

BaptistWay: Non-Christians

August 13, 2015

• *The BaptistWay lesson for August 30 focuses on 2 Corinthians 5:11-21; 1 Peter 3:15-16; Colossians 4:2-6.*

Checks are great. Credit cards are better. An illustration in two directions.

Checks are great. You can buy whatever you want with them, you can write them for any amount and you can keep writing checks until the book is empty. As long as there are checks, there's money, right?

Ah, but credit cards are better. There is no "last check." You can buy stuff all day long ... and never pay for it! Isn't that how credit works?

Sure, credit is great ... until the reckoning comes. But haven't you heard? The reckoning has come.

The disconnect

Unfortunately, many Christians are as disconnected from the ministry of reconciliation as they are from the real cost of credit. They may say all the right things and do all the right things at the right time. They may play religion really well, but they may not understand they owe an incredible debt to the one they claim as their Lord.

As Christians, our lives no longer are ours to live, for we are bought with a price—the blood of Christ—and our lives now belong to him (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 2 Corinthians 5:15). He makes us new (5:17), gives us a new life and sends us out into the world as ambassadors, as ministers of reconciliation.

Reconciliation: The embassy is open.

For 54 years, the United States and Cuba were not on speaking terms. With the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the two nations on July 20, 2015, both countries reopened their respective embassies.

From sometime after creation until Christ's crucifixion, our relationship with God was strained, to put it mildly. We'd cooked our goose, burned our bridges. However, with Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, relations formally were restored. The embassy is open, and all who call Christ "Lord" are ambassadors.

Just as all foreign ambassadors have a job, to represent their sending nation in matters of state and commerce, Christ's ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) have a job in this world, to represent their sending sovereign, "always being prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks (for) the reason for (our) hope" (1 Peter 3:15).

Peter tells us our job is to represent hope. The Apostle Paul tells us the hope we represent is our reconciliation, our being reconciled to God through Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). This is true peace. Paul defines reconciliation as God "not counting people's sins against them." In other words, the balance we owe God has been paid—and not by us.

The original term—*katallasso*—denotes an exchange initiated by one party to fulfill the obligation of another party. *Vine's Dictionary* puts it this way in relation to us: God changed our relationship "from enmity to friendship."

Paul uses both the noun and the verb in 2 Corinthians 5, the verb pointing to God and the noun pointing to us. Because God reconciled (the verb) us, because God actively worked through Christ to erase our debt, we receive reconciliation (the noun). As such, we are in the passive role in relation to God.

In relation to those who have not received reconciliation, we are in the active role, taking the news—not the work—of reconciliation to them. This

is the Christian's job among non-Christians. The trick is to carry out our duty without turning non-Christians into targets or projects. Philosophically speaking, once non-Christians become targets or projects—and frankly, once we categorize them as “non-Christians”—they become less than human, and our track record with the “less than human” is not commendable.

Paul offers us a corrective. Paul frames our job as ambassadors, as ministers of reconciliation, with the single word “love.” It is not duty that drives us to check off the daily task of administering reconciliation. For one, reconciliation is not ours to administer. It is not duty but “Christ's love (that) compels us” (2 Corinthians 5:14). Because of Christ's love, we rush out to make the good news of reconciliation known to all who don't know it so they may receive it, too.

We do rush out, don't we? Love compels us, doesn't it?

We are not debt collectors or repo agents. We are messengers of reconciliation.

In love, Christ went to wedding parties. In love, Christ laughed over dinner with whores, crooks and scumbags. In love, Christ touched disgusting people. In love, Christ turned himself in, held his tongue, stretched out his arms and died. You don't do this for a target or project. You do this for people you love. And God demonstrated love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).

As ministers of reconciliation, as Christ's ambassadors, we cannot remain detached from the world around us as we so easily are from the cost of our credit card purchases. No, we must dive into the world, carrying the hope of the message of reconciliation with us, delivering it with “gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15), and paying the cost to do so. That's what love does.