

2 Corinthians 5:11 - 6:2 (OHP)

Morning church.

I'm continuing in our series of talks about in 2 Corinthians

Let's turn to page 1096 and to **2 Corinthians 5:11 - 6:2**

XXXX is going to come and read for us.

As (s)he does I want you to look out for Paul's job title, how does he describe his job? Hold onto to thought, it relates to something I'll say later

So who has heard the phrase **(OHP)** 'don't judge a book by its cover'?

What does it mean...? Any ideas...?

And yet we do it all the time don't we?

Here's a classic example... **(OHP)** (John F Kennedy)

Who's this? (John F Kennedy)

What's the occasion? (inauguration)

What year? (1961)

What's significant about this photo? He's not wearing a hat or coat

It's around -10 degrees and he speaks for around 13mins.

Here he is **(OHP)** arriving for his inauguration with the previous President, President Eisenhower - notice both are wearing their overcoats and hats.

And here **(OHP)** Kennedy is shaking the hand of the former president after the speech.

(OHP - back to JFK speaking) Many said at the time that his image conveyed a youthful, vigor, a man who was impervious to the bitter cold whilst he passionately spoke about what lay ahead. Out went the old, tired, frail and spent leader; in came the young, healthy, energetic new leader - before a word is spoken JFK's appearance suggested that change was in the air; how he presented himself at his inauguration was thought to have said something about what he represented.

So how do you like your leaders?

What makes a great leader? **(OHP)**

Do you like them to be statesmen like?

People who lead by example

Skilled

Intelligent

Great communicators

perhaps you prefer your leaders to be visionaries

Ambitious

Passionate

or simply approachable

Well it was a question that the Corinthians were asking themselves.

A new group of leaders had come to their church and they had a very impressive set of credentials.

We read about their glowing endorsements in chp 3 of 2 Corinthians. Chp 11 Paul suggests that these new leaders placed an importance in being paid by the church and in chp 12 we read that they prized visions and special revelations or words - boasting of experiences.

So the Corinthian church looked at these new super leaders and then at Paul and they saw a mismatch.

We read about that mismatch in vs13. There were some who felt Paul was out of his mind by comparison.

The comparison led the Corinthians to question Paul's credentials; led them to think that perhaps he wasn't very good, perhaps he wasn't the right kind of leader. Afterall he didn't appear to have the same kind of backing or experiences.

(OHP - Blank)

At its core, this letter is all about relationships - not perfect ones, but real ones.

In this letter Paul reveals that he is struggling in his relationship with the church in Corinth. Although he founded this church - back in Acts 18, the congregation have now apparently rejected him.

So Paul writes this very personal and passionate letter to the church concerned that they are being distracted (11:3-4), departing from what he had taught them previously and preferring what the new leaders represented.

This morning we're looking at a part of the letter where Paul is defending his reputation. And His defence is rooted in reminding the church of the job that God had given to him to do and what was motivating him to do it.

So what we're reflecting on here is a warning, a challenge to consider where are we placing our perspective? What is motivating us to follow God?

He's doing this so that the church will not judge their leaders by outward appearances; so they won't judge a book by its cover.

So back my question

How did you get on - did you spot Paul's job title?

Yep it's in vs 20. Paul calls himself and those working with him Christ's Ambassadors (**OHP**). And Paul wanted the Corinthians, and us, to reflect on two things about his job title:

Firstly (**OHP**) the message of Christ's Ambassador.

Secondly (**OHP**) the motivation (or focus) of Christ's Ambassador.

So let's start with the message: (**OHP**)

Now we all know what an ambassador is don't we? It's someone who likes giving out chocolates at a party, isn't it? (**OHP - chocs**)

Well strictly speaking it holds a bigger responsibility than that. (**OHP blank**)

Essentially an ambassador is a recognised official of a particular nation who is living in a foreign country.

And the job is to represent the interests of their home country in the country they're now living in. So

here's the American Ambassador (**OHP**), Matthew W. Barzun, who lives in London and represents American interests to the UK.

And Paul uses that association to explain that he too is representing the interests of another country

(**OHP - blank**), another Kingdom, namely God's eternal and permanent Kingdom. Paul's task is to

represent the interests of that kingdom which in, vs 20, he describes as making an appeal on behalf of God. So what's the appeal?

(**OHP**) "be reconciled to God"

What does reconciliation mean?

Look with me at vs 19, we read that it means **(OHP)** that God doesn't count peoples' sins against them. He doesn't count the rejection of his rule and power against those who have chosen to follow Christ (vs15).

How is he able to do that?

Well Paul explains in vs 21 that **(OHP)** God uses Jesus to swap places with us. Jesus takes our sin, our rejection of God and the punishment that results on himself and we get his righteousness which restores our relationship with God.

Why does God do it?

Well Paul tells us in vs 10 that **(OHP)** judgement is coming humanity faces a day where we have to face God and give an account for our lives.

The trial is set and the outcome is already known; we will be punished for rejecting the author of life, preferring to follow and serve created things rather than the creator; what the bible calls idols - anything that sets itself up in place of God; the desire for success at work, the desire for the comfort of wealth, our health & looks, our family, our friends, our reputations can all become idols- and the list goes on and on doesn't it?

Yet God is not content to allow us to be punished. He would rather show us mercy than judgement. So Paul writes that through Christ's love in vs14, Jesus swaps places with us, dies in our place; so that, vs 17 **(OHP)** we become a new creation, with a new purpose and a new relationship with the author of life.

And the result? vs 15, **(OHP)** we no longer live for ourselves; we live for Christ.

So this **(point up)** is the what it means to be reconciled to God; and it goes to the heart of what it means to be a Christian.

Now if you identify with that list and call yourself a Christian this all feels very familiar doesn't it? There aren't many surprises in what Paul is writing here, is there?

For a christian this message of reconciliation will be well known. We have understood these points haven't we?

This then, is the message of Christ's ambassador. **(OHP)**

But there's a bite here in Paul's letter. There's a rub in this message.

Let's remember who Paul is writing to; look at the start of the letter and the readers are those who already think themselves as being reconciled to God; the church of God in Corinth.

So he is writing to the Corinthian believers, those who have already professed a faith in Christ and he is pleading with them to be reconciled to God.

Why is this? What has gone wrong? Why is Paul calling Christians to be reconciled to God?

Well put simply Paul explains you might know the message of the gospel but have the wrong motivation in living by it. **(OHP the wrong motivation)**

The problem is summarised in vs 12 - look with me. There were some in the Corinthian church who were placing their motivation on what could be seen rather than unseen but eternal realities - the Corinthians were motivated by their appearances, they were judging a book by its cover.

So the wrong motivation of Christ's ambassador is **(OHP)** taking pride in what is seen

Now Paul has already introduced this idea in his letter, look back at 4:18

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

5:7

For we live by faith, not by sight.

Paul is concerned that the Corinthians no longer have the right perspective on their lives and their relationship to God. This was the problem with the new Corinthian leaders.

They looked too long at the things which Paul calls temporary and had lost their focus on things that are of eternal value. They had lost sight that they had been made for eternity; that's the point of vs 16; in contrast to Paul, the leaders were motivated by a worldly point of view not an eternal one.

It is similar to a challenge given by Jesus in Matthew 23:27 when he speaks to the Jewish rulers and teachers and said **(OHP)**:

"You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of bones... on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness."

The Jewish leaders had a wrong perspective on their lives and were motivated by appearances instead of a focusing on their relationship to God. Just like the new Corinthian leaders in our passage, they took pride in what could be seen rather than what was in the heart. In other words they liked to judge a book by its cover.

But more significantly Paul is warning the Corinthians that it is possible for them, as well as the leaders, to be operating from the wrong motives. **(OHP - 'wrong motive, taking pride')** After all the Corinthians preferred leaders who had great visible status compared to Paul; who came with reputations endorsed by others; whose identities were defined by their earnings; who considered themselves eloquent and clever and who prided themselves on signs and wonders; on spiritual experiences

But these things, just like our troubles, Paul says in 4:18 are temporary.

Now clearly that is not to say that all endorsements by others are wrong, or that miraculous signs, wonders and experiences have no value in the church or that we shouldn't pay our church staff.

No. Paul is saying that as Christians we're not to be focussed on these temporary things. We're not to pride ourselves by visible and temporary factors. Because Paul's point (and Jesus') is you can be active in church life in your appearance but in your heart you can be far from God.

So let's take a moment to reflect. God is telling us through the bible that it's possible for Christians to come to church each week, to live morally good lives, to be active in outreach, to help at the night shelter or with the youth work, lead a discipleship group, know our bibles well, attend prayer meetings, fast and pray for a week, demonstrate clear spiritual gifting and even be a church leader and not be in a right relationship with God.

Paul is saying in effect you might know a lot about God and what the christian life looks like, but you have lost the heart of knowing God.

And that loss of perspective has a devastating consequence listen to Paul goes on to write in chp 11:13

(OHP)

For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness.

Paul writes that you can demonstrate all the right outward signs that you're a believer by what you do but in fact, in reality, you're no different to a servant of satan who is masquerading - pretending to follow God.

That's a pretty powerful statement isn't it? A pretty condemning assessment.

Paul is pleading with the Corinthians, and us, not to judge a book by its cover. We're not to be fixated on outward appearances to motivate us to serve Christ. Instead we're to come back and live with God again - be reconciled to God

So if we now know the wrong motivation that define Christ's Ambassadors; what are the right ones?

(OHP) How do we avoid making the same mistakes as the Corinthians leaders? how does Paul help us to spot this problem in our lives?

Well it's what he calls those things which are in the heart; things that are unseen which have an eternal and not temporary value. And in this morning's passage Paul points to 2 things, 2 factors that we should reflect on to consider whether we have lost our focus and motivation.

The first is in vs 11 **(OHP)** ; the fear of Lord.

The second motivation is in vs 14 **(OHP)**; which is Christ's love.

Let's look at each in turn. And then I'll wrap up.

Firstly, Paul's fear of the Lord. **(OHP - fear of the lord on its own)**

What does it mean to fear the Lord? It might seem to us an old fashioned term. We might think of fear as a terror brought on by a threat of danger; like some kind of b - movie caricature. **(OHP- reed poster)**

But the Bible uses fear in different ways. Look for the phrase 'fear of the Lord' in the Bible and you get a whole bunch of verses like this:

(OHP) Deuteronomy 10:12-13

What does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul...

(OHP) here's one that might be familiar to you

Proverbs 1:7

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

(OHP) Proverbs 19:23

The fear of the Lord leads to life; then one rests content, untouched by trouble.

This one is important because it echoes what Paul talks about in 2 Cor 4, which Simon and Tim spoke on in previous weeks.

And a final one from Isaiah who is writing about Jesus some 700 years before his human birth **(OHP)**:

Isaiah 11:2-3

The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord – and he will delight in the fear of Lord.

(OHP - the right motivation) Fearing the Lord is about recognising who God is and revering him. And according to Isaiah, it's something that even Jesus does.

The fear of the Lord recognises God's eternal power and authority in the universe and gives him due respect and position. After all in vs 10 this is the one who has the authority to sit in judgement over us and hold us to account. And not just us but everyone who ever lived, over all of time - who else could do that?

Now you may have experienced something similar to what Paul means by the fear of the Lord when you've had the opportunity to meet someone whom you respect or you consider to be important.

I vividly remember meeting one of my art school heroes; a guy called Calvin Seerveld **(OHP)**, who has written a whole bunch of stuff about what it means to be a Christian in the art world. In fact he wrote a book which had a strong influence on the business I run with Gary - but that's another story.

I had the opportunity to meet Calvin at a conference. Knowing he was going to be there I took a copy of the book that had been an inspiration to me so I could get him to sign it.

As I approached him to get the book signed I became completely awe struck and could barely get my request out; 'Erm, I think you're great - could you sign my book please?'

Katherine was there too and was inwardly giggling away. She saw this friendly, in her words 'cuddly' man, who was incredibly approachable, humble and taking a real interest in us and then saw me completely crumble before him because of what he represented to me - I was unable to string a sentence together.

What had happened? Well, I had the fear of Seerveld in me; I wasn't scared of him I was in awe of him.

And that sort of attitude which Paul says motivates him in his relationship with God. **(OHP)**

The fear of Lord is rooted in an understanding and a conviction of who God is. It means we takes time to reflect on God's external power and authority as shown to us in the bible. And that fear, that reverence for the Lord, motivates Paul to persuade others (vs11) that God is at work to reconcile the world to himself (vs19). That, Paul writes, is the purpose of Christ's ambassador.

So Paul asks us do we hold God with the same awe and reverence in our lives? When was the last time you were humbled and amazed by what God has done for you in Christ?

And does it lead to a conviction that we should persuade others to be reconciled to him? Or instead are we fixating on things that are visible and temporary?

(PAUSE)

The second motivation from Paul's heart is in vs 14; Christ's love compels Paul. **(OHP)**

Notice that it doesn't say that it's Paul's love for Christ that motivates him; he is not relying on his own capacity to love God to drive him to his task to serve God.

It's the other way around; Paul focuses on Christ's value for him to set his value and motivation.

How is that love shown to us?

It's what follows in vs 14; Christ dies for all.

Christ's sacrifice for us is motivated in his love for us. He is willing to take on our sin and in it's place we are given his perfect and sinless righteousness; his purity and goodness becomes ours.

Again Paul asks us are we motivated by Christ's love for us in our lives? When was the last time you were humbled and amazed by Christ's love which he displayed in his death? Do you take time to reflect on this?

These two convictions (**OHP - both**) call Paul to challenge the Corinthians not to receive God's grace in vain (in 6:1). He quotes from Isaiah 49 (in vs 2) to say that God is now at work to call people into a restored relationship with him. The day of Salvation is here and God is at work - not us. He has provided the means to know him and to be fully satisfied in him, fully content in life for eternity. And it is all accessed by faith not sight.

Know God, fear Him, and see His love for you. And do it today.

Don't miss out on the grace of God! How desperately sad would it be as Christ's Ambassadors to know so much about a country, so much about his Kingdom, but never get there because we have misplaced our focus?

So this morning we're ask ourselves what are we looking to build our relationship with God on? Where are we finding our motivation to follow Christ?

The Bible teaches that two eternal realities the fear of the Lord and Christ's love for us are the only things that will bring true contentment and fulfilment for all of us.

Reflecting on these eternal realities we help us to see that everything else is just temporary; our troubles and afflictions, our jobs, our wealth, our health, our relationships, our families, our outreach, our knowledge and our spiritual gifts and experiences are all just temporary.

Are you focusing on what is temporary and visible to find your motivation in life?

If so let us be reconciled to God.

(OHP - blank)

Let's pray

"And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment"

John 16:8

Questions

2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2

Paul defends his ministry and message of reconciliation in this passage.

- Quickly skim chapters 3, 10, 11 & 12 - what accusations might Paul's opponents have made about his ministry?
- How does Paul explain his true motives and goals?
- In describing his message, Paul uses the words reconciliation and reconciled five times.
- What does it mean to be reconciled to God?
- What does fearing the Lord look like? Compare your answer to *Proverbs 19:23*
- How can you be certain of Christ's love for you?
- What would it mean for the Corinthians—or us today—to receive the grace of God in vain?

Applying the Word

- How would you use this passage to explain why we proclaim the gospel?
- How might Paul's example help you be a more effective ambassador, especially to people who are "turned off" by Christianity?
- Who, specifically, would you like to be an ambassador to?
- How could you reach that person?

Responding in Prayer

- Ask God to make you an effective ambassador.