

Ambassadors and Priests

Our text for this lesson is found in 2 Corinthians 5:17-20.

17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. 18 And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. 20 Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

Jesus was the first minister of reconciliation. He was an ambassador for God, calling men to be changed into God's likeness in the spirit realm. This outward ministry of Jesus is one that I we are familiar with.

There is an inward ministry of Jesus as well, called his priestly ministry. We are called to be imitators of Him, we have been made like him, and we share these two ministries-outward and inward-with Him.

The inward ministry begins first. It is your identification with Christ, who you are in Him. There was an instant change one day that linked you up with Christ the moment you accepted salvation. And this is the requisite for the outward ministry.

The Inward ministry is an identity - "who you are". The outward ministry is your behavior-"what you do". While your inward change occurred in an instant of time, your outward change is a daily process as you are conforming your behavior to the standards in the Word. The outward ministry is produced as the inward ministry is nurtured.

Jesus Christ was a minister to His heavenly father. As a man on this earth, he operated in the office of a priest. In Hebrews 5:1 we read,

"For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things

pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: "

The priestly ministry, the inward ministry, is the ministry you have as a believer before the Lord, offering sacrifices of prayer and praise, ministering to the Lord in your quiet time with Him. We recall Jesus often separated Himself from the crowd so He could go refresh Himself in those private times with His father. Jesus was in preparation for thirty years in private so he could be effective for three years of public ministry. The importance of the inward ministry must be recognized.

As priests, we attend church so we can build up our inner beings. We encourage one another in fellowship, we seek to understand the Word, and we receive blessings. We indeed offer "both gifts and sacrifices."

Chapters 3 through 8 of Hebrews is the "priestly" section of that book, comparing the priestly ministry of Jesus to Moses, then to Aaron, then to Melchizedek, and finally culminating in Jesus' high priesthood for us as believers. In chapter 8:1-3 we read, *"Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; (2) a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. (3) For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer."*

Referring to verse two of this passage, let me first clarify that in the Greek it says "minister IN the sanctuary". This is a New Testament analogy of the Holy of Holies where the high priest went in to minister. This was the location of the ark of the covenant and the shekinah presence of the Lord. It was a type of heaven.

Jesus is in heaven today, and as a high priest, he makes intercession to the Father for us. He represents us before the Father, ministering in the sanctuary .

We minister in the sanctuary when we minister in private to the Lord. Matthew 6 makes it clear that our ministry in giving and praying should be done privately. There are times you might be in public but your motive should be private worship of

God in giving or praying. This is the time of your priestly ministry.

You'll remember that when the priest went into the Holy of Holies, he went in alone. He was unaccompanied as he stood in the presence of God. This is an example to us as we exercise our priesthood. Be assured that God who sees in secret will reward you openly (Matthew 6:4). In these times of quiet God's blessings come. You are able to receive from the Spirit of God.

Ministering before the Lord in praise is also an important part of our priestly role. We are exhorted in Philippians 4:4 to "*Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, rejoice.*" Even if you don't feel like praising God on the outside, allow your inward man to carry out the function of priest before God, and you'll see a change in your outward man.

In essence, the Christian life can be summed up as the process of working to the outside what exists on the inside. We need to exhibit peace, since we have the fruit of the spirit on the inside. We need to be overcomers, since we have the Greater One dwelling within us. We need to live prosperous, full lives, since we have been recreated with the "zoe" life of God in us.

The priestly ministry of the believer (inward) is the foundation for the believer's ministry as ambassador to the lost (outward). Fruit is not produced for the benefit of the tree; fruit is produced for those who pass by to be strengthened and refreshed. But fruit trees don't produce fruit overnight. It's a process of getting the life that exists inside the tree into an acceptable package outside the tree.

"Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom (inward); teaching and admonishing one another (outward) . . ." (Col. 3:16) "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you (inward), he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies (outward) by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." (Rom. 8:11) You can think of many other scriptures illustrating this concept, including Isaiah 40:31, Joshua 1:8 and Matthew 6:33. If you have been born-again, there will be a change in your behavior. That new life on the inside eventually begins to

manifest itself on the outside. You don't think, talk or act like you once did.

So your priestly ministry is private, before God; your ambassadorship is public, before men. Being a good priest will make you a good ambassador. It doesn't work the other way - being a good ambassador will not make you a good priest. An ambassador is a result of being a priest. Jesus

Christ was first a priest, showing Himself self approved before God before entering His public ministry.

Now what is an ambassador? He is a person of royalty or of very high ranking in one country that has been sent to another country to represent his home country. Before you can ever be an ambassador, you first have to be of the house of royalty. Praise God, He made you a new creation first, as we read in our text for this lesson (verse 17). Then he commissioned you to be an ambassador (verse 20). You are God's representative on foreign soil.

Let's look at an example of ambassadors in the natural sense. The United States sends ambassadors to Russia. They are persons of high rank here in the US and they are citizens of the US. Even though they live in Russia for a time, they are still US citizens, subject to US laws. They represent our country in their official capacity and also in their personal behavior. They are models of what Americans are like.

John 17 tells us that believers are in the world, but not of the world. And Philippians 3:20 says, "*For our conversation (should be translated "citizenship") is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ*". When we accept Jesus as our Savior, we immediately become citizens of heaven, but we still live in the world, as ambassadors on foreign soil.

Our ambassadorship reflects on every area of our lifestyle - our prosperity, our health, our guidance and direction, and our relationship with those who are "foreigners" (that is, those who are not citizens of heaven).

When American ambassadors are in Russia, they are not affected by the

Russian economy. Their needs are supplied according to the prosperity of their home country. Fluctuations in the local economy do not concern them at all.

American ambassadors can claim "diplomatic immunity" when asked to conform to certain laws. Our ambassadorship is the same-when the devil tries to make us conform to sickness and disease, we can claim "diplomatic immunity". We were inoculated against those "foreign diseases" by our home country! A good ambassador has read his agreement papers. He knows the provisions of his contract. He knows he doesn't have to accept certain lifestyles in the country he's visiting. He doesn't have to accept poverty, sickness or death if he is a citizen of heaven, because his contract calls for prosperity, health and abundant life.

When war is declared, what is the first thing that happens between the warring countries? The ambassadors head for home, right? Well, there's a lot of controversy today about when the rapture will take place. But if we truly are called to be God's ambassadors in this earth, He will remove us before He declares war upon the unrighteous, pouring out His wrath in the tribulation. All the ambassadors go home, good and bad alike. Once they get home, they are dealt with according to the measure of their performance. But if they are ambassadors they are brought home before acts of war begin

To be good ambassadors, we need to know the terms of our contract, stay in communication with our home country, and be good representatives in official matters and in personal conduct. If you have diligently developed your personal life (inward man, priesthood), then you will be a successful ambassador (outward man, representative).

Too many people have it backwards. They constantly talk about *doing*: witnessing, wearing long dresses and no jewelry, all the outward things. Instead, these outward things should be a result of inward development. Witnessing will fall into place as you minister before the Lord, developing your priesthood in private. Then you can minister to men, which is your public ambassadorship.

The priest received the blessings, the ambassador gives the blessings. You

can't give what you don't have. You can't act as an ambassador to receive the priest's blessings. Don't be confused. In order to prove yourself before the world, you must prove yourself before God first.

In our text for this lesson, verse 19 tells us we have *received* and now we are to *give*. We are to give the word of reconciliation. But you can't *preach* the ministry of reconciliation until you *understand* the ministry of reconciliation. So you must get into the Word of God and find out how God has reconciled you to Himself. Find out about the cross and what God did for you through the shed blood of Jesus.

Then you can go out with that knowledge and that conviction within you and share it with the world. There is nothing more obnoxious than a believer *trying* to witness; there is nothing more gentle and effective than a believer who can't help but witness from the overflow of the Word of God in his life. This person doesn't try to force the conversation or manipulate the listener; he just understands his priesthood and is so overflowing with the love of God from his private times with the Lord. This person is a good ambassador.

Jesus in His public ministry operated as an ambassador for God. He describes this in John 12:44-50.

44 Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. 45 And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. 46 I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. 47 And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. 48 He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. 49 For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. 50 And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak.

Jesus was God's ambassador in the earth. He didn't speak His own words, but accurately represented heaven, His home country. And we are to follow His example,

being good ambassadors while He is not physically present in this earth. We are to speak our country's words of healing, peace, prosperity, and reconciliation. John 13:20 says, *"...He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me: and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me."*

In closing, let's look at a passage in Proverbs 13.

15 Good understanding giveth favour: but the way of transgressors is hard. 16 Every prudent man dealeth with knowledge: but a fool layeth open his folly. 17 A wicked messenger falleth into mischief: but a faithful ambassador is health. 18 Poverty and shame shall be to him that refuseth instruction: but he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured.

In verse 15, we see that good understanding gives us favor with men. Notice that understanding is your priesthood and favor is your ambassadorship. One is inward; the other is outward.

We see in verse 17 that health is equated with a faithful ambassador. Are you in health right now? Are you a good ambassador, a good representation of your home country? When you walk around in health in the midst of sickness, you are being a good ambassador for God. We see also in verse 18 above that a good ambassador also lives in honor, free from poverty and shame. He is free of these detrimental qualities in his spiritual life; therefore, he is free of them in the natural.

As those around you who are unsaved see your outward appearance - health, joy, peace, prosperity - they will be attracted. They will want to know more about you and about the country you represent. They will ask what makes you so different, just like people ask ambassadors what life is like in their home country. Then you will have the opportunity to minister the word of reconciliation. Your inward light will shine out upon them. Glory!

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