

## 12 Keys to Spiritual Maturity

### An Evangelist's Heart

By [Dr. Derek Thomas](#)

#### 2 Corinthians 5:6-21

Now turn with me, if you would, to the second epistle of Paul, to the Corinthians in chapter 5. And we are going to pick up the reading at verse 6 and read through to the end of the chapter. 2 Corinthians 5 beginning at verse 6—This is the word of God:

*<sup>6</sup>Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—<sup>7</sup>for we walk by faith, not by sight—<sup>8</sup>we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. <sup>9</sup>Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. <sup>10</sup>For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. <sup>11</sup>Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences. <sup>12</sup>We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, so that you will have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart. <sup>13</sup>For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. <sup>14</sup>For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; <sup>15</sup>and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. <sup>16</sup>Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. <sup>17</sup>Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. <sup>18</sup>Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, <sup>19</sup>namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup>Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup>He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

Thus far, God's holy and inerrant word—May He add his blessing to it. *Amen*. Now if you're joining with us this evening as a visitor, you've come almost towards the end of a series that began...I've forgotten when but maybe in the middle of May...but a series of twelve sermons that I've called "Twelve Keys to Spiritual Maturity." And over the course of this summer we have ranged over many issues and topics and texts, and it would, of course, be altogether amiss if we were to suggest that one of the keys of spiritual growth wasn't evangelism; because as many of you have learned and known in your own lives, giving testimony to Jesus can be one of the most growing experiences in our lives. Many of you have been away this summer on mission trips, and we've heard from some of you and we have yet, perhaps, to hear from a few of you. And those with whom I've conversed already this summer have given testimony to this very thing: that the discipline of giving testimony to Jesus Christ has proven to be one of the keys to spiritual health and vitality and growth.

Paul uses here in 2 Corinthians 5 the metaphor of an ambassador. It is one of the ways in which the Apostle Paul sees himself not only as an apostle but as a Christian, as a believer in Jesus Christ. One of the ways that he encapsulates what that means is to say, 'I am an ambassador of Jesus Christ.' An ambassador is an emissary, one who goes in the place of a sovereign, in order to bring good news and to initiate peace. You and I as believers in Jesus Christ are ambassadors of Christ, as though in Christ's stead we were begging the world to be reconciled to God. There is no doubt that if we were to search the gospels that we would discover again that our Lord Jesus Christ wants and desires His children to be spokesman on His behalf. He wants us to be evangelists. And I think the thing that comes across in this particular chapter in 2 Corinthians 5 for the Apostle Paul is the sense of honor and a sense of privilege that God in His great mercy entrusts the gospel into our hands and into our mouths and into our lips. And I think the Apostle Paul as he does in these epistles remind us of the problems and the difficulties and the hardships that the Christian life brings with it, wants us also to appreciate that despite all of the difficulties, giving testimony to Jesus is one of the things that actually exalts us and reminds us of the dignity with which Christ has now endowed us.

And I want us to ask of this passage this evening what the marks of bearing an evangelist's heart are. Now, there is more in this passage than I have time to deal with, and I am, in examining these verses, going to be somewhat selective in order to answer that particular question: What are the marks of an evangelist's heart? And as we examine these four marks that I want us to see, I want you to ask yourself, do I have that mark? Does that mark shine forth from my heart this evening?

## **I. The first mark of an evangelist's heart is to please Jesus Christ.**

Now the first one that I want us to consider is that an evangelist's heart makes their goal pleasing Jesus Christ. They make it their goal to please Jesus Christ. Now you'll see Paul alludes to that in verse 9, "Therefore we also have as our ambition," our goal, "whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him." It was one of the things that the Apostle Paul lived for. It was what circumscribed his entire existence: that he wanted to please Jesus Christ; that he was, if you like, so *in love* with Christ; that he was so enraptured by Christ that he saw it as his goal and ambition—no matter where he was, no matter what he was doing—to bring pleasure to Jesus Christ. You'll notice that he says that in different ways and in different words in the course of this chapter. He says again in verse 15, "He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."

When Paul talks about the gospel, when Paul talks about the work of Jesus Christ upon the Cross, Paul is at the same time eager to ask the question, what does that mean for me? What are the implications of that for my day-to-day living as a believer in Jesus Christ? And the fact that Jesus gave His life for me means that I must in turn give my life for Him, that I must live out my life to please Him. There's a beautiful illustration of that, isn't there, in the Old Testament in Exodus chapter 21? We're coming to it shortly...the slave who had won his freedom. And there were occasions in the Old Testament economy when slaves who had won their freedom did not necessarily want that freedom, that they wanted to continue in the service of their master. And you remember the ritual and the ceremony whereby the owner of that slave would take him to the doorpost and bore a hole through his earlobe and, as it were, nail him and fasten him to that house and to that service for forevermore? And it's as though Paul is saying, 'That's what has happened to us in Jesus Christ. We have been nailed and fastened to Jesus Christ, so that no matter what we do we want to please Him.'

John White, Christian psychologist and therapist—better known perhaps in Great Britain than here—in his book, *The Cost of Commitment*, writes about an American Marxist that he once met in Mexico City. And this is what this man said, "There is one thing about which I am completely in earnest—the communist cause. It is my life, my business, my religion, my hobby, my sweetheart, my wife, my mistress, my meat and drink. I work at it by day and dream of it by night. Its control over me grows greater with the passage of time, therefore I cannot have a friend, a lover, or even a conversation without relating them to this power that animates and controls my life. I measure people, books and years and deeds according to the way they affected the Communist cause and by their attitude to it. I have already been in jail for my ideas and if need be I am ready to face death."... All for the communist cause. That's a man...that's a man whose one goal in life was the cause of Karl Marx.

Our goal, our cause is Jesus Christ. The thing that we think about, the thing that motivates us, the thing that drives us one from minute-to-minute is Christ and His love for us in the gospel. Everyday we seek to please Him, not just in evangelism

but in our vocation, no matter what that vocation may be. Whether we are a housewife, or a mother, or a student, or whether we're retired, we want to please our Lord Jesus Christ. William Tyndale said, "If we look externally there is difference," he said, "betwixt washing dishes and preaching the word of God. But as touching, pleasing God, there is no difference at all." Some of you tomorrow morning have to go to your office. You have to go to school. You have to go to your earthly bosses. And some of them are demanding and they're always pointing out every failure, even imaginary ones, and they never praise you for what you've done well. And even to think of tomorrow in that office and that school and that desk with all of its papers and those files brings a measure of apprehension...even to think about it in these moments. But even there, my friend, you can please Jesus Christ. You can bring glory to Him.

And Paul, although here in 2 Corinthians 5 he wants to talk about evangelism and he wants to talk about being an ambassador of Jesus Christ, the motivation for being an ambassador (as it is the motivation for being anything in the Christian life) is the desire to please Jesus Christ—that I'm so in love with Jesus that I want to please Him no matter what I do.

Husbands, do you remember when you fell in love with your wives? You remember that? Before you married her...you know, when you were trying to woo her...all those flowers that you bought, all those meals that you paid for, all those gifts that you sent to her, those times when you forced yourself to be sweet and to smile and to say those charming words that utter out of your mouth. And you were always on time and you were early, and you were never late because you were driven by one motivation, you wanted to please her. You wanted to please her. Well, that's the way it is with Jesus Christ. We are in love with Him and we want to please Him in everything that we do. So that when we find ourselves sitting on airplane and there's somebody sitting next to us that we've never seen before and an opportunity opens up to speak for Him, you want to please Him. You want to say to this person, "Jesus is the only solution for the problem of humanity," and to beg and to woo that person into a relationship with Christ and into the kingdom of God. So the man or woman who has an evangelist's heart makes it their aim to please Christ.

## **II. The second mark (goal) of an evangelist's heart is to persuade others of Christ.**

But, secondly, they make it their task to persuade others of Christ. Look at what Paul says in verse 11, "Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men"... "Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men." And the Lord there in verse 11...and the context is Jesus Christ that Paul has spoken of back in verse 10, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds...knowing therefore the fear of the Lord." Don't you

like the Authorized Version and its bluntness: "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men."

Don't be frightened, Christians. Please don't be frightened of using the word *fear* in relationship to God. It's the height of folly not to have reverential fear in the presence of the majesty and the greatness of God. "Jesus, the name high over all in heaven and earth or sky; angels and men before it fall, and devils fear and fly," Wesley said. Knowing the terror of the Lord, the Lord who sits on His judgment seat in verse 10...it's the highest court in the whole universe. The highest court in this land is the Supreme Court but there is a higher court than the Supreme Court: It is the court of Heaven; it is the judgment seat of Christ. And how glorious the Judge is who is seated there! The Lamb of God is turned into a lion and the sight of Him will strike terror into the hearts of men and women who don't know Him.

Do you remember when Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph your brother whom you sold into Egypt"? And do you remember they were troubled by his presence? He was the second most powerful man in all of Egypt and they feared him. They feared the consequences of what they had done so many years before.

And so it will be before the throne of Christ. Christ will come in judgment and say, 'I am Jesus that you have sinned against. I am Jesus whose laws you have broken, whose blood you have despised. I am come to judge you.' And what horror and amazement will grip every sinner then. How they will be troubled by His presence then. But to His people, to His people, to Christians, to believers, how comforting the sight of this majestic Christ will be in all of His glory and splendor and majesty! His first coming was in humility. was incognito: He was born in a stable in Bethlehem. His second coming will be illustrious: He will appear with the outriders of archangels and the entourage of a vast number of angels. Christ the Son of Righteousness shall shine in splendor above all the glory of the Seraphim and the Cherubim and He will acknowledge His own by name. That's the sight. Christ will plead His own blood for the saints. 'These persons I have purchased,' Jesus will say, 'on Golgotha. I have won and bought their redemption. Though their sins were as scarlet, they are as white as snow. Their sins are covered by what I've done. They are as righteous as I am,' Jesus will say of them. "Come, ye blessed of my Father. Come and inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you from before the foundation of the world." He'll mention before men and angels all that you have done for Him. "I was in hunger and You gave me meat. I was thirsty and You gave me drink." And then He will beckon them to Him. This glorious sight of the judgment seat of Christ where Christ will own and gather His own to Himself and equally disown and cast out those who do not believe in Him...And it's that sight—it's the *terror* of that sight; it's the fear of that sight; it's the overwhelming spectacle of that sight, my friends, that motivates the Apostle Paul to say, "I persuade men."

You know if you're sitting next to somebody and you don't see them...as Paul says here, you don't see them as the world sees them. You don't see them as important people. You don't see them as CEO's or millionaires; you just see them as perishing sinners who don't have Christ. No matter what their earthly dignity may be, they don't have Christ and they're going to hell. That's what Paul is saying. That's the transformation that's been brought into his life as a result of the gospel of redeeming grace. He sees people differently now. He sees them as those whose true need is to embrace Christ and to embrace Him alone.

My friend, do you have that particular burden in your heart? Is that what you see when you're in the office, when you're talking to your neighbor, when you're at a ballgame and there are people around you who don't know the Savior, who don't love the Savior? And Paul is saying, 'I am motivated by the sight of the judgment seat of Christ. I want to live my life so that my conscience is clear before that throne. And knowing therefore the fear of the Lord, we persuade men.'

I came across this little quotation from Machen in a sermon on this particular text, "The motive of fear is used in many places in the Bible. It is used in the Old Testament; it is used in the New Testament. It is used with particular insistence in the teaching of Jesus. I think it is one of the strangest of modern aberrations when men say it is a degrading and sub-Christian thing to tell men to stand in fear of God. Many passages in the Bible might be summarized by the word, 'the fear of God constrains us.'" And that is an evangelical motif, my friend. That is an evangelical motif because it is a motive that is aware of the realities of death and judgment and a world to come.

### **III. The third mark of an evangelist's heart is that it derives its energy from Christ.**

But then in the third place, the man or woman who has an evangelist's heart derives their energy from Christ. Look at how he puts it in verse 14, "The love of Christ controls us." Actually, I think I prefer the translation, "The love of Christ *constrains* us," holds us. And it's the word that's used actually in the negative of the Gerasene demoniac, you remember, who couldn't be constrained by chains. They couldn't bind him; they couldn't hold him together. It's the kind of word that you'd use if you were coming out of a football match...and I know that some of you were there yesterday. I can look at you straight in the eye and you know exactly what I'm talking about. And when you're coming out of that stadium where there's been...I don't know, 50,000 people or 60,000 or whatever it was...and you're coming, funneling through those exits. You can't move to the left or right. You've got to go with the flow because of all the pressure of people around you. You're constrained to go in one direction. And that's what Paul is saying here. He's constrained to live out his life in one direction. If you ask, if you ask what it is that gives Paul the energy and impetus to live his life like this, it is the constraint of the love of Jesus. It is the constraint of the love of Jesus.

I remember reading about the former China Inland Mission missionary, Allen Stips, and talking of this verse and referring to the Yangtze River. The Yangtze River is one of the longest rivers in Asia. Its origin is in Tibet and it has carved out what's called "the Three Gorges." It's one of the wonders of the world. And the Qutang Gorge is famous for its magnificent precipices; for the river is so constrained by the mighty cliffs that it can only surge and run, as it were, in one direction. The cliffs have constrained that water to build up that pressure. And we need that, don't we, because we are prone to wander? Isn't that what the hymn writer says? "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love. Take my heart, O take and seal it; seal it from Thy courts above." That's the impetus. It's the constraining power of the love of Jesus.

#### **IV. The fourth mark of an evangelist's heart is that its foundation is built on the person and work of Jesus Christ.**

But there's a fourth thing that I want to rush on to because this is perhaps the most important thing of all. The fourth mark of an evangelist's heart...and it directly comes from that third mark of an evangelist whose heart is constrained by the love of Jesus. The fourth mark is that they build their foundation on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

You notice how Paul in this beautiful passage towards the end of chapter 5 begins to expound upon what it is that Jesus Christ has done for us? He says in verse 18, "All these things are from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ." It's one of the great words, isn't it, for the work that Jesus has done on our behalf? Paul uses other words in other parts of the New Testament: *justification, atonement*...Here it's the word *reconciliation*. It's the fact that sinners are in hostility towards a holy and righteous God, and God in Jesus Christ has reconciled them, has brought peace. We are ambassadors of Jesus Christ to bring peace between warring factions, between the sinner and God, and it's through Christ as our substitute. As he tells us in verse 19, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them." Isn't that a beautiful thing that God wouldn't count your trespasses against you?

Isn't that a beautiful thing? The sins that you have committed, the sins you committed in your youth, the sins that you've committed in your mind, the filth that has passed through your mind, the words that you've uttered, the motives that you've had, the ambitions that you've had, the awful things you've said to people that you love—and God in His mercy and grace doesn't count that against us but, my friends. That isn't the gospel. That's not the gospel. Good news as that is, that's not the gospel.

The gospel is not that God doesn't count our sins against us; the gospel is that God counts our sins against Jesus. He counts our sins against His own Son. "He

made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be reckoned the righteousness of God in Him.” It's the great exchange. My sin laid upon Christ and Christ's righteousness laid upon me. My sin's imputed to Christ so that God the Holy One comes down in judgment upon Him, so that He cries, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” And the answer that Jesus didn't hear was that the reason God the Father had forsaken His Son was because our sins were being reckoned to Him. They were being judged in Him. The judgment of Hell itself was being meted out upon God's Son for us. And that's the gospel that Paul says he builds his foundation upon. That's the love of God. That's the measure of the love of God, so that, “My richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.”

And I want to say to you, my friends...and I don't want to be misunderstood by saying this, but I want to say this to you...that the best program, the best program for evangelism is motivated...is motivated and channeled and constrained by an overwhelming sense that Jesus loves us and loves us so much that He was prepared to die for us. It's from that wellspring that the challenge and the desire and the motivation to evangelism brings. My friends, if you're finding it hard to evangelize, what you need to do is sit down and ask yourself, “How much it is that you love Jesus?” That's what you need to do. You need to ask yourselves again, do I really understand what Jesus has done for me? Do I really understand that Jesus has delivered me from the judgment seat of Christ? Because it's as we understand that...it's as we understand the depths to which the Father's love went, that He poured His unmitigated wrath upon His Son...it's as we understand that, that the motive and the constraint to tell others, “Be reconciled to God,” comes. Paul can say in the course of this chapter, “From now on,” he says in verse 16, “we recognize no man according to the flesh.” Something so life transforming has taken place in the soul of the Apostle Paul that he can no longer look at anyone without thinking in terms of where that soul is going to spend eternity. “From now on...” And the consequence of what has happened in me as a consequence of what I now understand of what Jesus has done...I don't see people in the same way that I used to see them.

And if that's true of you tonight, my friend...Maybe you're here tonight and you've come...maybe you were invited here, maybe you're visiting, maybe you're not a Christians, maybe you're not a believer, maybe you don't understand what it is we're talking about here.

I want you to understand one thing before you leave tonight: that the main reason why we are here this evening is because we love Jesus Christ and we love Jesus Christ because He loves us. May God bless His word to us for His name's sake. Amen.

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