

Sunday 8th May 2022

Andy Banks

Why Should I Share My Faith?

2 Corinthians 5:9 – 6:4a

With permission from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, I want to start a new short series this morning, based on the Christian Life and Witness course. Firstly, because it's very good material and I'm conscious that a lot of us were not able to attend. Secondly, for those who *did* attend: I don't know about you, but I found that the time flew by and I wanted more space to reflect upon what was said. And thirdly, we are building up to the God Loves You tour event on 16th July, and people are only going to come to know Jesus through that event if people like you and I invite them to come along. But I want to start a stage back from where the Christian Life and Witness course starts by asking the important question, "Why?" *Why* should I share my faith with others? Because, let's face it, if we are not convinced that our faith needs sharing, we won't do it. So, we're going to look at what Paul had to say about this in 2 Corinthians 5:9 – 6:4a.

[Read 2 Cor 5:9 – 6:4a]

5:9We make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 10For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due to us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

11Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. 12We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. 13If we are 'out of our mind,' as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 14For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

16So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! 18All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God. 21God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

*6:1As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. 2For he says,
'In the time of my favour I heard you,
and in the day of salvation I helped you.'*

I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.

3We put no stumbling-block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. 4Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way.

[Pray]

We're going to do something a little different today. In pairs, I'd like you to share, in just one minute each, who first told you about Jesus and how you first reacted; and if your reaction has changed since then, share how that change began. So, for example, I first heard about Jesus from my parents talking about their faith at home and

also from primary school and Sunday school. And my reaction was that I was not interested at all. One of the catalysts for change in my reaction was when my brother, Pete, became a Christian at university and talked about his new faith with me, and much later read through Mark's Gospel with me. And also, some lessons from a Christian teacher at school on the symbolism of good and evil in Macbeth played a part in sparking my interest.

Obviously, I had a bit of time to think about this, but hopefully you get the idea. Keep it short and to the point. You each have one minute to share who first told you about Jesus; how you first reacted; and if your reaction has changed, how that change began.

[Time for sharing]

I wonder, is there anyone who could not name someone who told you about Jesus? No. We're here today because someone, somewhere shared their faith with us. But I suspect the response to this next question may be different. Whose first reaction to hearing about Jesus, like mine, was either negative or indifferent? Now keep your hands up if, nevertheless, you are now grateful that that person told you about him.

You see, one thing that can make us nervous about sharing our faith is that we imagine we have to share the *whole* Gospel at once, and that if the person doesn't fall on their knees in repentance, it was a waste of time. But that isn't our own experience. For many of us our journey to faith was exactly that – a journey. And *most* of the people who shared their faith with us were like important little refreshment breaks along the way – someone whom God used to re-shape our thinking a *little* towards finding him. If we measure our success in evangelism on the reaction we get, we will likely very soon become despondent and give up. The only thing that can truly sustain evangelistic perseverance is our own conviction of its necessity.

1) Convinced

Paul said (5:14): "Christ's love compels us, because we are *convinced* that *one* died for *all*." This is the first and most important "why" of evangelism: being *convinced* of the truth of the good news of Jesus Christ and its necessity for *all* people. If we are not convinced that Jesus' death and resurrection changed the world forever and that there is no better or more important news that anyone can hear, then we will not see evangelism as a personal priority. But if we *are* convinced, then we find ourselves, as custodians of this truth, in debt to those who have yet to hear it: we owe them the gospel. As Paul said in Romans 1:14: "I am a *debtor* both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish." Why? Because he was *convinced* (in contrast to his initial hatred of Jesus) "that *one* died for *all*."

But why is that such good news? Let's take a look at what else Paul says about it. 2 Cor 5:21: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." This is sometimes called "The Divine Exchange." On the Cross, Jesus Christ, who had never sinned – never done anything wrong or ever rejected God – on the cross, he became as though he was the worst of sinners, because all the sin of the whole world was laid upon his shoulders to bear. Everything. Every bitter thought you've ever had, every covetous desire, every lustful look, every unkind word, every time you walked by on the other side of the road rather than help someone in need. All that wrongdoing was laid on him. And not only yours and mine but everyone's sin who ever lived. "God made him who had *no* sin to *be* sin for us." But why? "So that we might become the righteousness of God." So that we might be given *Jesus'* goodness and grow to become like him. We've all done wrong, but Jesus owned our wrong as though it was his own and exchanged it for his spotless goodness. Is that not news that is worth sharing?

And Jesus didn't initiate this alone and twist the arm of a reluctant God to accept his sacrifice. Nor did God force an innocent victim to take our punishment for us. Rather, Paul says, "God was *in* Christ ..." (5:19). The NIV word order unfortunately obscures this significant point. Jesus Christ is God the Son in human flesh. Together, before the beginning of time, he and his Father and the Holy Spirit planned this way of rescuing and restoring us to right relationship with God (reconciling us). And together they carried out the plan. "God was *in* Christ reconciling the world to himself." Notice: not just humans, but the whole world! For the whole world was and is spoilt by human sin, and the whole world was freed, by Jesus' death and resurrection, from the consequent path to destruction. But the *process* of restoring the world to God's original design will not be *complete* until Jesus returns and recreates the world at the end of time.

Nevertheless, Paul says, "If anyone is in *Christ*, the new creation has *come*: the old has gone, the new is *here!*" (5:17). In other words, the new creation that Jesus will complete at the end of time begins for *us now*. The moment we first put our trust in him, we are reconciled to God, and he begins to mould us to become like him in character. And wouldn't the world be a better place if everyone behaved like Jesus? No wonder, Paul says to his readers, "We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God" (5:20). Interestingly, he wrote that to people *within* the Church. Is it possible that, if we revert to stubborn unrepentance, we could once again find ourselves *unreconciled* with God? Christians should not abandon the healthy fear of God that first brought us to repentance, lest we become complacent and presuming of him.

2) Compelled / constrained

And so, Paul says (5:11): "Since ... we know what it is to *fear* the Lord, we try to persuade others." Our knowledge that God is not a *safe* God (even though he is good) is one motivation to share our faith. For we cannot escape the truth that those who reject Jesus' sacrifice for them are destined for an eternity without him in hell. But that is far from the *primary* driver for Paul, nor should it be for us. Rather, he says, "Christ's *love* compels us" (5:14). The sense of that word "compels" is of constraint. Our experience of God's love constrains and squeezes us like a wide, fast-flowing river being forced into a narrow gorge to create a powerful waterfall. Christ's love constrains us not in the sense of a restriction but in the sense of powerfully *motivating* us to action. Because we are convinced that one died for all, and we have experienced his love in that truth.

And, our experience should transform our life's priorities. "He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for *themselves* but for *him* who died for them and was raised again" (5:15). "We make it our *goal* to please *him*" (5:9). And how do we please him? One vital aspect is to share in his passion for reaching out in love. God was *so* passionate to be reconciled to the world, that he came himself to die to remove the barrier to that reconciliation, which is our sin. Nothing is more important to God than this reconciliation! And he gives *us* the honour and privilege of being involved in this ministry of reconciliation (5:18)! "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (5:20). If we are truly convinced that one died for *all*, then his love constrains and compels us to share this vital and wonderful truth out of *love* for all.

3) Conscious

But *how* do we do that? I'll talk a lot more about this in the coming weeks. So for today, I just want to highlight a couple of vital attitudes that arise out of this passage, both of which have to do with being *conscious* of how we present ourselves and therefore how we present the good news of Jesus.

Paul was acutely aware that we Christians can easily discredit the gospel by our behaviour. Hence he insists (6:3-4): “We put *no* stumbling-block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way.” And he goes on to list the incredible suffering he endured to ensure that he was speaking and living the truth of the gospel and not veering away from it in any way. This desire to be an ambassador for Christ was all-consuming for him. Everything he did, every choice he made as to how he lived, was done, was made, with the aim of representing Christ well. Peter says something similar: “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Peter 2:12). The first gospel that anyone will encounter, before they ever hear it from our lips, is the gospel they see in our behaviour. That will either attract people to Jesus or put a stumbling block in their way. Paul knew that the gospel itself is enough of a stumbling block (1 Corinthians 1:23). So, he determined that his own behaviour should not create any further barrier to faith. Is that your determination too?

Linked to this is the second attitude, which is articulated in 5:14: “Because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore *all died*.” Paul echoes Jesus’ own statement, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny *themselves* and *take up their cross daily* and follow me” (Luke 9:23). No-one took up their cross except to die on it. The call to Christian discipleship is a call to daily die to self-interest and to live for Jesus. Nowhere is that more necessary than in the field of evangelism. For one of the biggest barriers to sharing our faith is a focus on self. Whether it’s self-image (“I’m no-one”); self-esteem (“I’m not good enough”); self-doubt (“I don’t know enough; I might say the wrong things”); self-consciousness (“What will people think of me? Will people still like me?”); or self-centredness (“It’s not my responsibility; I’ve got other things I’d rather do”); whenever our focus is on ourselves and our own insecurities, inadequacies, needs or wants, we will shy away from sharing our faith. But, Paul says, if we have put our trust in Jesus, *we died* with him on the cross. Our conscious aim, therefore, should be daily to crucify our self so as to wholly live for him. And if “we are convinced that one died for all,” that love compels us to share in his reconciling mission. Amen?

[Pray]