

## **2 Cor 5:20      GOD MAKING HIS APPEAL**

PRELIMS. It is Xmastime! What should the Church be doing at Xmastime? We should be saying: God is making His appeal through us, He is **imploring** people to be **reconciled** to Him through the Lord Jesus Christ! More people go to Church at this time of year than any other time of the year! And we **ought** not to miss the opportunity and make sure they know the **message** the Church **has** from God!

The message of the Church is **centred** on Christ! Who Christ is and what He did is what ought to be explained at Xmastime!! The whole world stops on Friday for Jesus!!?? **Amazing** isn't it! We need to explain about **why** Jesus came into the world and that He came to **save** us from our sins and **reconcile** us to God - for **we**, (both in our covenant head, Adam, and individually) have **broken off** relationships with God. We have left Him as our God and Lord.

**What** is Paul saying here? He is saying God is making an **appeal** to us, the people who have forgotten Him and are living **self-centered** lives! God is using us, His Church, as a **marriage counsellor**, *"making His appeal through us"* the Church, to be an **arbiter** to heal the break-down of communications between God and Mankind!

Our message is from God - we have **not initiated** the message, the message is God's. \*God is **deeply concerned** about the relationship breakdown. Far more concerned than mankind is! Now, marriage counselling is **not** really a **pleasant** occupation because you learn the **worst** about **both parties**! Although it must be very **rewarding** to be successful, it can be a **very difficult** task to re-unite those who are **determined** there is **not** going to be **re-union**!

Preaching the gospel of course is **much more pleasant** than marriage counselling – for one, you do **not** hear the worst about **both** parties in the gospel – you only hear the worst about **one** party - we, mankind! The other Party, God is totally **innocent**. And surprise, surprise, it is God, the innocent party that is doing all the **chasing**!

Yes, despite all the insults He has received from us, **ranging** from **unbelief** in His existence, to outright **hatred** - God with **all His heart** is seeking and **longing** to be **re-united** with His **estranged** people!

God is truly **'missing'** the love of His life! That is why we read: "*O Jacob...**return to Me***"[Isa 44:21,22] Again through Joel, God calls "*Yet even now, declares the LORD, **return to me** with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments. **Return to the LORD your God**, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and He relents over disaster*"[Joel 2:12] Isn't that lovely!

God genuinely wants a **restored relationship!** To prove God's genuine sincerity, He has called and sent out special people, 'servants' to do this particular work, the **ministry of reconciliation!** There was another apostle who had a wonderful **'personal experience'** with Jesus Christ, and he puts it like this: "*This is the message we have **heard from Him and proclaim** to you*" and outlines it, adding the **purpose** for which he wrote his letter, "***so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ***"[1J1:1-5] God want **fellowship** with you/I! This actually is the message of Xmas! God **with us!!**

Many people think that the Church's message is a **sad one!** But it is **not** a sad ministry! The Church's message is a positive **happy** message. It's a wonderful message of **hope!** Alexander Pope coined the phrase 'Hope springs eternal' meaning: People will keep on hoping no matter the odds! Of course there is a **false hope**, but **even** a false hope helps for the time being! In Los Angeles in 1928 a child was abducted. 5 months later the police re-unite the boy to his mother - but it is not her son, despite the police insisting he was. In the film '**Changeling**', retelling the true story, the mother's relentless quest to find her true son exposed the corruption of some public institutions. She suffered greatly, including being sent to an asylum. Her son was captured and put in a group of 20 boys, of 17 were

murdered. 3 escaped! One was found alive to tell the story. **Hope** enabled the mother to continue looking for her son!! I don't think she ever found her son! But **hope** kept her going - and a **reason** to live!

But the **gospel hope** is not **uncertain** in that way. Hope is a **certainty** in Scripture, there is **no uncertainty**! It is concerning "*the hope set before us*" that the Writer to Hebrews says "*We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul*" [Heb 6:19] How **could** 1st Century believers express certainty in a **stronger** way than by the picture of an **anchor**? He described this certainty a few verses earlier, as "*the full assurance of hope*" [Heb 6:11]

Paul felt this hope was **worth** going to prison for - as did the mother in the film with her hope! But Paul **knew** he was not wasting his time spreading the gospel "*it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain*" [Acts 28:20]. Paul considered it a great **privilege** to suffer, indeed he said "*I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may...complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me - the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace*" [Acts 20:24 NIV]. That is all Paul wanted to do, to tell the wonderful story of God's grace. He went around the world **imploring** people to believe in Jesus Christ!

Yes, of course, there is the **bad news** of sin's **curse**, but that is what we see every day around us in the problems of life which **makes** the 'good news', 'the good news'! All the evil be remedied! No one needs to be told that the world is full of evil – its so **obvious**! People are looking for 'good news', and it is **only** Jesus that has 'good news'! Jesus' message is. "*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life*" [J5:24] + "*Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life*" [J3:36]. Wonderful!

The **biggest problem** in this work is **convincing** people that they **need** to be reconciled to a God they **cannot see**! Not many people today believe they **need** to be reconciled to God up in heaven!

Hardly anyone among the millions believe that the **one imperative need** of mankind is to be ‘reconciled to God’! Such a thought, is absolutely **alien** to their thinking! God is not in any of their thoughts!

And yet, **that was** the Apostles' one message “*be reconciled to God*”[20]!! That was their plea and message. Of course they said it with **passion**. They **really believed** it! And that is my/our problem today – we are **not passionately** convinced that it **is man’s one imperative need**! These Apostles saw the risen Lord – it made them **alive** with fire in their stomachs! “*For the love of Christ controls us*” [14,15]! It **did** control them! It did not only put **pressure** on them, it actually **controlled** them! They passionately believed that death was **not the end**! They believed that Jesus was “*raised*” from the dead, and if He was raised from the dead, so would all of us!

The whole Story of the Bible is this message about God’s Call ‘Come and Lets Be Friends Again’! Come and lets get together again! That is what God is really **wanting**. God is **not** just **saying** “*Be reconciled to God*”, He **wants** reconciliation, He **desires** it with all His heart! And all this reconciliation is **His** idea, not ours! That is what Paul means when he says “*All this is from God*”[18a] – it was all God’s idea that we should get back together again “*Come now let us reason together says the Lord although your sins be...*”

God gave Paul this message so that he could write: “*We implore you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God*”[20]. God is **genuine** – look at what He has **done** to **prove** His genuine sincere forgiveness: “*For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that, in Him we might become the righteousness of God*”[21] It was **God** that **sent** Christ, to die for our sins. Christ could **not** come on His own - He was **called** by His Father to do this- and He accepted! Marvelous!

“*so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*”[21c] It is **only** ‘**in Him**’ (**Christ**) that we can become righteous! There is no Xmas gift as good as Jesus Christ. He is the **Best Gift**!