Who has been entrusted with this holy task? Who is a steward of this

marvelous ministry? There are two statements in verses 17 through 20 that make clear who is qualified to be a messenger bearing the good news about reconciliation to the world of rebels against God:

“All things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

Who is given the privilege of being a messenger of this message? Those who have themselves been reconciled to God and therefore have become “new creatures” in Christ Jesus! You and I who have accepted God’s sacrificial reconciliation Lamb as our Savior are granted this high and holy ministry.

We have the stewardship – the privilege – of being the messengers of the life-changing gospel. Verse 18 says God, “...gave US the ministry of reconciliation”—“US”—that is all of “US” who have experienced salvation are to be Messengers of this Ministry. This “ministry” is not one of actually doing the reconciling of sinners. Christ has done that by His death. We have the ministry of reconciliation in the sense that we are the announcers – the communicators of the Good News that reconciliation is needed and has been provided in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Listen to what Paul said back in verse 11: *“Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men ...”* and, v. 20 - *“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ.”* We are the messengers – if the message does not get through it is the messenger who has failed.

The Christian, who is a citizen of the Kingdom of God, is an Ambassador appointed by our Head of State, King Jesus Christ!

- His commands should engage our time and energies;
- His concerns should occupy our minds;
- His cause should be our cause.
- His communiqué must be delivered without any change in its content whatever!

Our business is to do the business He has assigned us to do. We have no business having any business that is not His business! We are Ambassadors – the messengers.

The hymn writer stated it as follows:

“I am a stranger here, within a foreign land,
My home is far away, upon a golden strand;
Ambassador am I of realms beyond the sky,
I’m here on business for my King.”

So much for the Ministry, the Meaning and the Messengers of Reconciliation. Now, what is the Message of Reconciliation?

THE MESSAGE OF THIS MINISTRY

He "...has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:19-20).

We who are the recipients of divine reconciliation have the privilege and obligation of being the heralds and instruments in God's hands to minister the message of reconciliation throughout the world. There are two aspects of this reconciliation ministry for which we humans are responsible namely:

- The work of reconciliation - "...gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (v.18)
- The word of reconciliation – "...committed to us the word of reconciliation" (v.19)

In these two verses we have the ministry and the message, the work and the word of reconciliation. We have already discussed the ministry of reconciliation, now, what is the message—the word, of reconciliation? Just what is the message that we, as ambassadors, are to communicate?

Read v.19 and 20 again: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself...Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

A. The Work - Reconciliation Was Accomplished And Is Available.

"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" - that is an accomplished fact. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). That has already happened – the transaction for restoration of harmony and favor took place at the cross! That was God's part. The debt has been paid – the sinner needs to accept God's offer of salvation. God has done his part. Our part is:

B. The Word- Reconciliation Must Be Announced And Accepted.

This is the work of the ambassador—this is our Stewardship Together. Verse 20 tells us: "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." The message is so important that Paul says we are to "beg", "plead" and in v.11 he says, "Therefore knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men." (NASB)

Paul raises 4 questions in this regard in Rom 10:13-15:

1. "How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed?"
2. "And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard?"
3. "And how shall they hear without a preacher?"
4. "And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!" (NASB)

How indeed! We who have been reconciled to God have the privilege and obligation of proclaiming the message of “*glad tidings of good things*” to a world of mankind that is largely at war with God.

Illust. Think of it this way: Here is a beneficent King with overwhelming power. However, a band of rebels rises up against him. The King marshals his army to deal with the rebellion. But before he crushes the rebels he sends messengers with this message: “*Be reconciled to the King; be in harmonious subjection to his beneficent rule; you who are now rebels and enemies can become his friends if you accept his terms of surrender.*”

That is what God has done. He took the initiative and sent His Son, King Jesus, who went to Calvary to make His enemies His friends. And if they but accept His terms of surrender they will be reconciled to God. That is the message the world needs to hear – it is a message of peace .

Summation:

- We, the Church of Jesus Christ, are Stewards of a Ministry – the ministry of reconciliation;
- This ministry involves our co-laboring with God as His ambassadorial messengers;
- Our chief business is to entreat, beseech, implore, beg, woo, win our fellow citizens to cease their resistance and accept God’s terms of peace. It is a strange thing that people should need to be pled with to take what is for their greatest good for time and eternity. But, that is the nature of the situation, isn’t it?

Conclusion:

We are left with a reminder and a challenge:

- A. First, A Reminder:** Every Ambassador will eventually be called home to report to the Head of State who sent him. The time will come when our Lord will say to us, “*Give account of your stewardship.*” (Luke 16:2) What kind of report will we be prepared to give concerning our Stewardship of Ministry as His Ambassadors?
- B. Secondly, A Challenge:** Let all of us be more than simply *Members* – let us be serious *Ministers!* Will you acknowledge your appointment as the Lord’s Ambassador and announce the Good News?

Illust. Philip Armour, founder of the Armour Meat Company, said on one occasion, “My chief business is to be a witness for Jesus Christ and I pack meat on the side to make a living.”

Is Ministry your mainline or your sideline?

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