
GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND THE GOSPEL

YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY NEED YOU

A message delivered by Pastor Marc Minter on October 9, 2016

First Baptist Church of Diana, TX

INTRODUCTION

When you think about the world as it is today...

Do you feel ready to meet it? Do you feel prepared? Do you feel discouraged by it? Do you feel panic?

Let's all be honest; you probably feel all of these to one degree or another. It just depends on the day. If you have not been paying attention to the many developments around you (both in American culture and in our own community) then allow me to inform you.

The “Culture War” is over... and conventional moralistic values did not win. While you may certainly still find like-minded friends who affirm your view of morality, this group is smaller today; and it will be smaller tomorrow. There is no such thing as a “Moral Majority” in the United States anymore (if there ever truly was one to begin with). Your children and grandchildren, their friends and their heroes, are now (or soon will be) totally out of step with your views of the world, humanity, and a whole host of other things.

Are you ready for this? Or are you feeling a sense of panic?

In their book, **Compassion without Compromise**, authors Adam Barr and Ron Citlau predict that at least one of the following things will happen to you in the next several months.¹

- A family member will come out of the closet and expect you to be okay with it. If you don't affirm it, your family may call you unloving and judgmental.
- You'll be invited to a same-sex “wedding” by friend or family member.
- Your young child will come home from school talking about bullying; and the topic of concern will be respect for peers from LGBT families.

¹ Barr, Adam T., and Ron Citlau. *Compassion without Compromise: How the Gospel Frees Us to Love Our Gay Friends Without Losing the Truth* (p. 11-12). Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2014.

- You'll show up for one of your kid's baseball games and little Billy will introduce his two moms or his two dads.
- Your company human resources department will hold a session on how to build a tolerant workplace for LGBT coworkers.
- You will encounter someone who says the Gospel cannot bring healing to our sexual identity or orientation.
- You'll have to share a bathroom with someone of the opposite gender who self-identifies as your own.
- You'll have a conversation with your college-aged child and learn that she thinks your view on homosexuality is bigoted. She will say that you are a 21st century version of a 1960s racist.
- You will read about another nationally recognized church leader endorsing the idea of same-sex "marriage."

On a side note: This last one has me especially aggravated and disappointed. While those who stand in the role of "church leader" should be the most biblically-skilled and the most deeply-resolved, they are sometimes "blind guides" leading others towards a pit of destruction (Matt. 15:14). Oh, church family... be careful who you listen to, who you read, and who you follow! Guard your own heart, watch your own steps, and keep your own eyes pure. Shame on that teacher who would lead people astray, but shame on those who gullibly follow as well.

Are you ready to face this new world? Are you panicking? Are you in denial? Are you depressed?

Well, this is no time for Christians to panic... or to be depressed. Nor should Christians ever live in denial about the world around us. We have the ultimate hope, the best promise, and the most steady truth!

Christ is King! God is sovereign! The Gospel is true! And eternal glory is certain for all those who love and trust Christ!

While these things should steady us, they should also prepare us to face the world in which we live. We should be especially emboldened and hopeful because of the fact that the Gospel is true. And yet, it seems to me that Christians often struggle to make the connection between these truths and their usefulness in everyday life.

May God help us to see how the Gospel changes us, charges us, and cheers us as we look to God's Word again today.

SCRIPTURE READING

2 Corinthians 5:17–6:13

5:17 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.

6:1 Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

2 For he says, *“In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.”*

Behold, **now is the favorable time**; behold, **now is the day of salvation**.

3 **We put no obstacle in anyone’s way**, so that no fault may be found with our ministry,

4 but as servants of God **we commend ourselves** in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, 5 beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; 6 by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; 7 by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; 8 through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise.

We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; 9 as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; 10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

11 **We have spoken freely** to you, Corinthians; **our heart is wide open**.

12 You are not restricted by us, but **you are restricted in your own affections**.

13 In return (I speak as to children) **widen your hearts** also.”

MESSAGE OUTLINE

(1) YOUR FRIENDS & FAMILY NEED YOU TO LIVE A CHANGED LIFE

(2) YOUR FRIENDS & FAMILY NEED YOU TO LIVE A CHARGED LIFE

(3) YOUR FRIENDS & FAMILY NEED YOU TO LIVE A CHEERFUL LIFE

MESSAGE

(1) YOUR FRIENDS & FAMILY NEED YOU TO LIVE A CHANGED LIFE

In this passage, Paul says that the person who is “in Christ” is “new” (v17), “recreated” (v17), “reconciled to God” (v18), appointed to “the ministry of reconciliation” (v18), “entrusted with the message” of Christ (v19), an “ambassador for Christ” (v20), “righteous” before God (v21)... **and that’s just in the first 5 verses I read.**

If we might say **anything** about the Christian life, we must **at the very least** say it is a “**changed**” life. It is a different life than the one he or she lived before becoming a Christian. It is a different life than the one lived by the non-Christian. For the Christian is a “new creation,” and his or her life is changed indeed.

A “changed” life is the mark of genuine Christianity. So, living a “changed” life should go without saying for Christians, but we live at an exceptional time in human history.

America (especially the South) is overwhelmingly “Christian,” if you take many Americans at their word. Depending on which source you cite, between 70%² and 83%³ of Americans claim that they are Christian. According to their profession of faith, at least 7 out of every 10 Americans are “saved,” “Christ-loving,” “heaven-bound,” “holy-living,” Christians.

But, is this true? Is America’s population really overwhelmingly Christian? Is America marked by widespread love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness? Are the fruit of the Spirit (which are produced in every Christian life) seen all over American culture?

You and I both know that the answer is, NO...

²<http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>

³<http://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=90356>

We do not see the fruit of the Spirit on display in America today. Instead, we see hostility, anxiety, and selfish expectations. There is something that just doesn't add up here.

The Bible speaks of a definitive break from “*old*” to “*new*” in Christian conversion; and we must hear it, believe it, and expect it. The Apostle Paul says, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation,” the “old has passed away,” and “the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17).

This is not the only place that the Bible calls our attention to a dramatic transformation in the person who trusts in Christ. The theme of conversion, of new life, of renovation is all over the Bible.

Consider a small sampling of passages:

In Colossians 1:21-22, the Bible says that those who were “once alienated” and “hostile” towards God became “holy and blameless and above reproach” (*Above reproach* means that no one could make a strong accusation against them that would stick).

In John's Gospel and in **his** and **Peter's letters**, we learn that God causes Christians to be “born again” (that is born spiritually by the power of God [John 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23; 1 Jn. 4:7, 5:1]). And especially in John's letters we see an incredible contrast between those who are “born of God” and those who are not (1 Jn. 2:29, 3:9).

In 2 Corinthians 3, the Bible says that God progressively “transforms” Christians into the “image” of Christ Himself (2 Cor. 3:18). Christ is holy and pure beyond compare, and God is remaking Christians to be like Christ.

Many more passages could be cited, but the point is: The Bible clearly communicates the expectation that every Christian will live a “changed” life, a new life, a commendable life.

Just listen to how **one Christian argued for the good social influences** of Christians on a local community. In a letter to a Roman official (within a few centuries of Christ's earthly ministry), one Christian wrote, “[Christians] **follow the customs of the country** in clothing and food and other matters of daily living... **They marry**, like everyone else, and they beget children, but they do not cast out their offspring. **They share their [homes]** with each other, but not their marriage bed... **They obey the established laws**, but in their own lives they go **far beyond** what the laws require. **They love all men**, and by all men are persecuted... **To put it simply:** ...the world hates Christians, even though it

suffers no wrong at their hands, because [Christians do not indulge] themselves [in the world's sinful] pleasures..."⁴

The idea conveyed here is simple and profound: *“Christians are good for society because they are the best citizens.” “Christians live moral and upright lives, no matter what the world around them is doing.”*

It would be easy to feel depressed or frustrated about the contrast between the modern Christian reputation in America and the one described here. We might be tempted to talk about how bad things are now... But I wonder if we might ask ourselves a more probing question this morning...

Let's not just ask the distant question, **“Does that describe Christianity *generally* today?”**

Instead, let us ask the more convicting question, **“Does that describe *MY* Christianity today?”**

Do you live a “changed” life?

Do your friends and family see your life as “commendable?”

I thank God that I may answer “yes” for many in this room today. There are men and women among us who live commendable lives indeed. I think of godly men who serve others so willingly, and I think of godly women who give their time to others so frequently.

May God continue to raise up godly men and women among our church family.

And yet, there are probably also some among us who should feel some conviction here. Some among us may not currently testify of the Gospel's transforming power with our lives.

We say with our mouths, **“Jesus makes all the difference in my life;”** but our friends and family may have a hard time seeing any difference Jesus has actually made in us.

At this point, there are two very important things we need to hear.

First, life transformation, the “**new**” life from the “**old**,” is “**from God**” (2 Cor. 5:18).

Second, life transformation is purposeful. It is not its own goal.

First, life transformation is “from God” (2 Cor. 5:18). While it is foolish to think that we play **no part** in our life transformation, it is equally foolish to think that we can **transform ourselves on our own**. God must empower and enable us to participate in His transformative work in us (2 Cor. 3:18).

⁴<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/richardson/fathers.x.i.ii.html>

Furthermore, God's transformative work begins with a change in our hearts and results in a change on our hands. Love for Christ must motivate our active pursuit of godliness. If all we are doing is modifying our behavior, then we are Pharisees of the worst kind.

So, if your life is not commendable today, then the first thing to do is pray that God would increase your love for Him. You would also do well to dig deeply into God's Word so that you may discover who God actually is. Hearing about God, singing about God, and talking about God are nothing to be compared with meeting God in His Word – the Bible.

We devote time and effort to those things we truly value, and our affections for Christ should be ever expanding as we (by God's grace) come to know Him better.

Second, life transformation is purposeful. As I said, it is not its own goal. Life transformation is the result of something and it is the basis for something. This is huge for most of us, because our view of life has been so radically affected by popular culture.

We are much more likely to see through the lenses of what sociologist Christian Smith called "moralistic therapeutic deism" than we are to see through truly biblical lenses. We likely think and live as though life transformation is the goal – all by itself.

What resolutions do you usually make?

Who are we kidding... What resolutions to you usually fanaticize about making?

"I am going to spend more time **exercising**..."

"I will be more **charitable**..."

"I am going to be **home with my family** more often..."

"I'll be a better **dad/husband... mother/wife... son/daughter... friend**..."

These are not bad resolutions, but these are not meant to be the goal.

So, what if you do become a better dad? Then what? **So, what if you do give away more of your time and treasure?** Then what? **Have you won the game?** Should we decorate a float for you at the Yamboree later this month?

You see, life transformation (motivated by sheer determination) for its own sake will end in pride. And that is best case scenario. For some of us, this kind of life transformation results in despair – because we did not win the game... we lost, and we keep on losing, and now we feel like a failure.

But this is not the way the Apostle Paul talks about life transformation at all. Look at how a *renewed life* and *purposeful living* are placed side-by-side in verses 18 and 19. God “reconciled us” and “gave us” or “entrusted” to us “the ministry of reconciliation.” Think also about what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:3-4. He says, “we commend ourselves in every way” (v4); but for what purpose? So that “we put no obstacle in anyone’s way...” (v3).

What is he talking about? What *way*? What *obstacle*?

He is talking about the inevitable result of a heart that is truly changed by the Gospel.

Heart-change produces Life-change; and Life-change is the starting place for Gospel-proclamation.

For Paul (and from the Bible generally), the motive and the end goal of life transformation are both much bigger than your individual life on planet earth.

- (1) **The cause of life transformation is God’s gracious gift of Christ** (you are changed because you realize God has loved you in Christ), **and**
- (2) **the end goal of life transformation is your inclusion in the greatest story ever told** (your changed life is the platform from which you now tell others of God’s transformative Gospel).

If you have been reconciled to God, then you also have been entrusted with the message and ministry of reconciliation.

God has “charged” you to live for something much bigger than yourself.

And that leads us into our second point...

(2) YOUR FRIENDS & FAMILY NEED YOU TO LIVE A CHARGED LIFE

A “charged” life is one that understands and acts upon the charge or duty or directive it has been given. Think about the robot “EVE” in the Pixar movie, “WALL-E.” One of the very few words EVE says in the whole movie is “directive.” The robot has a single-focus on the directive or duty or charge it was given.

Like that robot, the Christian should regularly refocus him or herself on the Christian directive.

There are several places we can look to understand the charge or directive of the Christian life, and our text today is one of them. But, before we unpack the explicit charge in 2 Corinthians 5 and 6, let me quickly refer to one of my favorite places in the Bible where a charge is made. It is a favorite passage of mine because of the powerful language we find there.

In Paul's first letter to Timothy, he lays out all sorts of directives for Timothy's life. He does this by contrasting godly and faithful service to God with worldly and self-seeking ambition. In chapter 6, you can almost envision the saliva-spray from Paul's mouth as his words intensify. He had just mentioned the cravings of conceited men, and then he says to Timothy, "**But as for you, O man of God, flee these things... Fight the good fight of the faith... Take hold of eternal life**" (1 Tim. 6:11-12). Hear the strong action words: "flee," "fight," and "take hold." This charge is not passive; Paul intends Timothy to put great effort into it.

Then I can picture one man standing in front of another, with noses nearly touching and eyes fixed in a laser-focused gaze, as Paul says, "**I charge you in the presence of God... to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ**" (1 Tim. 6:13-14).

What is the charge, the stone-cold serious directive that Paul gave Timothy? It was to live in such a way so as to "**keep the commandment**" of God "**unstained and free from reproach.**"

How would Timothy do that? Well, Paul says, "**Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, [and] gentleness**" (1 Tim. 6:11). In other words, live a "changed" life – for the purpose of "**keeping the commandment**" of God "**unstained.**"

Paul's reference to "**commandment**" here is no coincidence. He talks about God's commands all throughout his letter to Timothy. The context is a similar one to what we find in 2 Corinthians 5 and 6. Look at how Paul speaks in chapter 5 verse 20... "**We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.**" This is not a suggestion or a mere request; this is a delegated command. "**God commands**" (Peter said in Acts 17:30) "**all people everywhere to repent.**"

Paul even speaks about Christians being "**ambassadors for Christ**" (again in 2 Cor. 5:20) through whom God makes His "**appeal**" to those who have not yet submitted to His gracious rule.

So, the “charge” for Timothy is no different (at least in a basic sense) from the “charge” of every Christian. All those who have been reconciled to God are also ministers of reconciliation, and we must live our lives according to this charge or directive.

Our “changed” lives give us the foundation or ground from which to live “charged” lives in Christ Jesus. We are to be about doing something with our lives.

Let’s dig into our passage in order to understand our “charge” better.

Paul says Christians are “[ministers of reconciliation](#)” (5:18), “[entrusted messengers](#)” of the Gospel (5:19), “[ambassadors for Christ](#)” (5:20), “[servants of God](#)” (6:4), and “[open-hearted free-speakers](#)” (6:11).

These all seem to fall under the same category: *Ambassador for Christ*

The role of “[servant](#)” can include many other things, but in the context here, Paul is consistently talking about a particular kind of service – living as an ambassador from the King of kings.

The phrases “[minister of reconciliation](#)” and “[entrusted with the message of reconciliation](#)” get us more to the action of what ambassadors are supposed to do. Ambassadors are to carry the message of the king’s terms to those who are not currently his people, and (in the case of Christians) this rings true.

However, an ambassador can carry the king’s message in several different ways. The ambassador can be arrogant, fearful, articulate, or foolish. Paul exemplifies an ambassador for Christ when he says, “[We have spoken freely to you... our heart is wide open.](#)” (2 Cor. 6:11). This is a way of saying “*we spoke the truth, the whole truth, and we did it with real love.*” Therefore, an ambassador for Christ is an emissary with deep love and affection for those to whom he or she is delivering the message.

Think about the following realities: (1) God is creator and sustainer of all things. There is nothing that escapes His authority as King of the universe. (2) All humanity now lives either under His grace or under His condemnation. Whether they acknowledge it or not, every human is under and subject to God’s rules and His judgments. (3) Christ will judge all people everywhere at a real point in time. The day is coming when everyone will bow before Christ as King; some will do this with great joy and others with awful terror. (4) In the time between this day

and that judgment, God has placed you (as an Ambassador) near many people who do not currently submit to His rule.

Is this how you live?

Do you arrange your day, your week, your month as an ambassador for Christ?

Do you spend your money like an ambassador for Christ?

Do you teach and train your family as ambassadors for Christ?

Do you speak to your friends and family as an ambassador for Christ?

If you are like me, then you probably feel as though you fall short here. If you are like me, then you notice your inclination to be more “of the world” and “like the world” than Christ ever intended any of His followers to be.

So, what are some overarching principles we can use to measure how well we are doing as ambassadors and recalibrate ourselves if necessary?

Well, I think we can ask ourselves these questions:

First, do we speak and act like Christ is actually King right now?

Are we more concerned about what Christ says and what Christ wants, or do we tend to be much more concerned about earthly powers?

When you come across something in the Bible that challenges you, do you tend to read past it or dismiss it? Or do you ask God to help you submit to His good authority?

Do you spend your time, treasure, and talent on things that matter only to this world, or are you spending these in service to King Jesus?

Second, do we speak and act like Christ is going to reign as King in the future?

Are you in a panic over the state of the Church in America? Or do you really believe that Christ is building His kingdom as He sees fit?

Have you bought into the idea that worldly leaders and forceful violence is what will usher in a time of peace and prosperity for you? Or are you eagerly waiting for the Prince of peace to bring all things to His good and final end?

Third, do we speak and act like our loved ones are actually going to stand before Christ as King and Judge?

Are you more concerned with how your friends and family see you or how God sees them?

When your loved ones act and live in opposition to Christ, do you avoid difficult conversations? Or do you remind them that the King is coming?

Do you plead with your rebellious children, parents, brothers, sisters, neighbors, and friends? Or do you speak and act like their rebellion will go unnoticed by Christ?

If we are honest with ourselves, we probably see some areas where we could use some recalibration... May God help us today.

Allow me to challenge us towards living “charged lives” in the same way that the Apostle Paul does in our passage. After he mentions his own “[wide open](#)” heart, he says, “[you are restricted by your own affections... widen your hearts also](#)” (2 Cor. 6:12-13).

This may sting a little, so I will try to be gentle... Paul says here that the reason more of the Corinthians were not living as ambassadors for Christ is that they were restricted by their lack of genuine love towards others.

This letter Paul wrote to the church of Corinth was full of personal and heart-felt content. Paul was very interested in contrasting himself with the false teachers among them. There seem to have been some teachers claiming a “super apostleship” in Corinth, and many of the Christians there were foolishly following their false leadership (2 Cor. 11:5). Paul’s basic appeal was, “I have loved you, and I love you now... My heart-felt truth-telling is not what you are getting from those other yahoos (Paul didn’t say yahoos, but I did).”

But, the Corinthians were listening to and following the other teachers who were not speaking and living as ambassadors for Christ. They were living as people of the world, and as such were chasing after the same worldly stuff that everyone else in Corinth was chasing after. This put them in worldly competition with the people around them, and it caused them to view others more as “obstacles to be conquered” instead of “people to be loved.”

Is there any parallel in our lives today? Could it be that you view others around you as obstacles to what you really want?

As I said before, this may sting a little, but it must be said... If we truly loved those around us, then we would care much less about our own *wants* and much more about their *needs*.

What do your family members really need? What do your friends really need?

Are we much more motivated by our own wants in our relationships?

“I want to be liked...” “I want to be wanted...” “I want to be perceived as good...”
“I want to be seen as successful...”

If these selfish wants drive our interactions with others, then let us hear the heart-felt admonition from Scripture today. “[Widen your hearts.](#)”

Let love, genuine love, motivate us to live charged lives. Let our overflowing love for Christ and for others lead us towards selfless lives of service. May we be a people who are marked out by love – not happy-slappy, puppy love; but genuine (I'll make myself vulnerable to you) kind of love.

Love that sees the broken as people, not as projects.

Love that expects to give and not just to receive.

Love that cannot help but enter in and speak up when the situation is dire.

Love that puts aside personal wants, sacrifices worldly gain, and even lays down life itself for the sake of Christ and others.

Let us live charged lives (active and diligent) **out of the overflow from wide-open hearts of love.**

It is important to remember, however, that these changed lives and charged lives must be lived in spite of circumstances and not because of them.

(3) YOUR FRIENDS & FAMILY NEED YOU TO LIVE A CHEERFUL LIFE

Up to this point, one may have been able to follow my pattern of thought like this:

“Ok, Christ has saved me, and so I now live changed... and Christ has charged me, so I must live for something bigger than myself... and I will start doing this whole *changed* and *charged* thing as soon as... my job situation gets better... my wife starts treating me nicer... my husband starts appreciating me more... my neighbor asks me about the Gospel... my friends want to live a better life... my kids are done with school... etc...”

Ah, but life circumstances will never be ideal for an Ambassador. The life an ambassador lives is away from the comforts of home, and he/she is relegated to the distant customs and environment of a foreign land. The ambassador is (by definition) not at home and not under ideal circumstances.

In fact, listen to how the Apostle Paul says he was treated as he lived out his life as an Ambassador for Christ: He endured **“afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, and hunger”** (2 Cor. 6:4-5). He was **“treated as an imposter”** (v8), cast aside as a nobody (v9), **“punished”** to the point of death (v9), counted as **“sorrowful”** and **“poor”** (v10), and considered as having absolutely **“nothing”** (v10).

This is not a life that any of us would want. Not only would we want to avoid all of this, we probably work really hard to try to ensure that our kids and grandkids will avoid such a life as well. No one wants afflictions or hardships. And nobody says, “I’d like to be beaten, imprisoned, and to go without food for a good long while.”

These things are not guaranteed to happen to an Ambassador for Christ, but the ambassador is also not promised that he or she will be able to avoid them.

The one thing we are guaranteed is that life’s circumstances are always changing, and they are often going to change for the worse... Don’t you remember that we live under the Curse of Sin?

So, what is the steadying reality for an ambassador? How can we live cheerfully during the good times and the bad?

Well, I think it is plain that Paul intends Christians to keep their mind fixed on what is really true. Think about the way he laid out his thoughts in the passage:

Paul started by pointing his reader to the “**new creation**” reality (5:17). Then Paul unpacked what that means. He said, “**God reconciled us to Himself in Christ**” (5:18). Therefore, we may be steadied by the reality that God has reconciled us (those who love and trust Christ) to Himself. There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, and we are free from the penalty of sin. This is great starting point indeed!

Paul then moves into the present by saying “**now is the favorable time... now is the day of salvation**” (6:2). Here he is pointing his reader towards the present window of God’s grace. Though the final judgment is coming, God is supremely gracious to offer a way of escape right now. This should cheer us tremendously, for we still have time to be about the business of telling others the Good News. “**The King is gracious! Turn to Him and be saved!**”

Lastly, Paul reminds his reader of the eternal reality. Paul says, we are counted as “**sorrowful,**” but we are “**always rejoicing;**” we are counted as “**poor,**” but we are the ones dispensing riches; we are counted as “**having nothing,**” but we “**possess everything**” (6:10).

What a contrast! The world sees Paul, the ambassador for Christ, as the opposite of what he knows himself to truly be. How can he speak of rejoicing and possessing everything, when those around him think he has nothing?!

It is because Paul reminds us here of the true and eternal reality; and he calls us to live in light of what we know, not what we see.

Paul speaks this way in his letter to the Roman Christians as well. There he said, “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. For **I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us**” (Rom. 8:16–18).

Brothers and sisters, we may see afflictions, hardships, and calamities. We may endure sleepless nights, slander, and dishonor. We may even one day be threatened with imprisonment and physical violence for our allegiance to Christ as King. But! But, these temporary sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory we shall come to see in eternity.

Do you hear the encouragement?! It is not that those who love and trust Christ will one day have the joy and glory we share with Christ... No! Paul said that such glory will be “**revealed**” to us (Rom. 8:18). In 2 Corinthians 6:10, Paul said that he now “**possesses everything.**”

Brothers and sisters, if you are in Christ Jesus, you are now co-heirs with Christ! You are now children of the King, and you are now possessors of everything.

What have you to dread? What have you to fear? When you are leaning on the everlasting arms of God, there is nothing that may steal your joy!

Oh, difficult times are all around us, and we shall face our share of hardships, but we may rest (cheerfully rest) on the reality of God’s promises of grace and life. Let these truths steady you today... Let these truths pierce through to your soul, and may you be cheered today.

Christ has won a marvelous victory. He is the King of glory. And He has given us Himself as our prize.

With all of this in mind, **may God help us live as changed people** (progressively transformed by God’s Spirit).

May God help us live as charged people (understanding and acting on our role as ambassadors for Christ).

And may God help us live as cheerful people (constantly anchored by the eternal reality that God loves us in Christ, more than we ever deserved or imagined).

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES ON THIS SUBJECT

“The Ministry of Reconciliation” by John MacArthur

<http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/47-38/the-ministry-of-reconciliation>

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