

Representing Jesus and His Kingdom

By Ed Stetzer

It is great to be here with you. If you have a Bible, you can take it out and turn with me to 2nd Corinthians chapter 5. 2nd Corinthians chapter 5. We do live in a divided time. Increasingly people are turning the volume up to 11 and being very vocal and upset and angry and divisive. Outrage has sort of been the theme of our day. It's not just politics, but it certainly includes politics. It's sometimes in families, at work places, with neighbors and more.

And from what I can see, you know, I used to run a research team for about ten years, from what I can see based on the trends, it's going to get worse before it gets better. It keeps getting louder and louder, but it looks like it's going to get even louder in days to come. Now I'm not predicting the future, I'm not a prophet, I'm not the son of a prophet. I actually work at a non-profit organization.

I'm not saying that I know for sure, but it seems like it. But we're not the first people to kind of live in a time that's a divided time and a divided season. We actually can look to the New Testament itself, 2nd Corinthians, Paul is defending his apostleship, to some degree, and in the midst of that there's some truth that Paul gives in this kind of admonishment slash encouragement to the church at a place called Corinth. And here the church had been internally divided, there had

been some difficulty in the community, and not dissimilar to maybe where we are today in some ways. And so the question is is how do we live in the midst of these divided times?

So I want to look at four things from this passage that I think will help us to respond well in the midst of the outrage and the fracturing around us. So you want kind of a walk through or break through the outrage in a fractured world? I think we need to represent Jesus and His kingdom. Well, that's both our title and our theme today is representing Jesus and His kingdom well.

Four things. Number one is we get a new perspective. Let's look here at what the Bible says. It says this in verse 16: "So from now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come, the old is gone, the new is here." We look closely, it says "from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view," which is a reminder that now we look at people differently because of who we are in Christ. We kind of a have a different look at the world. We have a different look at people. We know, for example, people are made in the image of God, worthy of dignity and respect because we have a different look because of this new life we have in Christ. So now, from now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view.

Then it reminds us, even if we've known Christ from a worldly point of view, we no longer know Him like that. In other words, maybe

before, this is two thousand years ago, maybe some of the people didn't know who Christ really was, they had a probably worldly view. Now they know Him for who He is. He is God the Son, He is Jesus the Christ, He's the Savior of the world. So it ties in this new look. We know Christ differently, now we've got a new look, maybe new lenses through which we see the world.

But it doesn't end there. It says "therefore, if anyone is in Christ, there is new creation. Old things have passed away" and look, "new things have come." So don't miss that what's going on here is they're tied in together. It says "therefore." Whenever there's a "therefore" in the Bible, you want to ask what's it there for. Well in this case, it's connecting the two verses, right? So we got this new look. Now how did we get this new look? Well because we have this new life. Therefore, if anyone's in Christ, there's new creation. We've been made new in Christ. So now because we've got a new life, we're going to have a new look, we're going to have new lenses through which we see the world.

Part of it we might understand that the world's pretty broken. I mean think about 1st Corinthians 7:31, actually says the world, the present form of this world, is passing away. So if the world's passing away, we ought not to be shocked or surprised that there's division and fracture and brokenness and outrage. We've got to ask how do we live as Christians in the age of outrage? How do we bring our best when the world is at its worst?

Now when we think about the moment we're in, you got to remind us, in many ways of the mission we're on. How do we see things differently, right? Don't miss it, right? Got this new life in Christ, got this new look through which we see the world, maybe it's a new lenses through which we see these things.

Now let me explain a little more about lenses. I have three daughters. They're all.. well they're 14, they're 16 and 20, which is both a statement of truth and a prayer request at the same time. Love my daughters, girls are amazing, but they have so many words. But anyway, that's another story for another day. But my daughters are wonderful and amazing. My youngest daughter, it seems that she inherited her father's eyes. You may notice that I wear glasses and so I wear glasses because I need to.

And so it wasn't that long ago, last year, she came home from the eye doctor and Donna, my wife, shared with me that Caitlyn's going to have to get glasses. Okay. Well so I kind of wanted to comfort her, because when I was a kid, wearing glasses was something that got you made fun of, right? They called me four eyes when I was a kid. Now to be fair, I had the big glasses and the eye patch. I mean I had the whole deal. But they made fun of me.

And so I was a little concerned, I didn't want Caitlyn to be made fun of. So I said honey, honey I'm sorry, and she said, what do you mean, you're sorry? I said well you have to wear glasses. Yes, that's cool

now, she said. She said some kids in middle school they're actually going to the eye place and buying glasses without prescriptions because they're that cool. And I thought to myself, I was born at the wrong time. Deeply disappointed that when I was a kid that was not cool. And it's so many things that now like comic books. I read comic books as a kid because I was a nerd. Now they're blockbuster films and all the cool people do that, so something is tragically wrong with my birth year, but that's another story for another day.

But lenses we use. So I don't wear glasses, though, for fashion. I wear glasses for seeing. I want to see you when I talk to you. I want to see my wife, Donna, I want to see my girls, I want to see. But the reality is is sometimes glasses sort of define us.

And it's interesting because it came up at the Moody Church, where Bobby mentioned that I've been serving. So I've been the interim teaching pastor there for two years, which is longer than two of their actual pastors were the pastor of that church, so it's been a long interim, wonderful, though. It's a wonderful church there in Chicago. Historic, founded by D. L. Moody. Beautiful sanctuary, just a wonderful place. It's not the most comfortable seats. Warren Wiersbe, one of the former pastors used to say come on in, grab a seat, any seat, they are all equally uncomfortable. So if you've ever been to Moody Church, you've experienced that.

But one of the things that when you're in this church it's been around 150 years, that's very well known by its former pastors, the most recent pastor, Erwin Lutzer, has recently stepped into a role as pastor emeritus while they're looking for a new pastor.

But it's kind of historic so people listen on the radio. Actually, pastor Lutzer is still the voice of Moody Church on the radio because I'm the interim, I'm not the radio, so people come every week to church and come up to me and thank me for the message they heard me do on the radio. So they actually think I'm Pastor Lutzer. But we sort of: Lutzer, Stetzer, so I just go with it and I say you're so welcome. Hope you enjoyed that. Shake their hands and all is good.

Well one of the things, though, when you have so many people kind of cycled in and out of the church over the years, you have hundred thousands of people, hundreds of thousands of people who kind of have this stake in the church, and they send letters. Right? Sometimes they're wonderful letters, sometimes not so much, but they send letters and they'll express an idea, or an opinion, and so I read some of them, particularly the signed ones, and here's one that I recently received that I thought I'd share with you. It relates to our topic.

Here it is. This is unedited. I just took a screen shot on my phone. So the two paragraphs here are not edited. But I edited out the dear pastor and their signature. They did sign it. Here's what he said. He said: "I listened to your August 13th sermon at Moody Church online. After

listening to it once,” which I think that’s a good sign. That means he listened more than once. “I listened again.” Okay, great, “because I was awestruck getting better with the number of times you adjusted your glasses while preaching.” That was not what I was going for with the awestruck.

“So the second time I listened, I saw in the first thirty six minutes of your sermon you adjusted your glasses 74 times. And then you took them off so I counted no further.” Then he goes, I guess to get a calculator, because it says “this was an average of once every thirty seconds. But keep in mind this was an incomplete count because some of the time scripture or your sermon was on the screen and I could not see you. I tell you this in Christian love.” They all say that at some point in the letter. “Because I know that you’re interested in being aware of anything that may distract listeners from hearing what you are preaching/teaching. So I hope you will accept this knowing that I want your ministry for Christ to be as effective as possible.”

Now I believe this guy wants to help me. I actually made changes on the basis of this email. I bought a product called nerd wax, I put it on my glasses, it keeps them from sliding down. So I made changes but here’s the reality. I don’t wear glasses and I don’t adjust them for fashion. I do these things for seeing. Now I know some of you are already right now planning to count how many times I touch my glasses by the

end of the message today. Let's just get that out of your heart right now and focus on the message at hand.

Because here's the thing I want you not to miss, right? So I need glasses to see. I need lenses to see the world. But now in Christ, I've got this new life. It's given me a new look. I look and see people differently now. This new look involves some supernatural lenses, and here's the thing I don't want you to miss. They slip, too. Because I adjust my glasses because they slide down my nose and the focal length gets off and I can't see, and so I put them back.

But here's what I don't want you to miss, right? In the world in which we live, when it's so easy to get distracted and out of focus, we've got to adjust the lenses. That's why Paul even writes this. Why would Paul tell us this if it was automatically evident that we're already seeing the world, not in a worldly way, but through the lenses of our new life in Christ? Here's why. Because he's reminding us because they were not. And two thousand years later it's easy for us to see the world through the lenses of things other than our new life in Christ. Some people are being disciplined by their cable news channel, some people are being spiritually shaped by their social media feed, and the end result is they look just like everyone else in the world when Jesus calls us to a different and a better way. So why does that matter?

Well it matters because as Christians, we need to look through a new lens because we've received a new life that's given us a new look.

And if you want to step through the outrage and the fracturing in our world, you have to do so by representing Jesus and His kingdom well.

So number one, we get a new perspective. Number two, sent on a mission of reconciliation. Let's continue to look at the text. It says "now everything is from God." It's referring to that which is before. "Now everything is from God." All this is from God. Right? It says "who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." Don't miss those two words in there. Reconciled us gave us the ministry of reconciliation. It goes on and it says that is like in Christ that God was reconciling the world to Himself, in Christ, not counting people's sins against them, and He has committed the message of reconciliation to us. It's actually a double parallel. It kind of talks about how God reconciled us to Himself, gave us the ministry of reconciliation, it is a parallel of it, a repeat, it says reconciling the world to Himself in Christ committed to us the message of reconciliation. Don't want you to miss this, right?

This is tied together, it begins well now all this is from God, so that which comes before the new life, which has given us a new look, which gives us some new lenses through which to see the world, super natural lenses that need adjusting because sometimes we get caught up in the worlds ways, but here we are sent on a mission of reconciliation. You are sent, I am sent on a mission of reconciliation. That implies some things that really matter. It applies for us that people without Christ need to be

reconciled to God through Christ. It tells us that we have been reconciled to God through Christ if we're followers of Jesus, right? We've been born again by the power of the gospel, we're living now new life in Christ, not perfect lenses need adjusting regularly, but we have been reconciled to God, and now we're sent as agents of reconciliation in the world. So your job and my job, then, is to be in the midst of a broken and fractured and outraged world, but to represent reconciliation in the name of Jesus. Now that reconciliation will be men and women to God. It also means we'll minister His kingdom and perhaps bring some reconciliation in the midst of the outrage and the brokenness that is all around us, as well.

You know I just had the privilege of holding the Billy Graham chair at Wheaton College. I serve the executive director of the Billy Graham Center, and of course this year, Mr. Graham went on to be with the Lord. And of course you know that Mr. Graham had a connection here, as well. The words "Hour of Power" were actually suggested first by Mr. Graham, and then named this program many, many years ago.

But Mr. Graham went on to be with the Lord and in doing so, it's kind of changed a lot of our conversation for just a little while in our country. People looked to him and said this was a guy who represented Jesus and His kingdom, while a winsome voice for the gospel. Why? Because he saw himself as an agent of reconciliation. When he died, I was asked for just a little bit of time to write articles for both the USA Today and CNN, and I did, and I asked them how avert can I be about

his message. And they said be all in. One of the articles was called “What Billy Graham Would Want you to Know about Him.”

And one of the things was is Billy Graham was famous. That’s not what he would want you to know. Billy Graham certainly was famous. He’s one of the most well known figures ever. As a matter of fact, he will probably be the, as of now, he’s the person most named as the most admired person in America. Probably no one will ever beat that record because how many times he was on there and how much our country is divided now. But he’s certainly deeply admired. But ultimately he saw himself as reconciled to God and being an agent of reconciliation.

I remember I was in Florida when I heard the news that he had gone on to be with the Lord, and the day before, Donna, my wife and I went down, I was speaking at an event in Florida, and when you live in Chicago and it’s cold, Donna always wants to go with me when it’s an event in Florida. So we went together. We got into our car, we take an UBER, and the UBER driver, UBER drivers tend to be very nice because they’re trying to earn that magical five rating. I’m trying to earn the magical five rating in return, so I’m being nice to them, as well. Very important my UBER rating. And so I get in the car, and Jane starts talking to Donna and me. She says like.. sometimes UBER drivers are ‘listen, I’ve got a bottle of water, if you’d like it, if you need to charge your phone, I’ve got an adapter. Take anything you’d like in the middle.’ And

one of the things in the middle was a little green.. I'm not sure if it was green.. I don't remember now, but I'm remembering like a Gideon Bible.

And so Donna kind of smiled at me because I've never gotten in an UBER where one of the options was a Bible. And so we started driving to the airport, and Jane started having a conversation with us, and moving that conversation towards spiritual things. Donna keeps looking over at me smiling. You know Jane's like, well how long you lived here? Well a couple a years, and she asked five or six different questions.

And she gets closer and closer to asking kind of spiritual questions. So tell me, and I don't remember her exact words, but I mean tell me, do you have any like church engagement or involvement? She's about to kind of land the plane and share the gospel with me. And Donna's smiling because I'm not saying anything much, and Donna at one point, she says, at that, she turns to me and says you need to tell her. I said Jane, just so you know, I hold the Billy Graham chair at Wheaton College, I teach evangelism and you are doing great. And she laughed and we laughed and actually recorded an interview with her that I later published in Christianity Today called "Jane the UBER Driver." Jane the UBER Driver. You can find that quite easily. It got picked up by a lot of different outlets.

So fast forward, we hear that Mr. Graham has passed, and oh I don't even know, it was a little while later, we were in Charlotte for the funeral, and the world gathered, right? Mr. Graham was in the Capitol

Rotunda, which the last person who had that honor was actually Rosa Parks. Presidents went to visit him there and the funeral as well.

And so while at the funeral, though, all the reporters were there. So a reporter from a national newspaper, you'd know the name, came up to me and said Dr. Stetzer, who is the next Billy Graham? And you know people wonder is it so and so, nobody really claims that, nobody says I'm the next Billy Graham. There's organizational leaders, there's people that other people say are the next Billy Graham, but nobody to my knowledge actually says I'm the next Billy Graham. But I was ready. The reporter said who's the next Billy Graham? And I said Jane the UBER driver is. And she looked at me with a puzzled look and I kind of explained. It didn't make the story.

But here's the thing I don't want you to miss, right? Jane knew that she's been sent on a mission of reconciliation. She was, because of the joy of being reconciled with Christ. She's actually a realtor. She works in and around the community where we live, and her kids said you should go drive UBER when you don't have a house to show, you like that, you like to talk to people, and she said and I get to share the gospel with them. And so Jane drives around picking up people so she can tell them about Jesus. And here's the reality I don't want you to miss. She knows she's sent on a mission of reconciliation, but so are you, if you're a follower of Jesus. We've been reconciled and sent on a mission of reconciliation.

So number one, we get a new perspective; new life, new look, new lenses. Number two, we're sent on a mission of reconciliation. Number three, representing Jesus and His kingdom. Let's look at verse 20. It says we are ambassadors, we are there for ambassadors, we're Christ's ambassadors, right? As though God were making His appeal through us, we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. So this passage here, Paul's actually speaking about himself and the kind of band of missionaries that are with him. He's defending his apostleship, but for two thousand years Christians have applied this to themselves. I think it's appropriate to do so because we are ambassadors for Christ. Why? Because that's our primary focus, right? Our primary focus is not a politician or a party or an elected official. The only person we should be all in for is Jesus, and the only kingdom that should be our greatest priority is His kingdom. And can I tell you, when that's the truth, it shapes how you respond to other people.

Remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:33. He said seek first, "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you, as well." When Christians are primarily focused on the values and the importance of the kingdom of God, it changes everything about how they relate to others. You say Ed, I just think I should be able to say whatever I want. It's a free country, I can say whatever I want and I can put it on social media, or we're coming up on the holidays, I can say it at Thanksgiving dinner, I can say it at Christmas, whatever I want.

I'm just being frank. Can I tell you, unless your name's Frank, stop. And Frank, be Christ-like, as well. Because it's not driven by your rights, it's driven by Jesus' kingdom.

Now part of that is to live in a world where there are rights that do matter, and we can and should speak up, but the question is what are you representing? Because we are ambassadors for Christ, are we representing Jesus? That's not always easy. We don't get to pick the time in which we live, and this turns out to be a divided time. Not the most divided time ever. Gosh we can look at the history of our country or countries around the world, even today, there's much more division around the world than there might be here, but there's division here. And the question is, will we add to it or will we represent Jesus in the midst of it.

Again, the question is will we add to it, or will we represent Jesus in the midst of it. It's not always easy. There's only two times in our English Bible the word ambassador is used. Once here in 2nd Corinthians 5. Paul uses it elsewhere in Ephesians 6, where he says pray for me. He asks for prayer. He says "pray also for me that whatever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains."

Now we see that around the world, sometimes poignantly. Recently Wheaton College graduate Andrew Brunson, who is a missionary to Turkey, was falsely imprisoned and not long ago released and

immediately just began talking about Jesus, as he had been when he was unjustly imprisoned in a Turkish prison for two years. Why? Because he's an ambassador for Christ. And we represent Christ and His kingdom. We represent Jesus and His kingdom in the midst of the brokenness all around us.

Now, number four and finally, and I'll close with this. You know what it means when a guest speaker says I'll close with this? Absolutely nothing. Just so you know. But I will. Number one, we get a new perspective. Number two, sent on a mission of reconciliation. Number three, representing Jesus and His kingdom. Number four, because of the cross.

Now it's interesting because it almost seems like Paul stepped away for a moment and came back with a new thought. Here's what it says: "God made him who had no sin." Let's look at that closely so you don't miss it. God made him who had no sin. That's God made Jesus. Him who had no sin. "God made Jesus to be sin for us so that in Him," don't miss those in Him's, "so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."

Now this verse is very theological. There's actually a theological principle at work here called imputation. I want you to say that word out loud with me, are you ready? Imputation. Let's do it again. Imputation. Now I'm going to explain it because I believe if you can learn to order coffee at Starbucks you can learn some theological words at church. I

don't know a Venti Latte from an imputation, but I'll explain what imputation is. My wife goes to Starbucks, I just buy coffee for her because I don't drink it.

But imputation is; it's from the first century, it's a banking term. It's like a deposit, right? And so here's the thing – we were born, right? We were born and we inherited a sin nature. It was imputed to us, so we were sinners by nature and by choice, but that didn't end there. Thank God the story didn't end there. You see on the cross, God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us. On the cross, Jesus.. remember when He cries out “Eloi, Eloi, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Remember when He sweat blood in the garden? Why? Because on the cross He knew He wasn't just dying, He was not just dying for our sin, but literally He was made sin for us. So when Jesus died on the cross for our sin and in our place, He took my place, He took the penalty for my sin, and in the process of doing so, my sin as a Christian was imputed to Jesus, deposited in Him.

But that's not the end of the verse. Here's where it gets even great, right? It goes on and says this. It kind of lays this out for us. It says “so that we might become,” don't miss the second part it, “so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” There's one more imputation. His righteousness has now been imputed to us. So if you're a follower of Jesus, God the Father doesn't look down and see your sin, He sees Jesus' righteousness, and He sees the forgiveness and the grace. He sees

the righteousness of His son because His righteousness has been imputed to you, if you're a follower of Jesus.

Now that has all kinds of implications. If you're not a follower of Jesus today, you can trust and follow Him. Receive that forgiveness of sin. Be changed and then become this kind of person who gets a new perspective, sent on a mission of reconciliation, representing Jesus and His kingdom because of the cross.

But the question is here, why is this at the end of this passage? Because it's such a different feel to it. But here's why: it is the motivation for everything that proceeds it. See why, because He made the one who knew no sin to be sin for us, so Jesus died a sinner's death. He wasn't a sinner, but He died a sinner's death so that in Him, we might become the righteousness of God in Him. And now, as I get to walk in the fullness of the forgiveness, and the grace, and the righteousness, and the beauty of the gospel, and the filling of the spirit, now I can, not just I can, I should and must live differently. So acknowledge, I've got a new life that's given me a new look, some new lenses through which I see the world. That means I'm going to engage differently because I'm representing Jesus and His kingdom now. Right?

So I'm on a mission of reconciliation because I've been reconciled. I'm sharing that with others, the good news of the gospel and I'm bringing reconciliation to a divided world so that I can be an ambassador

in the midst of it. And the end result is I do this to honor Christ because of the cross.

So sisters and brothers, my encouragement to you is simple: put on those supernatural glasses when you engage your neighbors or your friends or your family or on social media. Work towards reconciliation with God and with others. Seek to represent Jesus and His kingdom, and do so because of what Christ has done for you on the cross.

Would you pray with me? Father, by your grace and your goodness, you have redeemed us and called us by name. You've sent us on a mission in the midst of brokenness and outrage. Father, help us to be Christians in the age of outrage who bring our best when the world is at its worst. Help us not to justify engaging in worldly means, to actually receive some sort of spiritual benefit, Lord, but let our hearts and our lives be shaped by the gospel, instructed by the word of God, be empowered by the spirit so that the way we live might not burn bridges with our neighbors and people with whom we disagree but might build them and ultimately your name and your fame would be more widely known, for its in Jesus' name and for His sake we pray, amen and amen.

Thanks for the opportunity to share with you. God bless.