

Strength Through Weakness  
vii. Ambassadors of Christ  
2 Corinthians 5:10-6:2

Preaching has rightly been described as 'letting texts talk'. The text in this instance is both surprising and challenging. It reminds us that not all fear is bad. There is healthy fear (v11a), a timely reminder that all of us will render an account to God on that great day (v10). Accordingly, Paul is motivated to "persuade others" by appealing "to [their] conscience" (v11). Unlike his opponents in Corinth he does not resort to manipulation or rhetorical excess. He simply states gospel facts: all face judgement (v10), equally, Christ died for all (v14). There is paradox and mystery here, responsive to 'faith seeking understanding' as opposed to philosophical speculation about God's character and human merit.

Paul is clear. We are not saved by the example of Jesus, as if the purpose of the cross was to move us to an attitude of repentance and love toward God. This was the view of the theologian Peter Abelard in the 12<sup>th</sup>C. Anselm of Canterbury countered Abelard's subjective understanding of the cross by stressing its objective nature. Speaking as a medieval man, he saw the cross as preserving God's honour as an expression of his holy love.

A Prussian nobleman faced this challenge in the 18<sup>th</sup>C. Nicholas Zinzendorf on a Grand Tour of Europe was deeply moved by viewing a painting in Düsseldorf art gallery by the 17<sup>th</sup>C Italian artist Domenico Feli, 'Eco Homo'. It depicted Christ with a crown of thorns before Pilate. The artist had inscribed in Latin at its base 'This have I suffered for you; now what will you do for me'. Deeply challenged, Zinzendorf founded the Moravian movement with its amazing missionary impact on the world, not least in South Africa, with the establishment of Genadendal, Valley of Grace, as one of the first mission stations by Georg Schmidt in 1738.

However, as important as the example of Jesus is and its impact in Zinzendorf and the Moravians, this is not the thrust of Paul's argument in this instance. He is not speaking about dedication to Christ in response to his example of love. His emphasis is rather liberation by Christ, the joyous reality of being possessed by Christ in salvation. He writes in the indicative mood, a statement of fact, rather than in the imperative, by way of request or command.

In so doing, Paul outlines the entire gospel message he was (and we are!) commissioned to proclaim:

- i. *A great act of divine initiative*  
"All this is from God" (v18)
- ii. *A great act of divine acquittal*  
"God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ not counting people's sins against them" (v19a)
- iii. *A great act of divine substitution*  
"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (v21)
- iv. *A great act of divine delegation*  
Repeated three times, no less:  
"God gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (v18)  
"He committed to us the message of reconciliation" (v19)  
"We are therefore Christ's ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us." (v20)

It is indeed a great privilege and responsibility to bear witness to the 'wondrous exchange' whereby God effects reconciliation through the Cross of Calvary.

*Upon a life I did not live  
Upon a death I did not die  
Another's life, another's death  
I stake my whole eternity.*