

You know the answer to this question, right off the bat! So, here's the question. What's the one organization that pursues a presence in every nation and has been marketing effectively for a couple thousand years? Of course, the answer is the Kingdom of God, whose citizens are Jesus-followers—and lots of those followers are very committed to proclaiming the huge value of what Jesus did on the Cross!

You see, as Paul taught the Colossians in his epistle (1:13-14 ESV), “[God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” So, believers have a very real structure of “dual citizenship,” yes, as temporary citizens of whatever country we were born in and also eternal citizens in the Kingdom of God.

And, just like, say, the Argentinian ambassador to the United States represents Argentina in its interests with the United States...well, then we as citizens of God's Kingdom represent the interests of Jesus Christ and His Kingdom in every country around the world that we may find ourselves in. Amazingly, we are more than just citizens of God's Kingdom, we are *ambassadors*—indeed, ambassadors with a special task.

Here's what Paul taught to the Corinthians. Listen carefully, then we'll unpack it to discern some of the most important direction we can ever get from Scripture. Listen carefully to this Bible passage:

“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (2 Corinthians 5:14-20)

Now isn't that powerful—the incredible reality that the God of the Universe and our Redeemer wants us to join him in the most important task of building out his Kingdom citizenry? So, because it's so astonishing, let's break out the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *how* of that passage.

- First, the *who*. Well, there are actually at least three categories of “who's” here in this Bible passage. We start with the key of the “who,” of course, the God category. “God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself...” The Father and the Son both involved. Awesome.
Next, there's the “us” in that passage—we are the *ambassadors for Christ*, the role he has appointed each believer to. Now, a country like Argentina only appoints one ambassador to the other countries around the world. Each ambassadorship is a very important mission that's entrusted to a very special person. But *God's* mission for *His* Kingdom is so very important that He doesn't entrust it to just one person in every country. Instead, God appoints every believer to represent Him. What a privilege!
Then, we have to complete the loop...ambassadors to *who*? To the world! To all! As Paul wrote, Christ died for *all*! And God was reconciling *the world* to Himself, not just a select few! Yeah, all of us believer-ambassadors telling of God's great reconciliation opportunity! So, that's all three categories of *who*: God...us as ambassadors for Christ...and them as hearers of the Gospel!
- Second, the *what*. Well, all of Christ's ambassadors are *entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation*. Yes, whoever calls upon the name of Jesus and believes is reconciled to the Father through Christ. Our ambassadorial ministry is to be the credible messenger of this most unique and most important message in all of human history. Because of the stakes involved—eternal life and fellowship with

God—this is to be our overriding message. Let's be clear here: our good works without the ultimate actual appeal for reconciliation are insufficient. Loving our neighbors without the ultimate actual appeal of reconciliation is insufficient. Don't believe that? Paul tells saved believers in 1 Corinthians 3 that believers' works not built on the foundation of Christ will burn up at the judgement seat of Christ. But that passage tells us that our works that are built on the foundation of Christ will be rewarded!

- Third, the *when*. Well, that's pretty direct, right there, the first three words in verse 16: "from now on!" That means from the time of the Cross till the end times. Yeah, that includes now! That's when!
- Fourth, the *where*. Well, that's simple: it's the world. Of course, we also know that for certain from Jesus's very well-known words in His Great Commission for us to go to "all nations" in Matthew 28:19-20. Also, we can't miss Jesus's last words before His ascension to heaven: "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." That's in Acts 1:8.
- Fifth, the *how*. Well, verse 19 here is clear: "God *making His appeal* through us." God is expecting us to speak up!

So, for the serious, full-of-gratitude, active ambassador for Christ, this "ambassador" passage Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers is definitive—it's an amazing who, what, when, where, and how!

"Yeah, yeah, I get it," you might be thinking, "that's solid, basic theology." *No!* This *isn't just* solid, basic theology...this is a *glistening, great privilege* of our life in Christ, a privilege afforded every believer! That's our primary message to our neighbors. In fact, it's the ultimate way we love our neighbors—by telling them about the Great Reconciliation, available to whoever believes!

But sadly, in many countries with churchgoers considering themselves well-steeped in Christianity, this message is not only often lost for a bit of time, it's been substantially missing in action for a very long time! Sometimes it's just passivity. Sometimes it's bad theology...perhaps with social activity given precedence over the Gospel...perhaps with supposing God does 100% of the task, apart from appealing through us...perhaps believing a sprinkle on a baby constitutes a full commitment to Christ.

Sometimes it's zeal for politics and cultural rules to try to prompt those unbelievers to act like law-focused Christians! But in 2 Corinthians 3:7, Paul warned against "the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone"—you know, the Ten Commandments, the Law of Moses being the dominant message to unbelievers. You got it, condemnation for others' bad behavior is preached—but without that pesky reconciliation story.

Frankly, this type of street-level religion is pervasive in many places where churchgoers proliferate. Isn't that tragic? Is this really the reconciling ambassadorship that Paul was so clearly speaking to as our privilege? Hey, when I teach at the University level, sometimes we talk about God's strategy for His Kingdom and the messaging He gives us to impart to others and I ask this simple multiple-choice question.

For typical unbelievers in the United States today, the dominant perception of Christianity is...

- Eternal life through the salvific love and grace of Christ and Him crucified.*
- Condemning the behavior of unbelievers and forcefully correcting it through politics and laws.*

The vast majority of Christian college students immediately answer "b." And I mean *immediately*.

Does that mean churchgoers are just trying to make their country look and feel supposedly "more Christian"? Or are they trying to redeem unbelievers through the Law of Moses? But the Law has absolutely no power to save or redeem—instead, it actually increases sin (Romans 5:20)! Here's the thing: saved Christians are "not under law but under grace" (Romans 6:4). Nevertheless, many churchgoers are striving hard to get their neighbors under that law. Yeah, instead of sharing God's love and grace and *God's offer to not be under the law!* Really? Is this remotely what Jesus meant by loving your neighbor?

It's really pretty astounding, isn't it, this ambassador-for-Christ gig that God has given us? Just give our neighbors the good news! And when that person then does believe in Christ, you can grin and say to God, "How about that! We just added another ambassador for you!" How fun is that? And how profound.

