

Ambassadors for Christ  
II Corinthians 5:14-21

Last week, as we studied Joshua chapter 7, we saw how one man's sin could have a tremendous impact on a whole nation. When Achan looted some of the valuables from Jericho, it wasn't just he that experienced the consequences of his sin – no, 36 people died in the next battle the Israelites tried to fight, and the whole nation was filled with fear. God considered the whole nation to be guilty because of what one man did.

Today, we see how this sort of group accountability can be good news. For as Paul says in verse 19, God has blessed all of us sinners because of the work of one man. Because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, instead of counting our sins against us, God has reconciled us to Himself.

And that's good news for all who are honest about our need for such reconciliation, all who are willing to confess that we are a lot like Achan, all who are willing to admit that we are nothing more than rebels against God's righteous rule, deserving the death penalty just like any other traitor. In fact, one of the things we do when we take this Lord's Supper is to remember that, when Christ died on the cross, He received nothing more and nothing less than we deserve.

That's what Paul says in the last verse of this passage: on the cross, the spotless Lamb of God who had never sinned, became sin for us. He took the sins of all His people upon Himself, so that we might become righteous, pure and holy and able to stand before the judgment seat of Christ without fear. That's the flip side of group accountability, the joyous truth we celebrate at this table today: If God considered all the people of Israel guilty because of Achan's sin, all of Christ's people receive the benefits of His death, and are considered holy and righteous because of what He did.

But we also celebrate a more mysterious truth today. For as we take this bread and this fruit of the vine into ourselves, we are acknowledging that, by faith, we are united to Christ, becoming part of His own body, just as the bread and wine become part of ours. Those who trust in Christ are truly one with Him, as He is One with us.

In verse 14, Paul thus draws the logical conclusion from this fact – if Christ died for all His people, then there is a very real sense in which all His people have already died with Him and in Him. Today we thus not only proclaim the Lord's death, but also our own death.

Why is that something to celebrate? We see the reason in verse 15: Christ didn't die for us so that we should go on living for ourselves, living as if we were still in bondage to sin. Because of the work of Christ we are freed from sin. And how do we know that? Because He didn't just die – He rose again on our behalf.

This is another amazing truth to which communion points: if we are in Christ, if we are connected to Him, if we are part of His body, we have died with Him to the power of sin. We have died with Him to the power of death. And we have also risen with Him to newness of life.

That's why Paul says in verse 17 that if anyone is in Christ, there is a whole new creation. The old things have passed away, and in their place new things have come. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper we celebrate this great truth – that we have not only been forgiven by the blood of Christ, but we have also been cleansed of sin, washed in the blood of the Lamb.

This, then is the word of reconciliation, which God speaks to us. God says, "I know you are a sinner. I know the depth of your sin much more clearly than you do. But I have provided a sacrifice for all who will trust in Christ."

God says, "Turn away from your sins and turn to me. Why go on in rebellion? Because of what Jesus has done, I don't hold any of your sins against you anymore. Be reconciled to me."

That's good news, and that's God's invitation to come to the table. But as we leave this table, Paul reminds us that we are to carry this word of reconciliation to others in word and in deed. We are to demonstrate our forgiveness and our newness of life by being reconciled to one another. In this way, Paul says in verse 20, we are to be ambassadors for Christ.

So, what does such reconciliation with one another look like? Well for starters, as verse 16 says, it means not pulling ourselves back from others whom we consider different or strange, looking at them according to the flesh, which means according to a human perspective. Instead, we are to look at people through God's eyes, seeing all human beings as both priceless image-bearers of God, but also as sinners just as much in need of a Savior as we are.

And that is another one of the truths to which the Lord's Supper points as well. For remember, this table isn't just for members of Yokena Presbyterian Church or First Presbyterian Church of Port Gibson. It isn't just for members of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. No, everyone who has been baptized and made a public profession of faith in any Christian church is welcome here. For as all believers gather around this one table, we celebrate the fact that all the walls that once divided humanity have been broken down in Christ. As Paul said in another place,

"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. So there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for we are all one in Christ Jesus."

And so this table is not for those who think they are perfect, who think they don't need Christ's cross and empty tomb to be reconciled to God. This table is not for those who reject their need to be reconciled to the rest of the family of faith. This table is not about individualistic, do-it-yourself salvation.

No, this table is for those who know they are sinners. This table is for those for those who know they are helpless. This table is for those who know they need to be forgiven and cleansed by the blood of Christ. This table is for those who acknowledge their connection not only to Christ by faith, but to all others who share that faith.

So come to the table. Feed on Christ in your hearts by faith, and be thankful for the reconciliation God has accomplished in Him. And then live for Him who died and rose again on your behalf. Tell the story of His grace. Show His love that others may also find salvation in Him.

Come to the table and be reconciled to God. Then go be an ambassador for Christ that the world might be reconciled to God.