

Kingdom Representatives

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Do you know that as believers we are not only awaiting the arrival of Christ's kingdom, we already are a part of His kingdom? We are seated, the bible says, in heavenly places with Christ.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus announced in Mark 1:15: "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand...*" The kingdom of God was near because the King had come. His first coming was the dawn of a new kingdom. God incarnate was on the scene. The glory of the kingdom, which is the presence and power of God, came to earth.

But for the most part, His people weren't ready yet for the kingdom. They weren't ready because they hadn't yet understood their need for the righteousness that King Jesus would provide. They sought to establish their own righteousness and did not receive the righteousness of Jesus by grace through faith.

They were looking for Jesus to deliver them from the oppression of Rome, but Jesus came to deliver them from their sin. He came to redeem lost sinners so that all who believe can receive forgiveness of sins, and be part of His kingdom forever.

Now, although the Kingdom was at hand, because of God's redemptive plan for all nations, Jesus in His first coming did not set up His kingdom on earth. All who have been made righteous by faith in His shed blood, await the literal establishment of His kingdom of earth.

But there is a sense in which believers, because Christ lives in us by the Spirit, are already part of the kingdom of God. The kingdom has come near to us. In Colossians 1:13, Paul wrote, "*He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.*"

Although, as Paul explained in 2 Corinthians 5, we await the resurrection of our bodies, believers have already been raised with Christ and are alive in Him.

Remember, as Paul also explained in 2 Corinthians 5:5, the Spirit has been given to believers as a guarantee. That is to say, because of the Spirit within us, there is an already and not yet reality to our salvation. The already reality of our salvation is that in our earthly bodies we can know the presence and power of King Jesus at work in us through the Spirit. But the fullness of the glory and reality of our salvation is yet to come.

As we will see in our text, believers are individually **transferred** into a new kingdom and **transformed** into new creations through our union with Christ. And until the arrival of the coming kingdom, our way of operating in the world should demonstrate our true allegiance. We can make an eternal difference in this world because as Kingdom people we are not of this world.

Main idea: Believers are united with Christ through the Spirit so that we can live as representatives of a new kingdom on earth.

This morning we are going to see 3 ways that believers live now as representatives of Christ's kingdom.

1. Believers in Christ receive a new kingdom perspective

Notice that believers in Christ have a new perspective. Having explained how the rescuing love of Jesus shaped who he was and what he lived for, Paul continues: *"From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer"* (2 Corinthians 5:16).

At one time Paul had no regard for Jesus. The same is true of every one of us before coming to Christ. We had little, if any regard for Jesus. In fact, we may have even denied and despised Him. We may

not have denied Him with words, but we may have denied Him in the way we lived our lives.

But when, like Paul, we are awakened spiritually through the gospel, we no longer view Jesus in the flesh. That is to say, we no longer view Him through the lens of our sinful nature which is driven by self-interest and selfish desires.

As Paul explained in verses 14-15, when we come to know the love of Christ who died and rose again on our behalf, our whole view of life changes. The love of Christ not the allure of this world shapes who we are and determines the decisions that we make.

When we know the love of Jesus, we don't live with a sense of entitlement, but with a profound gratitude for the redeeming grace of Jesus. Thus we view everyone through the lens of Christ's love and see no one as unredeemable.

We don't see them just for who they are now, but for who they can become by the grace of Jesus. We see grace potential in everyone.

Daniel Henderson frequently says that discouragement is often a temporary loss of an eternal perspective. How many of you know, people can discourage us, people can disappoint us, and people can get under our skin.

Remember, that Paul planted the church in Corinth with great care and sacrifice and yet some were believing the lies being told about him. Others, whose lives were not being controlled by the love of Christ, maligned Paul's character to gain power and influence for their own advantage.

What kept Paul from writing the church off even when they wanted to write him off? What motivated him instead to instead pursue those who were straying from the Lord?

Paul didn't find his identity in what others thought about him. He was secured in the love of Christ. The love of Christ gave Paul a gospel

shaped perspective—a perspective that drove him to pursue wandering sheep, just as Christ had pursued him.

Writing about how church elders are to shepherd God's people like Jesus, Jeramie Rinne, observed, "Tracking down stray members is probably one of the most difficult, least glamorous parts of being a pastor/elder. You experience deep satisfaction from praying for others. But what are the personal benefits from confronting an adulterer or sticking your nose into a long-standing squabble? Don't we all have too much drama in our lives already? Why jump into someone else's mire?"

Here's one reason: elders [and all believers] embody the gospel when they search out wandering members. Keeping watch and tracking down strays is a Jesus-shaped activity. The Good Shepherd came into this world to seek and save the lost. The Lamb of God came to die for unrepentant, sinning sheep like us. The Great Physician came to bind up limping sheep, sick and broken by sin. The prince of Peace waded into our war-torn world, ripped apart by rivalries and divisions beyond number. And when we hurled insults at him, struck him, and pierced him, he did not open his mouth. Jesus didn't have to come, but he did. And when elders take the initiative to insert themselves, even though it costs them, they exemplify the very gospel that they preach."

People will disappoint us and even discourage us, but when we know the love of Christ we don't lose heart. We don't regard people like we did before the pursuing love of Jesus captured our hearts.

We keep coming before His presence through prayer and the word so that our perspective is renewed by His love and hearts are encouraged to pursue others like Jesus pursues us.

This brings us to a second way believers in Christ live as His representatives on earth.

2. Believers in Christ become new kingdom people

In addition to receiving a new kingdom perspective, believers in Christ are new kingdom people. Having explained that believers, who know the love of Christ, no longer regard people as they once did, Paul continues: *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come”* (2 Corinthians 5:16).

To reinforce why Paul no longer regards Jesus or others as he once did, Paul further explains that all who are in Christ are new creations. This new creation leads Paul to further state, *“The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”*

This verse on the new creation in Christ is an often-quoted passage of scripture. And most of the time the meaning applied has to do with how believers are transformed by the Spirit and given new desires and new affections for God.

But although it is true that believers are made new in Christ, Paul may be saying much more than that. In the Greek, verse 17 can also be read that through our union with Christ we are part of a new creation or enter into the new creation.

This language of new creation that Paul uses is closely related to the prophecies found in Isaiah about the future kingdom. For example, in Isaiah 65:17 we read: *“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.”*

So, it's not only true that through union with Christ believers are **transformed** into new creations, we are also **transferred** into a new creation, into a new kingdom, into a new world. As believers, the world that we now live in is not our home. We are pilgrims and strangers in it. Heaven is our home.

As the Apostle Paul explained in Philippians 3:20: *“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious*

body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.” (Philippians 3:20-21).

But now our calling as believers and citizens of heaven is not just to wait on earth for Jesus to come back for us. We are kingdom people sent from the heavenly realm with kingdom power to live as kingdom representatives on earth.

Because of the Spirit that has been given to us as a guarantee of the greater kingdom yet to come, we can already experience kingdom power on the inside.

And because of this already and not yet glorious reality, people outside of the kingdom should be able to see in us a glimpse of the kingdom to come.

Notice that when speaking of how, for the sake of love, believers would be willing to give up certain liberties for the good of others, Paul writes, *“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”* Romans 14:17

O brothers and sisters, the kingdom of God is more than a place or a realm, it's a person and a rule, namely the person and rule of King Jesus.

If we are going to make a difference for Christ in this world, people outside of the kingdom must see the “out of this world difference” that the person and rule of Jesus can make in and through our surrendered lives.

We should stand out from the crowd because we bring the distinctiveness of the Kingdom to bear by how we carry ourselves and communicate to others!

What makes us compellingly distinct from the world and keeps us from conforming to the world? Notice that because in Christ all things are

made new, Paul states, “*The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*”

Notice that similarly the Lord spoke through the prophet Isaiah of the coming kingdom of Christ in Isaiah 43:19: “*Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*”

Concerning the new creation in Christ, both Isaiah and Paul exhorted the people of God to *behold*. Remember because believers are no longer in the flesh, but in the Spirit, we have a new kingdom perspective.

We have a new perspective because through the Spirit we can *behold*, we can see the unseen, we can set our minds on things above and perceive the new things that belong to the redeemed of the Lord.

When we look to the glories of the unseen realm and set our hope on the new creation in Christ, we will see the world with an eternal perspective. This eternal perspective enables us to live as kingdom people with kingdom power and for God’s kingdom purposes.

This brings us to a final way believers in Christ live as His representatives on earth.

3. Believers in Christ have new kingdom purpose

Believers in Christ have a new kingdom purpose. Having explained that we are **transformed** and **transferred** into the new creation through our union with Christ, Paul continues:

“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.” ²
Corinthians 5:18-21

Notice that Paul explained that the God who makes all things new in Christ, has not only reconciled believers to himself, but has entrusted to believers the message of reconciliation.

And that message, according to verses 19 and 21, is that because Christ absorbed the penalty of sin on the cross, the sins of all who are in Christ are no longer counted against them. And because of the forgiveness of sins found in Christ, they are not just free from the penalty of sin, they are also reconciled to God.

What does it mean to be reconciled to God? To be reconciled means that as believers we are no longer alienated from God because of our sin, but our brought near by the blood of Jesus.

To be reconciled means that we are now in right relationship with God—that we have peace with God.

It's important to note here that we don't make peace with God. God makes it possible through Christ for us to be at peace with Him.

This is the good news of Jesus. This is the message of reconciliation that has been entrusted to the redeemed. "We are not called to make peace with God—that is God's work (Kent Hughes)."

Do you have peace with God? O to know peace with God through the gospel of Jesus is the greatest of all treasures. And to share this treasure with others so that they too can know peace with God is the greatest of all blessings. "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

I don't know about you, but before I got saved I wasn't pursuing the Lord. I didn't give God a second thought. O but I'm so glad that His love moved a pastor to relentlessly pursue my brother, and encountered me in the process and led us both to Christ.

Yesterday, while sharing this part of the message with my brother, he shared with me that he had just received the following text message from Freddy Laureano:

“Good morning my brother. I just want to thank you again for ministering the truth into my life according to God's word. Every time I get to share God's gift of salvation to someone, I'm grateful for that day you made time to go out and reach the lost. You were looking for Katherine but instead you found me. God bless you! I love you brother.”

How many of you are so glad that God didn't wait for you to come to Him, instead He came to you? In God's work of reconciliation, He pursues us.

Notice that after explaining that reconciled believers have been entrusted with the message of reconciliation, Paul adds: *“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.”* 2 Corinthians 5:20

Remember, because of Christ, we are kingdom people sent from the heavenly to live as kingdom representatives on earth. We are, as Paul explains, ambassadors for Christ.

Referring to believers as ambassadors for Christ is significant because an ambassador does not represent himself but the one who sends Him. Likewise, as believers, we represent the kingdom of Christ.

Commenting on what it looks like to be ambassadors or representative for Christ, one commentator observed: “As representatives of Christ's righteous rule, we speak a different language, we have different customs and lifestyles, and we appear a bit like foreigners in a foreign land. We are ambassadors for a nation without borders, an invisible kingdom without currency, a King whose throne is in heaven and who reigns spiritually through the hearts of His people. As His ambassadors, we represent King Jesus to those around us, even though they do not acknowledge Him as their own sovereign Lord.”
Chuck Swindoll

It's important to note also that to the mind of the Corinthians, Paul's use of the word ambassador would carry more significance than the way we might understand it today. In our day, ambassadors typically seek diplomatic relationships with other nations for the sake of their countries.

But in Paul's day ambassadors played a much different role. When Paul wrote this letter, the Roman empire ruled the world. And they did so through the might of their military force. They didn't send ambassadors to make peace. Rather, after violently conquering other nations, their defeated enemies would send a representative to negotiate their surrender to the Roman Empire.

But now in contrast, God does just the opposite. He doesn't make His enemies come to Him to negotiate a peace treaty. Rather, He takes the initiative. He goes to His enemies, to those who are in opposition to His righteous rule.

And through the sacrifice of His Son, He made a way for His enemies to have peace with Him so that they can enjoy the blessings of His glorious kingdom. Paul says in Romans 5:10 that while we were enemies, God reconciled us to Himself through the death of His son.

Likewise, as His kingdom people, shaped by the glory of His reconciling love, we have been called to represent Christ in a lost world. And like Jesus, we don't wait for lost sinners to come to us.

Rather, as His ministers of reconciliation, we take the initiative. Compelled by the love of God, we go to them. And as His ambassadors, we humbly and earnestly implore them to be reconciled to God (v.20).

Notice again that in verse 20, the message of reconciliation that believers are to deliver is not "reconcile yourselves to God." The gospel is "be reconciled." That is to say, receive reconciliation from God. Kent Hughes

And to clarify further the message of reconciliation, Paul explains in verse 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”* (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Oh, this verse gives us a clear and concise explanation of the saving power of the gospel. As Chuck Swindoll noted, “Jesus, the perfect God-man, the spotless Lamb of God, was made a sin offering in our place, just as Isaiah had prophesied centuries earlier in Isaiah 53:10.

Through faith alone in the person and work of Jesus Christ, we become the righteousness of God. A real transfer occurs at the Cross: We trade our guilt for His innocence. Having been declared righteous (justified), we are completely free of guilt and have become full heirs of a glorious promise.”

Conclusion

Have you been reconciled to God? Remember, that we don't reconcile ourselves to God. We receive the reconciliation that God provided through the cross by grace through faith, by turning from our self-rule and trusting Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

If you have not received this great salvation, I implore you today, be reconciled to God.

And if you have received reconciliation, you have not only been transformed into a new creation, you have also been transferred into a new kingdom.

We are more than citizens of heaven waiting on earth for Jesus to come back for us. We are kingdom people sent by King Jesus with kingdom power to fulfill His Kingdom purposes.

May we seek the Lord daily to receive kingdom perspective so that we see the world through His eyes and are compelled by His love to reach into a broken world and implore lost sinners on behalf of Christ to be reconciled to God.

Discussion Guide

Kingdom Representatives (2 Corinthians 5:16-21)

Main idea: Believers are united with Christ through the Spirit so that we can live as representatives of a new kingdom on earth.

Review

During His earthly ministry, Jesus announced in Mark 1:15: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand...” What did Jesus mean when he said the kingdom of God is at hand? Did Jesus establish His kingdom on earth at His first coming? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Is there a sense in which believers are part of the kingdom of God now? 2 Corinthians 5:5; Colossians 1:13

Assess

How did Christ’s redeeming love change how Paul viewed people? 2 Corinthians 5:14-16

What kept Paul from writing the church off even when they wanted to write him off? What motivated him instead to pursue those who were straying from the Lord? 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

According to Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17, how does our union with Christ bring us into new creation or bring about new creation? Keep in mind that the Greek simply says, “If anyone is in Christ, “new creation” (kainē ktisis). Isaiah 65:17; Philippians 3:20-21; 2 Corinthians 3:18).

How does Romans 14:17, challenge us to think of the Kingdom of God as more than just a realm but also as a rule/reign?

How are we as believers called to bring the distinctiveness of the kingdom to bear by how we carry ourselves and communicate?

How are sinners reconciled to God? What is the message of reconciliation? What does it mean to be reconciled to God? In what way are believers called to be ministers of reconciliation? 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

What does it mean to be an ambassador for Christ? How might our modern understanding of an ambassador differ from the Corinthians in the first century?

What did Paul mean when he wrote that Jesus was made sin and how do we become the righteousness of God? (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Apply

We've been saved to be kingdom people; ambassadors for Christ; a living breathing picture of Christ's coming kingdom to our world. How does it feel to know you've been saved for this? How does this challenge you?

Is it easy for others to recognize you as a kingdom person? Why or why not?

What are the internal motivations that lead to your external actions? Do your motives line up with what His kingdom is about? 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

How should a kingdom perspective of life shape the way we pray? In view of our calling to be kingdom representatives, how might you need to change what you normally pray about or even the tone of your prayers? 2 Corinthians 5:20; Matthew 6:7-13; 33

What are the qualities of the kingdom that are to be on display in our lives and how might you need to pray for these qualities to be more true of you as a kingdom representative? 2 Corinthians 5:14-21; Matthew 5:1-11