

Ambassador III - Character

An Ambassador Doesn't Tamper With the Message

Introduction/Review

Last week we discussed how an Ambassador knows the fear of the LORD (Cor. 5). Hopefully we all came to see the fear of the LORD as:

- Foundational (beginning of wisdom/knowledge)
- Experienced by all who encounter Him (friends and enemies alike!)
- Paradoxical for Christians--
 - base fear due to His Holiness (and our lack of it)
 - fear of what would have been--prompting proportionate love and gratitude
 - a resulting love-motivated fear of not pleasing Him (“it is our aim” - v.9)

We ended last week with a breakout session where we discussed how a healthy fear of the LORD affects an ambassador's:

- ethics/morality
- view/treatment of the Gospel
- way of thinking/decision making
- priorities

→→→→→→ Living it Out

Knowing the Fear of the LORD, an ambassador:

- would not dare to tamper with His message – the Gospel
- would not dare to misrepresent His Character or otherwise bring reproach upon Christ or His Bride by living immorally or foolishly.
- is growing in boldness and courage, putting to death the fear of man.

Handout-- You may recall during last week's discussion how I mentioned how seriously God takes His own glory. I was grateful to see that John Piper had done my homework for me. Please read this in preparation for next week.

... would not dare to tamper with God's Message

White board exercise: What would cause or motivate professing believers to tamper with God's message of reconciliation (the Gospel)?

[see if responses can fit under these categories--additional insights?]

- I. Pride/Idolatry
- II. Ignorance
- III. Fear of Man

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 2:17** For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

^{ESV} **2 Corinthians 4:1-6** Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. ² But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The goal here is not that you will just “prefer” to be faithful to God’s Word, but that you will actually *fear* mis-representing God’s message.

God's zeal for guarding his Word

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 4:2** You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 12:32** "Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it.

^{ESV} **Proverbs 30:5** Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. ⁶ Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar.

^{ESV} **Revelation 22:18-19** I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

Paul equates distortion of the gospel to deserting God--And calls a curse upon those guilty of it

^{ESV} **Galatians 1:6-8** I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- ⁷ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

Let’s go back and look at the categories... the motivations or chief temptations to tamper with God’s Message.

A. Pride/Idolatry (MOB) *“I can do better...”*

We’ll be dedicating future sessions to this. Just remember this is a big player.

B. Ignorance *You don’t know any better*

1. Apathy – *It’s easy to see how this falls under having no fear of God*

- a. It's not something we ever *really* plan to share with anyone, so we really don't need to know it.
- b. It's not something I'm ever asked about... never considered it worth thinking about/pursuing.

*If these sound like they may be true of you. **Repent.** Trust God to forgive you and ask and believe that he will transform your priorities.*

2. Bad Theology/Interpretation (hermeneutics)

- a. Assume the Gospel (first step to losing it)
 - Assume we know it (can you give a clear coherent 60 second version?)
 - Assume others know it (believers and unbelievers)
 - Never articulate it. -- **Repent!**
- b. Embrace and propagate a *false* gospel (lots of overlap here...)

➤ **Easy Believism, Decisional Regeneration, "pray that prayer-ism"**
"one question pop-quiz-ism"

We never like to close our broadcast without giving you an opportunity to make Jesus the lord of your life. Would you pray with me? Just say, "Lord Jesus, I repent of my sins. Wash me clean. Friends, if you prayed that simple prayer we believe you got born again."¹

- Save yourself by parroting this prayer and pass the one question quiz! **Law Lite!**
- **What does this "gospel" imply about God?** [petty]

➤ **Therapeutic Moralistic Deism²** -- Being pumped out by pop-evangelical church youth groups ... **the result of assuming the gospel for the last 30+ years.**

"A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth."

"God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions."

"The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself."

"God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem."

¹ Joel Osteen ends every sermon/broadcast at Lakewood Church (former Compaq Center) in Houston.

² A term coined in the book: *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Eyes of American Teenagers* by Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton--a study including over 3000 interviews with American adolescents.

“Good people go to heaven when they die.”

➤ **Moral Reform** -- “get-your-act-together-ism”

... When Christians feel that sins (acts) are bigger than sin (condition), they see evangelism as an effort of moral reform ...³

➤ **Self Improvement** -- “The worship of MOB” (Me Only Better)

- The most common idol in our culture.
- Become a better you!
- MOB worshipers are fond of saying:
 - “I like to think of God as ...”
 - “My God would never ...”

Are you a student of the Gospel? Are you zealous for its purity? Do you recognize the danger of these errors? The goal in Amb-III is that you grow in your fear of the Lord with respect to zealously guarding gospel. We discuss these more in Amb-I.*

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:15** Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

**This is not a call to be a nit-picking jerk.*

C. Fear of Man (*we’ll have another complete lesson on this later, this is specifically with respect to the content of the message*)

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 2:1-5** And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ² For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴ and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Our Temptations:

1. Say nothing – *The easiest road to unfaithfulness*
2. If you say something, say what people want to hear

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 4:3-4** For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

– Therapeutic Moralistic Deism is quite palatable.

³ J. Mack Stiles, *Marks of the Messenger*, IVP Books, p. 32.

- Just pray this prayer--*and we'll make it as easy as possible!*
 - *Don't want to embarrass you: "every head bowed, every eye closed... just raise your hand... just repeat after me ..."*
- MOB is quite popular, an even better version of me? I want it!

3. Don't say what might offend people

I don't think anything has been done in the name of Christ and under the banner of Christianity that has proven more destructive to human personality and, hence, counterproductive to the evangelism enterprise than the often crude, uncouth, and unchristian strategy of attempting to make people aware of their lost and sinful condition.⁴

- The gospel is offensive (Gal 5:11, Rom 9:33) we dare not add to the offense by being offensive. (superior attitude, manmade rules, nit picking theology ...)
- The gospel is considered foolish (1 Cor 1:18,23,) we take care not to add to this perception by being foolish. (*There is a difference between being considered a fool for Christ and being foolish*).
- We dare not remove the inherent offense of the gospel. When we do, we find ourselves preaching a different gospel (Gal 1:6-9)

*We want people to see their sin in all its horror, not so they are motivated to "clean up their act," but so they fall at the feet of Jesus knowing that he is their only hope. People need to see the depth of their sin so that they come to a fuller understanding of the depth of God's grace.*⁵

Breakout

*If we confess our sins and shortcomings in the area of witness, just as in any other area of our lives, Jesus promises not only to forgive our failures and inadequacies but to come to our aid and to teach us what to say and how to say it.*⁶

It's worth repeating--*we are not about guilt trips in this class*. We are, however about repentance (change) and growth in maturity as disciples and ambassadors.

I. Below are self-evaluation questions we should all work through on our own.

- We are all guilty of these to varying degrees. How can I say that?
- What safeguards to we have (or need to have) in place? How do we grow?

⁴ Robert Schuller, *Christianity Today*, October 5, 1984

⁵ Stiles, p. 31.

⁶ Barrs, Jerram, *The Heart of Evangelism*, Crossway Books, Wheaton Ill. 2001, p. 53.

– *Any specific equipping requests?*

1. Are you in danger of tampering with God's message?
 - **Pride/Idolatry**
 - *Are you willing to change or skip the parts you don't like?*
 - **Ignorance**
 - *Are you buying into what you've heard over the years, or firmly founded in God's Word?*
 - *Do you recognize the dangers of these false gospels (Easy Believism, TMD, Self-Improvement ...)? Do you fear for those who've trusted them? ... those who've proclaimed them?*
 - *Are you equipped to recognize error? If you need help understanding the error, get with your CG leader or an elder... study up! And sign up for Amb-I.*
 - **Fear of Man**
 - *Will you, in the fear of the Lord, resolve to proclaim the pure Gospel and pray for the courage to do so?*
2. Will you resolve to pray for the things an ambassador of Christ prays for? (see the notes)
Will you draw others into your prayer circle for this purpose?

Suggested Reading:

Marks of the Messenger--Ch 2, 3.

The Heart of Evangelism-Section III Ch. 20-26