

Overview:

An ambassador is an official representative from one country to another country. They are given the authority to speak on behalf of the country they are representing. It is a prestigious position often given to people of high ranking social status. They need to be diplomatic in solving problems. They also must be fully aware and seek the interest of their home country. An ambassador is an appointed position.

How do you become an ambassador for God? In 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, Paul explains that this only happens if you are “in Christ.” Paul uses this phrase to frequently describe believers in his letters. Once you are “in Christ” you become a new creation. It doesn’t matter if you have been “in Christ” for an hour or for 20 years. Being “in Christ” means you have a new position before God. Your job with this new position is to offer the ministry of reconciliation to others who are not yet “in Christ.”

The idea of being a new creation is sometimes hard to understand. There might be days, weeks or years that you don’t feel like a new creation. Your past, present, and future sins can weigh you down causing doubt about your new position before God. This is the difference between position and practice. Paul wrote in Romans 7:15, 19 “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 19 For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.” Even Paul struggled with his practice (actions) agreeing with his new position in Christ.

So what does all this mean; being an ambassador in Christ as a new creation? Paul states in 2 Corinthians 5:20 that God is making His appeal through you. God has appointed you as His ambassador. You did not earn this position. You were chosen. This doesn’t mean there won’t be a struggle between your new position in Christ and your actions. It does mean that over time you should become a better ambassador. All this is by God’s grace and not by your works. Don’t be fooled that you can earn the position of an ambassador.

It was God’s grace that made you one and it is His grace that will help you act like one.

A. The Christian’s destiny (continued).

5. (11) Our message in light of our eternal destiny.

Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

a. **Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord:** What do we know of the **terror of the Lord**? We know that apart from Jesus we are the righteous targets of **the terror of the Lord**. We also know that in Jesus we have been *delivered* from **the terror of the Lord**.

b. **We persuade men:** Knowing the place of men both apart from Jesus and the place of men in Jesus, **we persuade men** to come to Jesus and know what it means to be *delivered* from **the terror of the Lord**.

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i. The message is not, “Watch out for **the terror of the Lord**,” though there is a place for that message. The message is not, “If I don’t persuade men I might face **the terror of the Lord**, so I had better get to work!” Instead, the message is, “I have been delivered from **the terror of the Lord**, and you can be delivered too. Come to Jesus!” In truth, **the terror of the Lord** was targeted on *Jesus*, so it would not be directed at all those who trust in who Jesus is and what He has done for them.

ii. **We persuade men**: This should be the heart of everyone who presents the gospel, whether it is in a pulpit or anywhere else. We intend to **persuade men**. We are not simply casting out ideas without caring how men respond to them. We should be like Paul, who passionately desired that men and women come to Jesus. We must intend in our hearts and our words to **persuade men**.

c. **But we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences**: Paul worked hard to **persuade men**, but he knew he did not need to persuade God. Instead, he knew that he was **well known to God**. He also wished that he did not need to persuade the Corinthian Christians; he wanted to **trust** that his message and his ministry were **well known in their consciences**.

i. Paul saw the need to persuade *the world* of the person and work of Jesus and of his own integrity as a messenger of the good news. However, he knew there was no need to persuade God, and it frustrated him that it was necessary to persuade the Corinthian Christians.

B. Paul defends and describes his ministry.

1. (12) Why would Paul defend his ministry at all?

For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have *an answer* for those who boast in appearance and not in heart.

a. **We do not commend ourselves again to you**: Was Paul just bragging? Was he just trying to glorify himself before the Corinthians? Not at all. Though Paul gloried in his weakness, his trials, and his struggles, he doesn’t do it to brag before the Corinthian Christians.

b. **But give you opportunity to glory on our behalf**: Instead, by telling of his weakness, his trials, and his struggles, Paul wanted to give the Corinthian Christians the *opportunity* to be proud of him (**glory on our behalf**).

i. Paul speaks with irony here. The Corinthian Christians were not interested in glorying in Paul or in seeing anything good in any of his trials. They thought the trials made Paul *less* of an apostle and man of God, not *more* of an apostle and man of God. Paul knew this well but is happy to give them the **opportunity to glory on our behalf** nonetheless!

c. **That you may have something to answer those who glory in appearance and not in heart**: One problem with the Corinthian Christians is that they *liked those who glory in appearance and not in heart*. They looked down on Paul because his glory was not in

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appearance and only **in heart**. By telling the Corinthian Christians how God worked through his struggles and trials, Paul gave them **something to answer those** who thought that way.

i. What do you glory in? Are you among **those who glory in appearance and not in heart**? Remember what the Lord said to Samuel: *The LORD does not see as a man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart* (1 Samuel 16:7). We are so easily impressed by a person's *image* that we often do not see or care about their *substance*. It isn't that **appearance** is completely unimportant, but compared to the **heart** it almost is.

2. (13-15) Paul isn't crazy; instead, he is motivated by the love of God he has received.

For if we are beside ourselves, *it is for God*; or if we are of sound mind, *it is for you*. For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

a. **If we are beside ourselves**: To be "beside yourself" describes crazy, irrational behavior. The Corinthian Christians probably thought Paul was crazy because he seemed content with a life of pain, trials, and discomfort if it brought glory to God. In being accused of being beside himself, Paul is in good company. Jesus was also accused of being out of His mind (Mark 3:21 and John 10:20).

i. "Probably he was reputed by some to be *deranged*. Festus thought so: *Paul, thou art beside thyself; too much learning hath made thee mad*. And his enemies at Corinth might insinuate not only that he was *deranged*, but attribute his derangement to a less worthy cause than intense study and deep learning." (Clarke)

b. **If we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you**: Paul doesn't want the Corinthian Christians to think he is *deliberately* acting in a way that some might think crazy, just for the sake of acting crazy. Instead, he is doing it **for God**. Then again, if the Corinthian Christians want to think Paul is **of sound mind**, they can think he is acting that way for them.

i. "The apostle tells them, that if indeed he was beside himself in any of their opinion, it was *to God*, that is, for the honour and glory of God: or if he was sober, it was for their sake; in what temper so ever he was, it was either for service to God, or them." (Poole)

c. **For the love of Christ constrains us**: Paul is motivated – even pushed on by – the **love of Christ**, that is, Jesus' love towards him. Paul *had* to do what he did in ministry, because he received so much love from Jesus that it compelled him to serve others.

i. This is the greatest foundation for ministry, wanting to give *something* to others because Jesus gave you *everything*. When we really receive the **love of Christ**, it touches us and makes us want to serve others.

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ii. Paul felt *compelled* by **the love of Christ**. If someone asked, “Why are you doing it all? Why all the pain and all the trials?” Paul would answer, “I have to. I have received **the love of Christ**. I have **the love of Christ** in my heart in the sense that I love Jesus. I also have **the love of Christ** in my heart for all the people Jesus loves. I am compelled by **the love of Christ!**” “The apostles laboured much, but all their labour sprang from the impulse of the love of Jesus Christ. Just as Jacob toiled for Rachel solely out of love to her, so do true saints serve the Lord Jesus under the omnipotent constraint of love.” (Spurgeon)

iii. To say, “**the love of Christ constrains us,**” is to say that the love of Christ has *power*. It has a force that can bind us and influence us. “The love of Christ had pressed Paul’s energies into one force, turned them into one channel, and then driven them forward with a wonderful force, till he and his fellows had become a mighty power for good, ever active and energetic.” (Spurgeon)

d. **If one died for all, then all died:** How did Jesus **die for all**? In the sense that His death is *able* to save **all** who will come to Him and is a *demonstration* of God’s love to **all**; but *not* in the sense that all are saved because Jesus died (which is the false doctrine of universalism).

i. However, it is probable that in this context Paul means “all the saved” when he says **all**. There is no doubt that there is a sense in which Jesus died for the whole world: *And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world* (1 John 2:2). But the **all** Paul mentions here is probably “all the saved,” because he also writes **then all died**. It can only be said that those who join themselves to Jesus by faith have spiritually died and risen again with Him (Romans 6:1-6).

e. **That those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again:** If Jesus died for us, it is only fitting that we live **for Him**. Jesus gave us new life, not to live for ourselves but to live **for Him**. The question is simple: Are you living for yourself, or are you living for Jesus? “He died for us that we might die to ourselves.” (Calvin)

i. God created us for the purpose of living for Him, not for ourselves. It is a corruption of our nature that makes us want to live for ourselves and not for the Lord. In Revelation 4:11 it says in the King James Version: *for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. We are and were created to live unto God, not unto ourselves. Jesus lived completely unto God the Father.*

ii. What does it mean to **live no longer for themselves, but for Him**? It doesn’t mean that we can say, “I won’t love or serve anyone else but God.” Instead, our love for God, and our life for God, is expressed in the way we serve others. When we say that we live for God, we can not use it as an excuse to neglect serving others.

3. (16) **Because of this new life made possible by Jesus, old earthly attachments are far less important.**

Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him thus* no longer.

a. **We regard no one according to the flesh:** Why?

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- Because we *do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen* (2 Corinthians 4:18).
- Because our *earthly tent* will be destroyed, but we will have a new body, *eternal in the heavens* (2 Corinthians 5:1).
- Because we *walk by faith, not by sight* (2 Corinthians 5:7).
- Because we do not *glory in appearance*, but we *glory in heart* (2 Corinthians 5:12).
 - i. For all these reasons, we don't look to the image and appearance of the flesh but to the substance of the heart.

b. **Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet we know Him thus no longer:** Even those who knew Jesus in the flesh found their new relationship with Him through the Holy Spirit far more rewarding.

- i. Because Paul writes **we have known Christ according to the flesh**, we can surmise that Paul knew of Jesus during the days of His earthly ministry and probably even heard Jesus teach in Jerusalem. Paul may have even been among some of the Pharisees who often confronted Jesus! Paul certainly fondly looked back on what he remembered of **Christ according to the flesh**. At the same time, he knew his relationship with Jesus through the Holy Spirit was far better.
- ii. "When he knew Christ after the flesh he considered Him as the leader of a new sect, the leader of a new party, a menace to holy religion. He says we do not see Him like that any more. We know Him now in the Spirit, by the Spirit." (Morgan)
- iii. So, to have known Jesus in the flesh didn't guarantee anything. "Great numbers had followed Christ in person who afterwards deserted Him and demanded His crucifixion." (Hughes) Even the disciples were poor followers of Jesus until they knew Him by the Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

c. **We know Him thus no longer:** Some think that it would be better if Jesus were present with us **according to the flesh**, but it would not be and Jesus knew this. This is why Jesus told His disciples *It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you* (John 16:7).

4. (17) The resurrection life of Jesus gives us new life.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

- a. **If anyone:** This is a promise for **anyone**. **Anyone!** It doesn't matter what class, what race, what nationality, what language, or what level of intelligence. **Anyone** can be a new creation in Jesus Christ.

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- b. **Is in Christ:** This is a promise for **anyone** who **is in Christ**. This is not a promise for those who are in themselves, or in the religion of men, or in someone or something else. This is for those **in Christ**.
- c. **He is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.** Paul here teaches the great principle of *regeneration*. Jesus Christ changes those who come to Him by faith and who are **in Christ**. The saved are not “*just forgiven*.” They are changed into a **new creation**.
- i. It is unfair for us to expect those who are not **in Christ** to live as if they were a **new creation**. However, it is *not* unfair to expect a changed life from people who say they are Christians. “I know no language, I believe there is none, that can express a greater or more thorough and more radical renewal, than that which is expressed in the term, ‘a new creature.’” (Spurgeon)
 - ii. However, being a **new creation** doesn’t mean that we are perfect. It means that we *are* changed and that we are *being* changed.
- d. **He is a new creation:** Who makes us a **new creation**? This is something God alone can do in us. This isn’t just “turning over a new leaf” or “getting your act together.” Yet the life of a **new creation** is not something God does *for us* but *in us*. So, we are told to *put off... the old man* and to *put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness* (Ephesians 4:22-24).
- i. Being a **new creation** is a gift from God received by faith. “God is surely the author of the second creation as he was of the first.” (Harris) “A phrase which argueth the greatest change imaginable, and such a one as can be wrought in the soul by no other power than the power of God.” (Poole)
 - ii. The work of a **new creation** is even greater than God’s work of creating the world. “My brethren, it was more difficult, if such terms are ever applicable to Omnipotence, it was more difficult to create a Christian than to create a world. What was there to begin with when God made the world? There was nothing; but nothing could not stand in God’s way – it was at least passive. But, my brethren, in our hearts, while there was nothing that could help God, there was much that could and did oppose him. Our stubborn wills, our deep prejudices, our ingrained love of iniquity, all these, great God, opposed thee, and aimed at thwarting thy designs... Yes, great God, it was great to make a world, but greater to create a new creature in Jesus Christ.” (Spurgeon)
 - iii. Living as a **new creation** is something God works in us, using our will and our choices. So, we must both *receive the gift* of being a **new creation** and be challenged to *live the life* of a **new creation**. All this is God’s work in us that we must submit to. This reminds us that at its root, Christianity is all about what *God did for us*, not what we can or should *do for God*. “Beloved, if you have no more religion than you have worked out in yourself, and no more grace than you have found in your nature, you have none at all. A supernatural work of the Holy Ghost must be wrought in every one of us, if we would see the face of God with acceptance.” (Spurgeon)

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e. **All things have become new** is the language of God's perfect, recreated work (Revelation 21:5). God wants to do a **new** thing in our life.

i. "The man is not only *mended*, but he is *new made*... there is a *new creation*, which God himself owns as his workmanship, and which he can look on and pronounce *very good*." (Clarke)

5. (18-19) The message and ministry of reconciliation.

Now 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.

a. **All things are of God:** Paul soars high here and wants the Corinthian Christians to know that he is writing of things that **are of God**, not of man. This work of *a new creation* and our eternal destiny are works **of God**, not something we have to earn and achieve.

b. **God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ:** God initiated this ministry of reconciliation, even though He is the innocent party in the estranged relationship. He **reconciled us to Himself**; we did not reconcile ourselves to Him.

i. Importantly, God did this **through Jesus Christ**. God did not **reconcile us to Himself** by neglecting His holy justice, or "giving in" to sinful, rebellious humanity. He did it by an amazing, righteous, sacrifice of love. God demands not one bit less justice and righteousness from man under Jesus, but the demand has been satisfied **through Jesus Christ**.

c. **And has given us the ministry of reconciliation:** Having **reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ**, now God expects us to take up the **ministry of reconciliation** and has therefore **committed to us the word of reconciliation**.

i. Reconciliation comes by **the word of reconciliation**. God uses the preached word to reconcile men and women to Himself.

d. **God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself:** Through all the terrors of the cross, God the Father worked in and with God the Son, **reconciling the world to Himself**. The Father and the Son worked *together* on the cross.

i. **God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself** is all the more amazing when understood in light of what happened on the cross. At some point before Jesus died, before the veil was torn in two, before Jesus cried out "*it is finished*," an awesome spiritual transaction took place. The Father set upon the Son all the guilt and wrath our sin deserved, and Jesus bore it in Himself perfectly, totally satisfying the justice of God for us.

ii. As horrible as the physical suffering of Jesus was, this spiritual suffering – the act of being judged for sin in our place – was what Jesus really dreaded about the cross. This was the *cup* – the cup of God's righteous wrath – that He trembled at drinking (Luke 22:39-46, Psalm 75:8, Isaiah 51:17, Jeremiah 25:15). On the cross Jesus became, as it were, an

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enemy of God who was judged and forced to drink the cup of the Father's fury so that we would not have to drink that cup.

iii. Yet, at the same time, Paul makes it clear that **God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself**. They worked together. Though Jesus was being *treated* as if He were an enemy of God, He was not. Even as Jesus was punished as if He were a sinner, He performed the most holy service unto God the Father ever offered. This is why Isaiah can say, *Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him* (Isaiah 53:10). In and of itself, the suffering of the Son did not please the Father, but as it accomplished the work of **reconciling the world to Himself**, it completely pleased God the Father.

iv. Robertson rightly comments: "We may not dare to probe too far into this mystery of Christ's suffering on the Cross, but this fact throws some light on the tragic cry of Jesus just before he died: 'My God, My God, why didst thou forsake me?'" In that cry (Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34), Jesus expresses both His partnership with God the Father (*My God*) and the agonizing feeling of receiving the wrath of God that we deserved.

e. **Not imputing their trespasses to them:** Why? Was it because God went soft and gave mankind a "Get Out of Hell Free" card? Not at all. Instead, it is because our trespasses *were* imputed to Jesus. The justice our sin demanded is satisfied, not excused.

i. If God sets aside His wrath or His justice to save sinners, then the cross, instead of being a demonstration of love, is an exhibition of unspeakable cruelty and injustice, and of one man's misguided attempt at do-goodism. If sin could just be *excused*, then it never needed to be *satisfied*.

6. (20) Ambassadors for Christ.

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.

a. **Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ:** Paul sees that he serves in a foreign land as the representative of a King. The King has a message, and Paul is delivering that message **as though God were pleading through us**.

i. There is so much to the idea of being **ambassadors!** An ambassador does not speak to please his audience, but the King who sent him. An ambassador does not speak on his own authority; his own opinions or demands mean little. He simply says what he has been commissioned to say. But an ambassador is more than a messenger; he is also a representative, and the honor and reputation of his country are in his hands.

b. **Ambassadors:** This is a glorious title for Paul and the other apostles. However, it is not more glorious or more stunning than the thought of God, out of love, **pleading** to man. Why should God plead for us?

c. **We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God:** As an ambassador Paul makes a simple, strong, direct plea: **be reconciled to God**.

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i. This makes it clear that the work of reconciliation mentioned previously in the chapter does not work apart from our will and our choice. Who are the ones **reconciled to God**? Those who have responded to Jesus' plea, made through His ambassadors.

ii. This makes it clear that it is *we* who must be **reconciled to God**, not He to us. *We* are the party in the wrong.

iii. Who is Paul imploring? The **you** of **we implore you** was added by the translators. Paul may have said, "*We implore the whole world on Christ's behalf,*" or he may have said, "*We implore you Corinthian Christians on Christ's behalf.*" The thought is valid either way, and both ideas may be in mind.

d. **Be reconciled:** We are not commanded to do the work of reconciliation between man and God. He has done the work; it is merely ours to embrace and receive. "It is not so much reconcile yourselves as 'be reconciled.' Yield yourselves to him who round you now the bands of a man would cast, drawing you with cords of love because he was given for you... Submit yourselves. Yield to the grasp of those hands which were nailed to the cross for you." (Spurgeon)

7. (21) How God made reconciliation possible.

For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

a. **Him who knew no sin:** The idea that any man could be sinless was foreign to Jewish thinking (Ecclesiastes 8:5). Despite that, no one challenged Jesus when He claimed to be sinless (John 8:46).

b. **He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us:** Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul carefully chooses his words. He does not say Jesus was made *to be a sinner*. Jesus never became a *sinner*, but He did become **sin for us**. Even His becoming sin was a righteous act of love, not an act of sin.

i. Jesus was not a sinner, even on the cross. On the cross, the Father treated Him as if He were a sinner, yet all the while, sin was "outside" of Jesus not "inside" Him and it was not a part of His nature (as it is with us).

ii. "Christ was not guilty, and could not be made guilty; but he was treated as if he were guilty, because he willed to stand in the place of the guilty. Yea, he was not only treated as a sinner, but he was treated as if he had been sin itself in the abstract. This is an amazing utterance. The sinless one was made to be sin." (Spurgeon)

iii. "I do not say that our substitute endured a hell, that were unwarrantable. I will not say that he endured either the exact punishment for sin, or an equivalent for it; but I do say that what he endured rendered to the justice of God a vindication of his law more clear and more effectual than would have been rendered to it by the damnation of sinners for whom he died." (Spurgeon)

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iv. "We obviously stand at the brink of a great mystery and our understanding of it can only be minimal." (Kruse)

c. **He made Him:** We note that well. This was the work of God Himself! The Father and the Son (and the Spirit as well) were in perfect cooperation in the work on the cross. This means that the work of atonement on the cross was *the work of God*. "If God did it, it is well done. I am not careful to defend an act of God: let the man who dares accuse his Maker think what he is at. If God himself provided the sacrifice, be you sure that he has accepted it." (Spurgeon)

d. **That we might become the righteousness of God in Him:** Jesus *took* our sin, but *gave* us His **righteousness**. It is a tremendous exchange, all prompted by the love of God for us!

i. "Not only does the believer receive from God a right standing before him on the basis of faith in Jesus (Phil 3:9), but here Paul says that 'in Christ' the believer in some sense actually shares the righteousness that characterizes God himself." (Harris)

ii. **The righteousness of God:** "What a grand expression! He makes us righteous through the righteousness of Jesus; nay, not only makes us righteous, but *righteousness*; nay, that is not all, he makes us the righteousness *of God*; that is higher than the righteousness of Adam in the garden, it is more divinely perfect than angelic perfection." (Spurgeon)

iii. "The righteousness which Adam had in the garden was perfect, but it was the righteousness of man: ours is the righteousness of God." (Spurgeon)

iv. This is the whole truth of justification stated simply: Our sins were on Jesus, and His righteousness is on us. And, "As Christ was not made sin by any sin inherent in him, so neither are we made righteous by any righteousness inherent in us, but by the righteousness of Christ imputed to us." (Poole)

Bible Study: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

1. Read 2 Corinthians 5:16. You can't make a second first impression. How do you get past looking at someone in a purely human way?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. You are a new creation in Christ. Discuss how you are a new creation in Christ even when you sin. How does struggling with sin or past guilt not affect your status of being a new creation in Christ?
3. A lot of Christians either use or have heard the phrase 'free grace'. Does sin become easier to fall into when thinking of grace as free versus thinking about the cost paid by Christ on the cross? Why or why not?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. In these verses Paul uses the word reconciliation 5 times. Think of a relationship with a friend, relative, or co-worker that needs to be restored. What steps have to happen for an earthly relationship to be restored? In what ways does this restoration compare to being restored to God?
5. Discuss what it means to be an ambassador for Christ.
6. "Reconciled people live reconciled lives." How and when should someone's life change after they become a Christian? What role does Christian community have in changing someone's life?

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7. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. This is a great summary of what happened on the cross. Christ became sin so that those who believe would become the righteousness of God. Do you think of yourself as being the righteousness of God? Why or why not?

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