

Christian Ambassador Training

Our Sovereign’s Message – Week 4

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 5:17-21** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ 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**. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[Prayer]

We are ambassadors *for Christ*. In the first week we talked about essentials for an ambassador: and those were...? Knowledge, Wisdom, and Character

As we study the needed knowledge of the ambassador for Christ, we broke it out into knowledge about our Sovereign, our Sovereign’s message, and those to whom we are called to be ambassadors (the culture).

Now let’s scan through the preaching of Jesus, his disciples, and the apostolic message in Acts.

I. His Message

John the Baptist—pre-church, but sounds familiar

^{ESV} **Matthew 3:1** In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, ² "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Jesus’ first words preached

^{ESV} **Matthew 4:17** From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

^{ESV} **Mark 1:14-15** Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; **repent and believe in the gospel.**"

Jesus to the Church in Laodicia

^{ESV} **Revelation 3:19** Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

Jesus sends out the twelve two-by-two ...

^{ESV} **Mark 6:12** So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.

Peter (no longer cowering in fear ... empowered by the Holy Spirit) brings knowledge of sin then...

^{ESV} **Acts 2:38** And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Peter has a personal message for Simon the magician ...

^{ESV} **Acts 8:22** Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.

Paul and Silas to the broken Philippian jailer who asked "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

^{ESV} **Acts 16:31** And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

Paul addresses the Areopagus

^{ESV} **Acts 17:30** The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,

Paul describes his message to King Agrippa

^{ESV} **Acts 26:19** "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,²⁰ but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.

A. "Repent and believe" is the consistent call of Jesus and his followers.

Repentance is "to turn back" (שוב *shub* in Hebrew) or "change one's mind or purpose" (μετανοεω, *metanoëo* in Greek). In this context it is a radical change to the core of a person's being.

The very fact that repentance is needed indicates that there is something wrong with people. How do we lovingly and gently reveal this? – The biblical model of evangelism: law to the proud, grace to the humble.

In the same way that it is not unkind of a doctor to faithfully give a truthful diagnosis to someone who has a deadly disease, it is not unkind of us to gently diagnose a lost and dying world by the means God has provided:

^{ESV} **Romans 3:20** For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

^{ESV} **Romans 7:7** What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."

^{NASB} **Galatians 3:24** Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith.

- B. Believe what? – so glad you asked! We’ll spend the next couple of weeks talking about the gospel. What it is and what it isn’t.

II. Not His Message

Breakout Exercise --His Message/Our Message

What follows could be a painful and difficult set of questions.

1. Below is a collection of popular messages/catch phrases you will hear (and may have even said--I have!)
 - i. *“accept” Jesus as Savior/make Jesus your Lord*
 - ii. *ask Jesus into your heart*
 - iii. *pray to receive Jesus*

For each of these:

- Do you find any language like this in the Bible? (Texts to support?)
 - What are some potentially dangerous implications of these messages?
 - So What? What difference does it make?
2. Where do you believe these approaches came from? *What do they resemble?*
 3. How often do we hear or use “repent”? Why? Are these legitimate reasons?

Group Review

A. Where did we go Wrong?

- The goal of contemporary evangelism is to *close the deal*.
Get the hearer to “raise their hand,” “walk the aisle,” or “come up front” so they can “pray the prayer,” to “make a decision for Christ,” or “ask Jesus into their heart.”

This approach has been a *disaster for the Kingdom of God, yet it is still used almost exclusively in evangelical circles. It’s tempting at this point, to say, well, aren’t the other 10% (or less) true conversions worth it?

*Statistics from major crusades show that the vast majority 90%+ of people who go forward and pray the prayer fail to ever get plugged into the church and are now, nowhere to be found in the community of faith¹

Parachute analogy: if 1 out of 10 parachutes actually open, do we praise the 10% success rate or admit there is a serious problem?

B. The Altar Call

Breakout Exercise 2 -- The Altar Call

Pastor Ryan recently compiled a list of “thoughts” on the altar call. For each, if you agree, how could you support this position, if not, how could you refute it?

1. The altar call is simply and completely absent from the pages of the N.T.
 2. The altar call is historically absent until the 19th century, and its use at that time (via Charles Finney) was directly based upon bad theology and a man-centered, manipulative methodology.
 3. The altar call very easily confuses the physical act of “coming forward” with the spiritual act of “coming to Christ.” These two *can* happen simultaneously, but too often people believe that coming to Christ *is* going forward (and vice-versa).
 4. The altar call can easily deceive people about the reality of their spiritual state and the biblical basis for assurance. The Bible never offers us assurance on the ground that we “went forward.”
 5. The altar call partially replaces baptism as *the* means of public profession of faith.
 6. The altar call can mislead us to think that salvation (or any official response to God’s Word) happens primarily on Sundays, only at the end of the service, and only “up front.”
 7. The altar call can confuse people regarding “sacred” things and “sacred” places, as the name “*altar call*” suggests.
 8. The altar call is not sensitive to our cautious and relational age where most people come to faith over a period of time and often with the interaction of a good friend.
 9. The altar call is often seen as “the most important part of the service”, and this de-emphasizes the truly more important parts of corporate worship which God has prescribed (preaching, prayer, fellowship, singing).
 10. God is glorified to powerfully bless the things He has prescribed (preaching, prayer, fellowship, singing), not the things we have invented. We should always be leery of adding to God’s prescriptions for His corporate worship.
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¹ See *Way of the Master*, Ray Comfort, 2004, pp. 61-64 for multiple sources.