Way-Maker Series
“The Way-Maker”

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Digging Deeper
Way-Maker Series: The Way-Maker
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Background Notes
Key Scripture Texts: Isaiah 43:16-19; John 14:1-7; 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, key verse 20

Introduction
In the woods behind the house where I grew up numerous trails snaked through the clusters of maple, oak, beach, and walnut trees whose fall leaves enriched the soil of the forest floor. My father harvested the humus from the top six inches of fertile ground which had deposited from above over hundreds of years. But his strategy was to strip the topsoil in eight foot wide paths, opening up a “way” to hike or bike the resulting spaces. Much overgrowth and debris, including straggly bushes, grapevines, itch weed, “volunteers,” and embedded rocks, also had to be removed. He and I often worked together and imagined future daily walks with our dog Pudge — walks only possible through the effort to make a way where they had been none. Memories of those days have often come to mind when I’ve needed to find a way through life, and the heavenly Father proved faithful as the Way Maker.

Our new series considers the dimensions of “the way” with reference to the Christian life. Early followers of Jesus gained the reputation through a nickname, “the Way,” as seen in the following texts:

8 Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. 9 But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-9).

22 He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer. 23 About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way (Acts 19:22-23).

3 “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. 4 I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, 5 as also the high priest and all the Council can testify (Acts 22:3-5).

14 However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, 15 and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked (Acts 24:14-15).

22 Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. “When Lysias the commander comes,” he said, “I will decide your case” (Acts 24:22).

At the outset of the Jesus movement, the Gospel writers quoted from the ancient prophet Isaiah in order to explain the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist as the announcer of the “way”:

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"— 3 "a voice of one calling in the desert, "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.” 4 And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River (Mark 1:1-5).

John was a transitional figure in Jewish history that created the bridge from the long-standing expectations of Israel’s prophets to the fulfillment in the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth. He helped make the way by clearing the road in people’s hearts so that the Lord might come to them. In turn the people made their way to the Jordan with repentance and baptism.
All of us seek to make our way in the world, often against the intimidating obstacles of birth and circumstance, in the face of personal failure or human pride. The “woods,” if you will, of our lives requires the same thorough treatment that my father applied to the soil and its encumbrances. The story of the Bible is saturated with the theme of way-making: the way from chaos to order in creation; the way to and from the Garden of Eden; the way through the flood and a new world; the failed way to heaven at Babel; the way for Abraham from Ur to Canaan; the way of Israel down to Egypt in oppression and up again in the Exodus; the way in the wilderness for forty years; the way from wilderness into the promised land; the way to nationhood and monarchy; the way down to deportation and exile; the way home again in restoration and new hope for the future. Each “way” required the work of God, the covenant Lord of Israel, who forgave sins, defeated enemies, fed the hungry, inspired the prophets, emboldened the kings, united the people, restored hope in the face of despair, and who promised the future to His people. Once more, Isaiah:

Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! O people of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it" (Isaiah 30:18-21).

God is gracious in hearing cries for help and answering them. When we walk on the road, sustained by the “bread of adversity and the water of affliction,” facing choices about direction (right or left), the faithful voice of the Lord speaks and acts: “This is the way; walk in it.”

As we examine this recurring idea of God the Way Maker, our thoughts and desires turn to the reflections of Scripture which bear witness to the lively voice which makes the way and points the way. This week we make our start on the journey and join our footsteps with our ancient forebears who walked this way before us.

**Scripture Texts**

16 This is what the LORD says-- he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, 17 who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick: 18 “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. 19 See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland (Isaiah 43:16-19).

"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. 4 And you know the way to where I am going." 5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him" (John 14:1-7).

Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. 12 We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. 13 If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:11-21).

**Way through the Desert (Isaiah 43:16-19)**

In the whole history of Israel, nothing surpasses the critical incident called the Exodus. While Isaiah’s prophecy reaches beyond the wonders of liberation from Egyptian slavery, it must begin there. Ask a Jew “Who is your God?” and the immediate reply is “God is the One who raised Israel from Egypt.” Contained in those words is
the story of redemption, the mighty acts of Yahweh who heard the cries of His ancient people in their suffering and oppression under Pharaoh’s lash and then responded with the ten plagues against the gods of the Egyptians. Israel’s God came to the aid of His people who had fallen under the unjust enslavement to forced labor in the interests of Egypt’s ruler. The Lord of His people refused to allow an illegal, covenant-violating seizure of Israel. These were Yahweh’s people, not Pharaoh’s, and yet the king of Egypt held them against their will and so they were held against His will. To this atrocity and covenant breach, Yahweh would not remain silent. He determined to take back what rightfully belonged to Him. Whereas the gods of Egypt sanctioned the decrees of Pharaoh, forcing unpaid labor on Israel, Yahweh chose to wage war against the gods and set His people free. The last battle in that war was the plague on the firstborn of the oppressors, described this way:

12 “On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt (Exodus 12:12-13).

Pharaoh himself was a god, and in this final judgment, his royal rule over Israel would be broken. The everlasting memory of that climactic event was kept alive in the celebration of the Passover.

What followed was the last shriek in defeat as Pharaoh’s armies pursued the fleeing Israelites in the miracle of the Red Sea, when the waters parted by the word of God through Moses, and Yahweh became the Way Maker for the newly liberated slaves. And so it is that Isaiah begins, “he made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters…” leaving the armies of Egypt to fall, “never to rise again, extinguished, and snuffed out like a wick.” Until the moment that God speaks, there was no way through the sea, nor could Israel make its own way. Trapped between Egypt’s forces and the sea, the people were trapped, without an escape route. It was the power of the covenant God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, demonstrated through covenant love, hesed, lovingkindness, that opened up the future through the sea. Israel was not rescued from the sea, but through it. They would not avoid the sea and its hostile mysteries, but they would watch the sea surrender to the word of the Lord and the uplifted rod of Moses His prophet. Thereby they witnessed the Way Maker God who would remain by their side throughout the coming generations.

Isaiah witnesses the same God addressing His people with a new word for a new time. The setting for the prophet’s message is the aftermath of another crisis in Israel’s remembered past, namely, their exile to Babylon nearly a millennium later. When the book of Isaiah begins, the march of history thrusts Israel toward the 9/11 of their time, reaching its climax in 587 BCE with the fall of Jerusalem, loss of Temple, and depopulation of its most privileged citizens. Nobles, scribes, priests, and artisans were the prime pickings of the Babylonians in any of its conquests. These classes of people went into exile on foreign soil under alien rule, taking the form of a new slavery. For Jews of that day, the events of the exile looked much like the original oppression in Egypt. If there was to be a reversal of fortunes, a new Exodus would be required and a new way home for an exiled people. That is why Isaiah admonishes his people, “Forget the former things, do not dwell on the past.” The past is both the fond reminiscence of Egypt and the fatal relapse into Babylon. To “dwell” on the Exodus in the fashion described in 43:18, no doubt meant treating the event in sentimental ways, like longing for the “good old days” that were long past, far behind, only alive in the shared memory of the exiles. One of the Psalms preserves the wistful reflections this way:

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. 2 There on the poplars we hung our harps, 3 for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" 4 How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? (Psalm 137:1-4).

Rather than treat the past romantically, the prophet wants his people to “remember” Zion, the land left behind, through the eyes of the Exodus as a precedent-setting experience. That is, Exodus can happen again for Israel in Babylon just as it happened for Israel in Egypt. And so, “See, I am doing a new thing!” In fact, the crossing of the Red Sea in the past wasn’t the final chapter in the Exodus story, for beyond the Sea was the wilderness where God would once more perform His mighty works, providing manna for food, water for thirst, and a way in the desert. All of that is not locked in dusty pages of history but becomes the template for new dealings, new provisions, and new ways, made possible by the God of the Exodus and the wilderness, for a new generation of Jews in the wasteland of Babylon. Such promised developments after the exile would “spring up” in 539 BCE.
Persia would defeat Babylon and the Persian king Cyrus would be impressed into the service of Yahweh as His anointed one to bring the exiles home once more.

22 In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing:

23 “This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: "The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone of his people among you--may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up” (2 Chronicles 36:22-23).

24 “This is what the LORD says-- your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the LORD, who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself, who foils the signs of false prophets and makes fools of diviners, who overthrows the learning of the wise and turns it into nonsense, who carries out the words of his servants and fulfills the predictions of his messengers, who says of Jerusalem, 'It shall be inhabited,' of the towns of Judah, 'They shall be built,' and of their ruins, 'I will restore them,' who says to the watery deep, 'Be dry, and I will dry up your streams,' who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid" (Isaiah 44:24-28).

Here, then, is the history and prophecy of the Way and the Way Maker. It is expressed in Exodus language: “who says to the watery deep, ‘Be dry, and I will dry up your streams.’” Those words parallel the astonishing wonders of Israel crossing the Red Sea. This is the “new thing” much like the “old thing,” yet funded by the fresh prophetic word of Isaiah’s God. He is the Redeemer now, just as He was then. When God makes the way once more, He uses the memory of the past to create hope for the message of the future. The same God works at all times in human affairs to perform His purposes in the world on behalf of His covenant people. To be the Way Maker is to be completely reliable, full of fidelity, committed to hope, and “who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself.” The God of the Exodus is the God of creation who once more intercepts the crises of the present with the power of new life for His suffering people in Babylon.

Reading the story of Israel means witnessing the continuity of divine faithfulness and the command for human trust.

The Way of Jesus (John 14:1-11)

This text is commonly used at funerals where it serves to comfort and console the bereaved. Taken as a whole, that is certainly a legitimate application of the passage. However, the depth of Jesus' words exceed their use as reminders of heavenly rest. They tell us that Jesus and the Father have an intimate relationship with one another. Perhaps the definitive introductory statement is this one: "Believe in God; believe also in me." Upon reflection, the connection made between belief in God and belief in Jesus is an important one. In effect, Jesus is saying that the two acts of faith are identical: to believe in God is to believe in Jesus; to believe in Jesus is to believe in God. The Greek form of the two statements looks like this:

\[ \text{Pisteuete eis ton theon} \]
\[ \text{kai} \]
\[ \text{eis eme pisteuete} \]

Notice how the word for "you believe" (pisteuete) surrounds the saying like two bookends. Observe, also, how the phrases "into God" (eis ton theon) and "into me" (eis eme) are positioned so that they are next to each other in the text, forming something called a chiasmus, a cross-like framework\(^1\). The result of this construction is to create the identity between Jesus and God described above.

Further, Jesus enhances his identity with God by referring to God as "my Father." In particular, Jesus administers the affairs of his Father's "house" (oikos) in much the same way that a royal sovereign might oversee the realm of the king. He knows that the Father's house can accommodate many persons, and he undertakes the role as "preparer" of a place for his followers to which he confidently promises to take them at some time in the future.

\(^1\) Chiasmus (or simply, chiasm) is a figure of speech in which two or more clauses are related to each other through a reversal of structures in order to make a larger point; that is, the clauses display inverted parallelism. Some prefer calling this a criss-cross structure, following the form A B B A.
While the idea of "heaven" is included in this "realm," the concept is actually broader, suggesting that Jesus has authority to administer the kingdom of God. This is consistent with the royal significance of the title "Son of God." Jesus functions as vice-regent within the "house of God," having full inheritance rights and the ability to designate others (his disciples) as beneficiaries within the kingdom.

The subject of "the way" (Greek: hodos) to the Father's house leads Jesus to say that the disciples "know the way" to the place where he is going. Thomas, one of his disciples, questions whether they actually do know the way. Here is an instance of "not knowing what you know"! That is, the way, as it turns out, is Jesus himself (14:6), and the disciples surely "know" Jesus by first-hand experience. The biblical concept of "know" is more than an intellectual grasp of a concept, or even an understanding of something. A certain intimacy is involved, approaching the experience of "love." To know the "way" in the sense Jesus intends, is less about the mechanics of reading a map and more about a relationship with Jesus who assures his followers of a place in God's kingdom. Thomas seems caught up in the "where" and the "how" (Greek: pou and pōs), and misses the "who"! Jesus immediately corrects this fixation on mechanics with his words "I am the way" (egō eimi hē hodos). He then explains what that means for his followers: "truth" and "life," the two essential results of knowing Jesus, and the two indispensable requirements for "coming to the Father." Much is implied here.

For Jesus, truth comes from the Hebrew idea of emeth, that on which a person leans, the reliable object of trust when one takes a journey. The word is closely connected to emūnah, the traveler's walking stick along the uneven ground and across the eroded highway. As truth, Jesus bears the weight and steadies the feet on the path which leads home to God. This reminds us of John the Baptist's instructions, based on Isaiah 40, that the road must be made ready for the coming kingdom of God. Why is Jesus the reliable walking stick for the would-be traveler to God's kingdom? It is because he knows the way, having already come from God, he knows the way back to God. That is precisely how John describes him in 13:3,

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God...

This, too, belongs to the rich universe of meaning for the phrase "Son of God."

An even greater mystery, moreover, lies within this journey back to God. How will Jesus go back home? Under what circumstances will he return to God in order to prepare the kingdom for his followers and show them the way? John has already written in his earlier chapters that Jesus, the Word, "became flesh" in order to pitch his tent among the human race as a human being (John 1:14). Returning to God involves a dramatic transition once again, this time through death and resurrection, or as Jesus puts it in 14:6, "I am....the life." As the truth, Jesus confidently made his way to the cross where he bore the weight of sin and death (proved himself true and reliable); as the life, he rose from the dead, bringing about a restored humanity — a new humanity.

As way, truth and life, Jesus proves himself the reliable guide to knowing God. For him to be the "Son of God" meant that he provided a credible answer to the question, "Who is God?" The concept of deity was sufficiently muddled within paganism, to be sure, in light of the bewildering number of gods and goddesses who ran the world. For Judaism, the problem was even more of a puzzle. On the one hand, Israelites declared themselves to be the covenant partners of the One True God, whose covenant with Abraham and his descendents secured the promise of God's blessing. But, on the other hand, judging from the last five hundred years of Jewish history, the reputation of this God had sustained serious damage. How could He be the true God if His people remained in exile to their Gentile overlords, the Romans? Where was the blessing for most of Israel, since it appeared that only a small percentage of Israel truly experienced it? God — whatever that word really meant — seemed distant, uninvolved and unreal. His "handlers" were largely the official teachers of Israel who crafted a portrait of this God by explaining His will from the ancient Scriptures. Their interpretations of those texts were, at times, tortured and technical; in Jesus' words, they "strained out a gnat and swallowed a camel" (Matthew 23:24), and became, effectively, "blind guides" — hardly the sort of persons to lead people along the way to God!

Something of this tenuous knowledge of God surfaces in 14:7 where Jesus tentatively wonders aloud, "If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well." This parallels the idea we saw in 14:1, "Believe in God;
believe in me." The Greek text helps us see this through John's use of the verb tenses for "know." In the first instance, "you knew" is in the perfect tense (εγνώκατε) which suggests a previous "knowing" in the past which has led to a continuing knowing in the present. Since Jesus uses the word "if" with this tense form, he strongly implies that prior to his arrival, the disciples had not yet achieved that sort of knowledge. The question of God remained a puzzle to them before Jesus came as the way, truth and life. Through familiarity with Jesus — his words, deeds, and coming death/resurrection — his followers truly "know" him, and, in knowing him they will know God as well. This was the crucial issue in Israel: knowing the One True God. Who can give Israel reliable knowledge of the One True God? The answer lies with Jesus, "the Son of God."

Jesus presses the implication of his previous "if...then" statement by affirming that "From now on, you know him and have seen him." The temporal phrase, "from now on," comes from the Greek ap' arti, which starts in the present and goes beyond into the future. A dramatic shift in the disciples' experience of God is about to take place. Whatever present and future knowledge of God (and of Jesus) they presently imagine will be enhanced by what is about to happen to Jesus. When Jesus "goes away," he does so in death; when Jesus "comes again," he does so in the resurrection. By seeing Jesus go away and come again, the disciples will at last "see God" in a way they have not until now. Indeed, the whole span of Jesus' earthly life, starting with his baptism, including his words and actions, are a revelation of the true nature of God. The disciples "have seen him," Jesus tells them, and John uses the perfect tense to communicate this vision of God as the Way Maker.

Ambassadors for the Way (2 Corinthians 5:11-21)

Accountability to God: Then and Now (5:11)

What is the controlling factor in Paul's proclamation of the Good News throughout the Roman Empire? In the preceding section he reminded his audience that his preeminent goal is to "please the Lord," since one day he will stand before the bēma seat to give an account of his life. When he begins this section with the word "therefore," (Greek: oun) he is using a resumptive particle which continues the thought of 5:10. That is, "fear of the Lord" (Greek: ton phobon tou kuriou) refers to the sobering and serious prospect that Christians will stand before Christ for judgment: not for salvation, in this case, but for an honest assessment of their service. In the Old Testament sense, the word "fear" when applied to God commonly meant "reverential awe" and not "paralyzing fear." Paul is not "scared of God," but rather sees his coming day of accountability as a helpful motivation in the present to conduct his ministry in transparency before God and others. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10, from the Hebrew yirah and pahad). Paul is saying that engaging in the ministry of reconciliation is sobering business because God is the true judge of motive and integrity, of compulsion and intention.

There a powerful scene in the Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis. The two girls, Susan and Lucy are getting ready to meet Aslan the lion, who represents Jesus Christ. As Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, prepare the children for the encounter, Susan says "Ooh, I thought he was a man. "Is he quite safe?" "I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion." "That you will, dearie," said Mrs. Beaver. "And make no mistake, if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knee's knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly." "Then isn't he safe?" said Lucy. "Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Who said anything about safe? Of course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king, I tell you!" For Paul, "knowing the fear of the Lord," isn't necessarily safe, but it is good.

When Paul next writes about "persuading people," he treads on ground where he sometimes trembles. The act of persuasion could have a negative connotation. From peithō, the word occurs in the present tense, suggesting that this is part of Paul's regular practice, but also that the work of persuasion has not yet been finished. Among public speakers, the art of convincing people to adopt some point of view often involved cleverly devised and potentially deceitful arguments. Such "shameful speech" was shunned by Paul in other contexts (see Galatians 1:10; 1 Corinthians 2:1-5). Paul refused to employ arguments based on human wisdom or rhetorical tactics, lest people come to faith for reasons other than the power of God. In this passage, he allows for his own use of persuasion only if it is transparent to both God and those who hear it. The verb translated "evident or manifest" is from the Greek root phaneroō and, in this context, approximates our idea of "transparency."
Witnessing to others must take place with integrity. If we mount arguments in support of the Gospel or the claims of Scripture, they must be legitimate, valid and grounded in fact. When citing historical evidence, we must do so with the utmost care and accuracy. It is not enough to win over a non-believer, especially if this happens because of tactics rather than truth. Or as Paul described it earlier in his letter:

But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God (2 Corinthians 4:2).

And this is what Paul affirms in 5:11. Too often, under pressure to produce "converts," some Christians cut corners and present arguments based on less than solid information. Bits of urban legend sometimes become entangled with an otherwise honest presentation of the Good News. More helpfully, the witness shows the way for others to follow.

**Boasting (5:12)**

The proof of Paul's ministry lies, in part, not with self-promotion, shameless as it is, but with the free testimony of those who have been benefactors of that ministry, namely, the Corinthians. That is, the Corinthians recommend Paul to others based on their "shared history" with him. Because they knew him, having personally received benefit from his apostolic ministry, they are in a good position to become "references" when asked about his character and motivation. The Greek word *aphormē* appears also in 11:12 and elsewhere in Romans 7:8, 11; Galatians 5:13; 1 Timothy 5:14. The prevailing idea behind the word is "suitable basis" for defending a person's actions or character. What Paul wanted to avoid was extended periods of self-promotion which stole valuable time from the more pressing task of proclaiming the Good News. Contemporary Christian evangelism, especially when it uses the mass media, would do well to learn from Paul's remarks here.

The word "boast" may seem to have negative overtones. But the underlying Greek word, *kauchēma*, means the ground or basis for pride or boasting. False pride and empty boasting would have, of course, no real grounds, but are the products of an inflated ego and self-serving motivation. Paul wants his ministry of witness to have adequate grounds for legitimate pride. Furthermore, a distinct contrast is made between what "appears" to be the case (Greek: *prosōpon*) and what is true in the heart (*kardia*). To have one's motives rooted in the heart and not in outward appearance is the same as commending oneself to everyone's conscience in 5:11. Paul seeks to avoid hypocrisy--the practice of presenting one "face" to the world while retaining hidden motives in the heart.

One of the thorny issues addressed by Paul in the Corinthian letters was the "cult of personality" which seemed to fascinate the Corinthian church. They loved to "name drop" (see 1 Corinthians 3), which led to divisions in the church, as people chose their "favorite" apostle or church figure. Later in 2 Corinthians, we hear about the so-called "super apostles" who sported glamorous spiritual abilities and laid claim to special knowledge gained through visionary experiences. Their actions are akin to the all-too-common present-day Christian luminaries who regularly claim, "God told me to tell you..." So-called "word of wisdom" teachers dazzle with their apparent ability to read minds and make predictions. In Paul's time, persons who spoke "in tongues" or had ecstatic experiences were deemed more impressive and persuasive to a skeptical world than Paul who suffered from human weakness and an unimpressive in-person presentation. By contrast, Paul saw his weakness as a strength and as evidence that God was at work in him, since he was incapable of doing mighty deeds on his own or offering wise words by his own ingenuity. If not by his own power or wisdom, then he did these things by the power and wisdom of God.

**Sober Minded (5:13)**

Some unusual language appears at this point, as the apostle writes about "being beside ourselves" vs. "being sober-minded." From the Greek root *existēmi* Paul derives the idea of "ecstatic experience," a reference to a special experience with God which has the appearance of "madness" to an outsider. The verb *mainesthai*, meaning "madness," is sometimes associated with the term Paul uses here. Among the Corinthians, such an experience was "speaking in tongues", and Paul offers his own view on how this controversial gift was suppose to operate in the church. Admittedly, such "utterances" reminded the Corinthians of the famous Oracle of Delphi,
a prophetess well-known from the days of Socrates and Plato, who fell into a trance and offered words of counsel or prophecy. Though Socrates spoke favorably about such special insights, he did not accept the results of a Delphic oracle uncritically. When told that the Oracle called him "the wisest of men," Socrates didn't boast in this estimation, but proceeded to develop "a method for trying the question," seeking to understand what such an extravagant claim might possibly mean.

Similarly, in his letters, Paul weighs carefully the pros and cons of ecstatic gifts like tongues or heavenly visions. He never denied the validity of them, but always called on his audience to judge the veracity of any so-called "prophecy", whether in a known language or not. On the matter of tongues, Paul showed a preference for keeping this gift within the realm of private devotion not public worship (see 1 Corinthians 14, paying special attention to Paul's preference in 14:28, "keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God"). In the present verse, he fully concedes that any ecstatic experience he might have is "for God", while sober teaching and preaching "with the mind" is for the benefit of the Corinthians. This is entirely in line with Paul's points in 1 Corinthians 14 where the building up of the body is more important than drawing attention to the spectacular nature of a gift. While some super-apostles might want the reputation for such "spiritual madness," Paul refuses to allow such notoriety to influence a non-believer to become a Christian. Even when he later tells about his unusual experience in 2 Corinthians 12, he does so, not to validate it as some true "out of the body experience" (he plainly tells us he doesn't know exactly what it was), but to warn about the temptation to spiritual pride such experiences attract.

By contrast, Paul indicates, he and the others who minister with him behave with "sanity" when preaching the Gospel to their audiences. Here the Greek verb for "sanity, be in the mind" is sôphreonein (also, sôphrosunê). He uses the present tense in this case, whereas his previous ecstatic experiences he places in the aorist form. Perhaps what Paul intends by this contrast of tenses is simply that the ecstatic experience is occasional (punctiliar), while the sober ministry for the benefit of the Corinthians is the norm and Paul's regular practice.

### Constrained by Christ's Love (5:14-15)

Paul began this section with a holy reverence for the "fear of the Lord" and the knowledge that he would one day give an account to God for his apostleship. But, as we indicated, such fear does not terrify but rather incites awe and wonder. To that motivation Paul now adds "Christ's love" (agapē tou Christou), using the genitive case for the word "Christ." Most grammarians think this is a subjective genitive, meaning that Christ is the subject (agent, author) of the love, not its recipient. The heart of the Gospel is God's love for the world which, in Paul's rendering of it, becomes Christ's love as well. Important texts which state this are: Romans 5:5; 8:35, 39; 2 Corinthians 13:11, 13; Galatians 2:20. Charles Wesley captured the essence of Paul's teaching about the love of Christ with his famous hymn lyrics:

> Amazing love! how can it be,  
> That thou my God should die for me?  
> "And Can It Be?" Charles Wesley, 1738

And this hymn:

> Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven, to earth come down;  
> Fix in us thy humble dwelling; all thy faithful mercies crown!  
> Jesus thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love thou art;  
> Visit us with thy salvation; enter every trembling heart.  
> "Love Divine" Charles Wesley, 1747

When Wesley writes about divine love, "all loves excelling," he means to say that this love has no equal, no peer. This love is embodied in Jesus who is "unbounded love.: When this love fixes its home in every heart, it brings with it "salvation" and causes those who receive it to "tremble." With this rendering of Christ's love, Paul's text resonates.

Such love "lays claim to" Paul and his fellow workers in the Gospel. The underlying Greek word is sunechein, a compound expression: sun="together" and echein="hold or have." The resulting meanings include "hold together, hold fast, hold shut, hold in custody, hold within bounds." Ironically, the idea ranges from "restraint" to
"compulsion." Some translations opt for "compels," "leaves us no choice," "controls," "rules," and "embraces." Scholars who study ancient papyrus documents from the period discover the notion of "oblige," with the further developing concept of "executing a judicial decision."

What is Paul saying? Put succinctly, he tells his audience that Christ's love makes a total claim over the life of the Christ follower. This claim has a binding force, holding us, as it does, tightly within its grip. We live under the rule of God's love which has become the supreme government of our life. Elsewhere Paul makes statements like "faith enacted in love" (Galatians 5:6) and life lived "under the dominion of grace" (Romans 6:14). For us to live under the reign of God (i.e. "the kingdom of God") is for us to live under the rule of Christ's love. From this love, "nothing can separate us" (Romans 8:35-39).

By using the expression "love of Christ," Paul does not mean some abstract concept. He immediately explains this agape by citing the central tenet of the Gospel:

14 For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised (5:14-15).

Repeated three times are the love-laden words, "died for," a clear reference to the cross and the selfless sacrifice Christ made for the whole world. On this thrice-told truth depends the whole of Paul's present argument. He makes that clear by using the statement, "we have concluded this that..." from krinantas touto hoti. From a rhetorical perspective, Paul is making a "judgment" about the nature of his calling as an apostle based on the fact that Christ died for all. In other words, the whole weight of Paul's mission to the world--and ours as well--rests on the shoulders of the Jesus who died and rose again. This helps us understand the meaning of "Christ's love controls us." In one sense, once we have become the beneficiaries of Christ's death for us, we are left with no further choice but to become his witnesses, his representatives, his messengers to the world on his behalf.

It is important to unpack the notion that "he died for all." Throughout Paul's letters, he consistently tells his readers that "Christ died for ours sins" or "Christ died for us." Consider some clear cases, starting with his concise definition of "Gospel," found in 1 Corinthians 15:

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die- 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6-8).

10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:10-11).

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died- more than that, who was raised- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us (Romans 8:34).

9 For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. ... 15 For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died (Romans 14:9, 15).

And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died (1 Corinthians 8:11).

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen (Galatians 1:3-5).

2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:2).

13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works (Titus 2:13-14).

Paul usually prefers the preposition huper, "for the sake of, for the benefit of, on behalf of," when he writes of Christ's death for us. Theologians across 2000+ years have sought to unpack the intended sense of Christ's death "for us." A number of so-called "Theories of the Atonement" have appeared in the writings of the church fathers and the books of theologians. Each tries to explain the nature and purpose of Christ's death on the cross. This is
not the appropriate place to trace these viewpoints, but some important features find support in the biblical materials.

1. Christ died for us, otherwise we would have died without hope of eternal life.
2. Christ died for us, taking our place and accepting the penalty for our sins, much as the sacrificial lambs of the Old Testament Torah became "substitutes" for the guilty.
3. Christ died for us, so that the human race might be spared inevitable obliteration, and outcome so devastating to the honor of God as to call into question His justice and His goodness.
4. Christ died for us, attracting to himself the forces of evil like a lightning rod, drawing away from us the destructive force of sin and death, doing battle with them on the cross and then rising from the dead, vindicated at last.
5. Christ died for us, revealing for all time the indescribable love of God for the world.
6. Christ died for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps.

In one or more of these senses we can read the meaning of Christ's death for us. For Paul, the interest is in the compelling and binding power of Christ's love revealed in the "death for us." From this constraining love flows the truth that if Christ died for us, then we can only consider ourselves "dead to ourselves." Christ has disarmed our selfish claims to control our own lives. In this sense, "we are as good as dead." Left without any prideful claim to direct our own lives, we discover ourselves anew, alive in Christ, our lives entirely dependent on him for any life at all. The implication for Paul is crystal clear: We no longer "live for ourselves," or as the Greek has it, hina hoi zontes mēketi heautou sōsin alla tō huper autōn apothananti kai egerthenti. That is, "in order that the ones living might no longer for themselves live but for the one on their behalf having died and having been raised." What Christ did, Paul places in the aorist tense, suggesting a final, definitive and decisive event in the past. What we are to do, Paul places in the present tense, pointing to the continuing, consistent and ongoing life--one lived for the benefit of and in the service of the Christ who died for the benefit of ourselves. Quite consciously Paul parallels the preposition huper: Christ died for us therefore we are to live for Christ.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians, he previously expressed this idea in the boldest fashion:

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

Here is wrapped up our death with Christ, his life in us, brought together as expressions of his love for us. The single and fundamental ground for being witnesses and way-showers of God's love for the world is the cross of Jesus Christ who loved us and gave himself for us. Nothing else mattered to Paul in his accreditation as an apostle of the Gospel. No special sign gifts. No ecstatic utterances. No silver-tongued oratory. No human charisma. None of that mattered, and, in fact, was viewed by Paul as slick chicanery used by false apostles to draw a following after themselves rather than after Christ (see 2 Corinthians 10 and 11 for a thorough handling of this issue in which Paul contrasts his own approach to ministry with that of the false apostles). In his first Corinthian correspondence, Paul warns about the personality cult growing up around himself, Apollos and Peter (Cephas). To such a "cult" Paul has died and risen to be compelled only by the love of Christ, as he seeks to be faithful as an apostle to the Gentiles (see 1 Corinthians 1:10-17; 2:1-5; 3:1-23). "No more boasting about men! All things are yours…and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God" (1 Corinthians 3:21-23).

In his ministry to the world, Paul remains faithful to the Gospel in his own life and the manner in which he bears his witness. He does not emphasize golden tone oratory ("I did not come with eloquence", 1 Corinthians 2:1), nor does he rely on cleverly worded arguments, calculated to persuade with the sheer force of words ("My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words", 2:4). Instead, as he phrases it in 2:4b-5: "...but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power." As for Paul, so for us. If we are to be "way-showers," it must be because our lives radiate with the love of Christ for us and because they derive their power from the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, the non-believer will have difficulty distinguishing between the genuine follower Jesus and the street-wise huckster who is peddling the latest self-help philosophy or who promises yet another "secret."

New Creation: 5:16-17
A dramatic turning point takes place in the text at this juncture, as Paul introduces 5:16-21 with the Greek subordinate conjunction ἀρσ: "that, so that, with the result that; in order that, for the purpose of; therefore, thus, so, accordingly." Everything he has written up to this point has climaxed with his affirmations in 5:14-15 about the impact of Christ's death for us on his apostolic ministry--and on ours. In what follows, he will push the implications of this conclusion even further. Not only does he use the logical connective, ἀρσ ("therefore"), he also incorporates a temporal one as well: απὸ τοῦ νῦν, literally, "from the now." A sudden change in "the times" has taken place because Christ died for us. We have noted in previous studies how Jewish people reckoned sacred time, drawing a distinction between "the present age" (οἶλαμ ἡζή) and "the age to come (οἶλαμ ἱβα)." According to the general understanding, the present age was marked by exile, evil and a longing for the coming reign of God, something that would happen in "the last days" at the time of Messiah. His coming would bring in the reign of God when Israel's enemies would meet defeat and thing would be made right with God's people, including the forgiveness of their sins. This new age, the age to come, followed the decisive end of the old one. Scholars refer to such interpretations as belonging to the "eschatology" of Judaism. The word "eschatology" refers to the eschaton, the "end," when the present age terminates with the arrival of the new one, the coming one.

But with the coming of Jesus, Paul understood a radical alteration of that scheme, and announced a new eschatology, one in which the Messiah arrived in the present age and in so doing carved out a fresh timeline which arrived in the present from the future. When Jesus rose from the dead, something happened in the present age that was originally thought to happen at the end of the present age. The old eschatology bisected time between the two ages, whereas the Christian view of time overlapped the present age with the age to come. That is why Paul would say things like "already….but not yet..." (see his handling of the present and the future in Romans 8:18-39). Already Messiah has come, died for our sins, risen from the dead and taken his place at God's right hand, reigning over his new kingdom. But, not yet has Messiah fully implemented his kingdom in this world, where sin and death still hold men in their grip, and where suffering remains the constant companion of the Christ follower. Still, something radical has taken place in the present age which changes the way God's people view themselves and the world around them. This is what Paul means when he writes, "Therefore, from now on no longer..."

What has changed? What is the way changer? What effect will this way changing have on Paul, the apostolic witness to the way, and on all Christ followers who bear witness to the Good News before the world? For starters, the way human beings are seen, the way they are valued, and the way they are assessed. The clause, "We regard no one according to the flesh," contains some important Greek words:

1. "We regard" comes from the expression οἶδαμεν, the common word "to know," used in the perfect tense, and should probably be translated, "have come to know," implying that a process in the past has led Paul and his fellow Christ followers to the conclusion which follows. That process has been, of course, Christ's death and resurrection which have radically altered the way Paul looks at human beings. At one time a right-wing Pharisee of the Shammaite party, Paul held strict views about associating with persons who did not meet the accepted criteria for table fellowship, food laws, dealings with Gentiles, and Sabbath. But after his encounter with the risen Jesus, all of that changed and he was transformed, as were his views toward other human beings. As he wrote in Galatians:

   There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (3:28).

2. Then there is the word, commonly translated as "flesh," from the Greek expression σαρς. "Flesh" (σαρς) is the human person in his entirety viewed as weak, frail, and damaged by sin. This is wholly consistent with the Old Testament understanding of human beings as fragile: "All flesh (σαρς) is as grass....", subject to the scorching heat of the desert sun (see Isaiah 40:6, compared 1 Peter 1:24). Jesus affirmed that the flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41), while the spirit is willing. So Paul sees the flesh as weak (Romans 8:3), and if we choose to live by its power we will "die" (Romans 8:13). Colossians 3 opens with a reminder that "flesh" remains a part of our experience, since we are sons and daughters of Adam and Eve who fell under sin's spell and plunged the human race into its weakened and imperfect condition. Through the flesh we are reminded of our weakened condition, and of the damage sin has done to the human race. Paul rejected the idea that we
can deal with the flesh through "earthly" means, he by no means ignores its presence and annoyance to the spiritual life. Nor should we.

3. When Paul acknowledges his past assessment of human beings in fleshly terms, he means that at one time he viewed humanity as capable of achieving and doing things which attracted the favor of God. In his own case, he cited examples of accomplishments which he once deemed important. But all of that has changed, and what he once considered "gain" (in terms of the sarx), he now views as "loss" by comparison to what he has found in Christ. This is especially clear in his Philippians letter, as seen in this extended passage:

3 For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh- 4 though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless. 7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith- 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained

4. The Philippians passage is also helpful in understanding the meaning of Paul's next statement, "...though we once knew Christ according to the flesh...no longer..." (5:16b). The word "Christ", christos in the Greek, is really the Hebrew word for the Messiah. Paul, like his contemporaries entertained hyper-nationalistic views of what the Messiah would do when he came at the end of "the present age." The expectation was that he would defeat the enemies of Israel, rebuild the Temple as it should be (contra Herod's version of it) and place himself on David's throne. Fresh in the minds of many were the exploits of the Maccabees, some two hundred years before, and many devout Jewish persons like Paul looked forward to a holy reprise of that event. By stark contrast, Jesus came in humiliation as a human being from (of all places) Nazareth in Galilee. He hung out with all the wrong people, attacked the legalism of Paul's colleagues, and then died the death of what seemed like a failed Messiah on a cross (of all places). Here was the supreme stumbling-block: accepting the Messiah as the Suffering Servant of Yahweh, "despised, rejected, a man of sorrows...from whom men hide their faces" (Isaiah 53). "Once," writes Paul, "we used to think about Messiah like that--"according to the flesh (sarx)," seeing him in a "fleshly, all-too-human way."

5. "But no longer," Paul contrasts what he will next tell his readers. He uses the Greek adverb ouketi in combination with alla nun, "but now." What we have is a grammatical construction which strongly sets apart the previous way of viewing human beings, and even of appraising Christ himself, from the new way. The contrast is both one of time and circumstance, and Paul uses ouketi elsewhere to express a similar idea:

   a. "...no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).
   b. "...faith has come...no longer under a guardian (of Torah)" (Galatians 3:25).
   c. "...no longer a slave, but a son..." (Galatians 4:7).
   d. "...Christ raised from the dead....death no longer has dominion over him..." (Romans 6:9).
   e. "...no longer strangers and aliens...but fellow citizens with the saints..." (Ephesians 2:19).
   f. "...no longer a slave but more than a slave: a beloved brother..." (Philemon 1:16).
   g. "...by grace no longer of works..." (Romans 11:6).

The persistence of Paul's use of "no longer" is no accident of grammar. Something dramatic has changed, and Paul's whole way of looking at human beings and the Messiah has undergone a transformation. This change in direction impacts the way Paul (and we) will undertake the mission to the world; and we become witnesses to a new way of the Way Maker.

We have reached the critical watershed passage, as Paul unfolds the essential nature of this new way in 5:17. He prefaces it with the word "Therefore," implying a tight connection with what he has just written. Again, we have a typical "result clause" which explains the outcome of what has gone before. "Here's where this all leads," Paul says by his use of hōste to begin 5:17. It leads to the fresh understanding that to be "in Christ (Messiah)" means
to be part of "New Creation." The flow of Paul's words has a staccato rhythm to it. He avoids explicit verbs "to be" and simply throws the critical terms onto the page:

Indeed (if), any in Christ? New Creation!
The old (former) things left.
See! New Things have come into being! (5:17)

By introduced his last line with "See!" (Greek: idou), Paul is consciously quoting from Isaiah 65:

17 "For behold [=See!], I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. 18 But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. 19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. 20 No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed (Isaiah 65:17-20; also, 66:22).

No doubt Paul had been meditating on this Isaiah passage, inspired by its promise of "new heavens and earth," and the consolation that with their arrival certain aspects of the old creation would "no more" affect human beings. Notice the similarity with Paul's thought in 5:16: "no longer..." A sharp turn pivots to a new way.

To be "in Christ" means to be part of New Creation. Why? Because the suffering Messiah rose from the dead and became the firstfruits of God's New Creation. The human race witnessed a precedent-setting event: a dead man lives again: not as a resuscitated corpse but as a transformed human being. A huge barrier was traversed with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The "last enemy" had been met on the field of combat and defeated (see 1 Corinthians 15:26). Paul makes a plain case for transforming humanity through resurrection in his 1 Corinthians 15 treatise. In Romans 8:18-39 he extends that case to the whole of creation itself which, to use Paul's words, "groans and travails" until the human race received resurrection bodies. And all of this begins with Jesus whom we no longer regard in merely human terms.

Of special significance for Paul is that the arrival of the New Creation means that human beings are not judged on the basis of human distinctions, notably that between Jew and Gentile:

For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation (Galatians 6:15).

That is why Paul prefaced this section with his words "we no longer regard anyone according to the flesh," since the New Creation looks beyond the old human viewpoints about matters of race, gender and religion and looks, rather, to the coming of a New Humanity in which the image of God is restored and new relationships are possible. In bringing the Gospel to his world, Paul refused to allow the old barriers to stand in the way. The "wall" separating human beings from each other in a natural sense had been pulled down (Ephesians 2:14) because of the cross. Or, as someone once phrased it, "The ground is level at the foot of the cross." Far from allowing the old distinctions to hinder transmission of the Good News, the Good News actually transforms the old distinctions into a new identity in Christ Jesus. As way-showers, Paul summons all of us to engage in this all-important task of realizing the birth of the New Creation by setting aside the prejudices of the old life and accepting persons on the same basis that Jesus himself did.

Reconciliation (5:18-19)
Though we are called to be God's way changers, it is not our efforts which bring about the New Creation. The kingdom of God will not come on earth ("as it is in heaven") because we skillfully do something to solve the world's problems. Even Jesus called his disciples to pray for the kingdom to come, knowing that only the heavenly Father could make that happen. It is God "who makes all things work together for good" (Romans 8:28), and, in the opening of 5:18, we hear Paul saying "All this is from God," or, as the Greek puts it, ta de panta ek tou theou, "but all these things from God," where the emphasis is on God as the source or origin the New Creation. The little conjunction de has two possible meanings: 1) a coordinating conjunction, "and, then, so, now;" 2) an adversative conjunction, "but, to the contrary, rather, but also, but even." Perhaps Paul is anticipating his audience at this point, as they think to themselves, "How is any of this possible? New Creation? What about the "old" one? Can we really regard other people in this new light?" To which Paul responds, "Why, of course not, at least without God's help! Don't you see? All of this comes from God who is the source of all new things!"
We are then told what God is actually up to. Paul introduces the word "reconcile" and its related idea "reconciliation." The Greek term is *katallassō*, a verb as it appears in 5:18. The form is an aorist participle which points to a decisive action by God, in the past. The word has a range of meanings: "to change, exchange, as coins for others of equivalent value", "to reconcile those who are at variance", "return to favor with, be reconciled to one", "to receive one into favor." The assumption is that something is "exchanged" in order that relationship might be restored. Prior to the coming of Christ, a state of hostility existed between God and the world. This hostility existed on both sides:

1. From God's side, He was angry, in a righteous sense, with the sinfulness of human beings and with their rejection of His creational love for them (see Romans 1:18). Scripture speaks of the "wrath" of God (orgē tou theou) directed against sin and sinners. A state of enmity existed, from God's side, since in His holiness He could not look on sin or allow it to exist forever within His creation. Nor could He have relationships with human beings who persisted in their sins, turning away from Him in disobedience to His law. In God's eyes, "All have sinned and fallen short of God's glory" (Romans 3:23), and, "There is none righteous. No not one" (Romans 3:10). Both Jew and Gentile are equally culpable (Romans 3:9).

2. From the human side, people refuse to believe God's righteous purposes and choose to go their own way. As godless persons, they do not understand nor show proper respect for God (Romans 3:11). They turn away from God and walk on the wrong way. Their words are full of deceit and poison, marked by cursing and bitterness. They shed innocent blood, bringing ruin and misery to God's good creation. See seek neither peace nor the will of God (Romans 3:12-18). They "love darkness rather than light" (John 3:19). In their hearts, all manner of evil is thought, felt and chosen (Matthew 15:19).

Human beings have proven incapable of remedying their fallen situation on their own. Though they attempt various forms of "good works," none of these can overcome the enormous separation which has arisen between God and themselves. Worse, their actions have brought misery and suffering throughout God's creation. When God chose a special people to bring the light of His truth to the world, that people became disobedient and returned to the gods of their pagan past. In the interim, God provided graphic signs of what would be required for sin's remission in the form of the sacrificial system. But all the blood spilled on Hebrew altars was, in itself, unable to atone for the sins of the people. Instead, those violent and bloody offerings pointed to the violent and bloody nature of sin itself and the need for a remedy far greater than any discovered thus far. They were, in the words of the book of Hebrews, "types and shadows" of "good things to come" (Hebrews 10:1). Their purpose was to keep the hope of reconciliation alive in the world. God would, one day, accomplish something wholly new that would fulfill everything depicted by these sacrifices.

That day has come, Paul announced in his preaching of the Good News. There is another way. God, on His side, has shown good faith to the human race by sending His own Son to become the sacrifice for sin, opening up a new way for human beings to have a relationship with Himself. God took the initiative. He did not wait for human beings to effect some great achievement or perform some astonishing work. He knew they could not. They were "helpless and without strength", so that at "just the opportune time, Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). That is what Paul means in 2 Corinthians 5:18 when he tells his audience, "God...has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ." On God's side, all of the necessary work has been completed for human beings to "come home to God." The wrath of God has fallen on Jesus; the fury of sin's power met him on the cross where the decisive battle for our reconciliation took place. Sin has been atoned for; the price has been paid; the ransom satisfied; the debt released. God has already proven himself faithful and just to forgive our sins (1 John 1:9). Faithful, in that he did not wait for us, but proceeded to fulfill his covenant commitments to the creation He had made. He would not abandon his creation Just, in that sin was not simply ignored but dealt with on the cross, the innocent dying in place of the guilty. He would not deny Himself.

But what of reconciliation from the human side? First of all, writes Paul, the human race must be told about what God has done to make it possible. Human beings must hear the Good News that God stands ready to forgive their sins and no longer shows hostility toward them. Through Jesus Christ, the offer of salvation is now being made to the world. But whom will God send? Who will go for Him with this message? In response to these
questions, Paul replies "we will." That is why he ends 5:18 with the words, "...and gave us the ministry of reconciliation..." Once again, the verb "gave" (Greek: dontos from didōmi) is in the aorist participial form, implying something that has already happened in the past with a definitive force behind it. For Paul, that came as a commission from Jesus Christ, and the account of that event appears several times in the book of Acts (9:3-19; 22:6-21; 26:12-18). The record in Acts 26 is the most complete, as Paul reports to the Roman and Jewish authorities exactly what Jesus asked him to do:

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," the Lord replied. "Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

"How can they hear without a preacher? How can they preach unless they are sent...", Paul wrote to the Roman Christians (Romans 10:14-15). "Well," says Paul in this week's text, "God has sent us to be the reconciling agents of His Good News to the world." That's what it means to be given the "ministry" (Greek: diakonia, "ministry, service; contribution, help, support; mission") of reconciliation. This time Paul uses the noun form katallagē, the state of being in right relationship with God. In other words, what God has provided for in His good faith gift of His Son, human beings must hear about and then act upon, and they can only do this if a bona fide offer is made to them from an authorized agent of God's Good News. This must be someone who knows firsthand what it means to be reconciled to God and someone whom God has sent to bear witness to His reconciling love. Paul was one such person. All true believers have been equally commissioned, and are "way-showers" in their role as agents of God's Good News.

In 5:19, Paul discloses a deeper understanding of what the reconciliation message means. The opening words are glorious! "...in Christ God was..." What happened on the cross involved God in the most intimate way. Whereas Paul once thought the cross was the ultimate sign of shame and the notorious evidence of a failed Messiah, he now sees as the very work of God Himself. Remember, "we no longer regard Christ according to the flesh..." (5:16). What happened on the cross was God's express doing, as the prophet Isaiah foretold centuries before: "It pleased Yahweh to bruise him (Messiah)" (Isaiah 53, in its entirety, 53:10 in particular). When we see Jesus dying on the cross, we see God's love in all its majesty. God was in Christ. That is the Good News Paul proclaims to the world under commission from the risen Jesus. And it is our message, given under the same commission. We bear witness to a change in direction, following a new road — a new way.

The specific fact made clear about "God in Christ..." is that he was not "counting" human beings "trespasses against them." This was, of course, the problem which, from God's side, kept Him in wrath against His human creation. Here is judicial language, the language of the court. Human beings are "guilty as charged" in the sight of God. The word for "count" is logizomai which means "count, reckon, calculate, take into account; credit, place to one's account; consider, think, suppose; evaluate, look upon as, class; maintain, claim; think on, reflect upon." Within its range of meanings we discover the concepts of "making a judgment" and "reaching a conclusion." Paul chose the present tense participle (logizomenos) to parallel the verb form of "reconciling" used in the same sentence. At the heart of God's act of reconciling is His determination not to hold human beings any longer guilty for their sins in light of the cross. When God looks at human beings now, He sees them through the cleansing blood of Christ and extends to them forgiveness.

When Paul picked his term for "sins" in this passage, he chose paraptōma, which literally means "to fall alongside", stressing the "fallenness" of human beings as the true meaning of their "sinfulness." Sin has not just detained human beings or temporarily delayed them in their journey. Rather, sin has caused them to "fall" by the wayside, permanently disabled and unable to stand up on their own. Reconciliation sees sinful human beings as fallen and in need of the divine hand to raise them up. God in Christ--crucified and risen--is the reconciling hand of God extended to fallen human beings, seeking to raise them up into New Creation life.

What Paul (and we) must do is faithfully proclaim the "message of reconciliation," as expressed in the Greek words themenos en humin ton logon tēs katallagēs, literally, "having placed in us the word of reconciliation." This
is a critically important statement, and the Greek terminology Paul uses needs to be understood correctly. The word for "placed" is τιθῆμι and is the ordinary word "to put, to place." God put in us the word of reconciliation. He didn't just place it in our hands as something wholly external to us, sealed from view, and a private communication only to be opened by the recipient. On the contrary, the "word" (logos) is God's Good News placed inside us, part and parcel of our lives, the warp and woof of our very being. Before we are called to bring the message of reconciliation, we must be reconciled ourselves, carrying about in our own lives the truth of the Good News we announce to others. We cannot be way-showers unless we first find the way ourselves. That is why when we read about Paul's "conversion," it might seem confusing, since Paul was converted and commissioned as a single act by the risen Jesus! That makes perfect sense in light of Paul's understanding of reconciliation in 5:19.

**Ambassadors (5:19-20)**
The first word in the Greek text of 5:19 is not "therefore," although it appears that way from the English translation. Paul begins with ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ oun. Just as Christ, through his death took our place (ὑπὲρ πάντων, as we saw in 5:14), so we act on behalf of Christ for the world. This is how we conduct the ministry of reconciliation, by embodying the message of the Gospel in our own lives and making visible in our witness the love of God for the world. The force of the Greek conjunction oun, translated as "therefore," is, in this case, to further explain the manner in which reconciliation works through Christ followers. It could be rendered "accordingly, thus, or so."

Our special status is "doing the work of an ambassador." As it turns out, Paul uses a verb here, not a noun: presbeuō. Those whom God has called as His ambassadors are the living instruments of God's appeal to the world. Curiously, the root of this verb "to be an ambassador", means "to be senior, elder" (compare the idea of "presbyter," a senior leader within the Christ community). Paul draws on his Jewish identity here. He is, in effect saying, "As the ancient, senior people of God who now represent Him through His Messiah, Jesus, we are making our appeal to you." Israel, represented by Paul, is making its appeal to the Gentile world to be reconciled with God. We might say, we "veterans" of the Gospel, having received it for ourselves and made it our own, are now living out its message.

In this role, "God makes His appeal through us." The word for "appeal" is parakaleō, and its range of meanings include: "beg, urge; encourage, speak words of encouragement; request, ask, appeal to; console, comfort, cheer up; invite, summon." In the Gospel of John, the Holy Spirit is called the παρακλήτος, the noun form of this verb and having a similar nuance. "Through us", from δι' ἡμῶν, suggests that we are God's "instruments" for making the Gospel appeal to the world. Once again, as "way-showers", we do not merely bear a message, but, to a certain extent, we are the message. Paul, in his correspondence with the Corinthians actually referred to them as a human letter:

2 You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. 3 And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. 4 Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God (2 Corinthians 3:2-4).

Through the way-making power of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit has written God's Good News on the pages of our lives, "to be known and read by all/" This is what Paul means when he tells his readers in 5:20, that God makes His appeal "through us."

That is why, Paul continues, "we implore you on Christ's behalf (ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ): Be reconciled to God." The force of the word translated "implore" is strong. It is equivalent to our use of the exclamation, "Please!!" Because God has taken the first step and laid aside His wrath in the cross of Jesus Christ, the immensity of opportunity to become right with God is reason enough to respond. "No time like the present," Paul seems to be saying here. "Don't delay!" Victor Furnish sees a comparison with Romans 12:1-2, "where Paul in an equally fundamental way urges his readers to be conformed no longer to this present age, but to "be transformed" in the renewal of their whole being, as they give themselves over to God and to obedience of the divine will" (p.349).
If the significance of God's initiative still seems unclear to the readers, our text deepens it by showing just how much God did in bring about our reconciliation with Himself. What follows might well have a certain lyrical quality about it, and so we set out the lines as poetic verse (the numbers in parentheses are from the Greek):

The One not knowing sin (8 syllables)
On our behalf (4 syllables)
He made sin (8 syllables)
That we might become (8 syllables)
The righteousness of God (7 syllables)
In him (3 syllables)

A few key ideas in this quasi-creedal statement suggests Paul may have used existing traditional material, but reworked it for the present context.

Christ as "sinless." This is central to our message and echoes throughout the New Testament (Hebrews 4:15; 5:709; 1 Peter 1:19; 3:18). Based on the Old Testament practice of selecting a "lamb without blemish," the suffering of Jesus on the cross was that of an innocent man, dying for the guilty. Moreover, we can hardly miss the connection with Isaiah 53 (alluded to earlier) where "the Lord has laid on him (that is, the Messiah) the iniquity of us all" (53:6). Further, the Suffering Servant (Messiah) "bears our sins" (53:4), a belief reaffirmed in 1 Peter 2:24-25:

24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. 25 For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Notice how Peter connects Christ's death for us with our being "returned" to proper relationship with God, our Shepherd and Overseer who cares for our "souls."

Paul earlier told his Galatian audience that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). He also told the Roman Christians God sent His Son "in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin to condemn sin" (Romans 8:3). Texts like these also remind us of the conversation between Jesus and John the Baptist on the occasion of Jesus' baptism. You will recall that when Jesus came to the Jordan River for baptism, John initially objected, pointing out that Jesus should be the one baptizing John (see Matthew 3:14). Had not John already proclaimed to Israel in his message of repentance, "after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry" (Matthew 3:11). Yet, Jesus insisted, deepening John's grasp of the situation with the words, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness" (Matthew 3:15). While there is some debate about the intention of Jesus' words, some scholars see in them an acknowledgment that Jesus must identify with the sinful nation of Israel in order to secure "the righteousness of God" for them. By being baptized, Jesus was making himself appear to be a sinner along with the whole nation, and that "appearance" contained a deeper truth: Jesus would be "made sin for us" so that he might take away our sin.

What does it mean for us "to be made the righteousness of God in him"? Space does not permit a complete explanation in the present study. However, a few key points need consideration:

1. The Greek words for "righteous, righteousness, just, justice, and justification" are largely based on a single root, the idea of δικαιοσύνη. Within the context of Paul's letters, the term shares origins in both Jewish and Roman thought. From a Jewish point of view, it points to the notion of the covenant and God's faithfulness to keep His end of the bargain with His people, as well as their need to remain committed to Him. When God proves Himself a reliable covenant partner (and He always has), He is seen as righteous and causing righteousness to prevail in His world and among His people. Within the Roman world, the term (iuscia in Latin) is connected to the law court. The purpose of the Judge is to make certain that justice is done, wrongs are righted, and a proper verdict is rendered for the one who stands before the court. Sometimes an injured party appeals for his situation to be remedied and his loss restored. When the Judge rules in his favor and effects that remediation, the Judge is said to "justify" the petitioner. If a person is charged with a crime and has his day in court, the verdict rendered by the Judge either declares the accused guilty or innocent. If acquitted of his crime, the person is said to be "justified."
2. With these twin concepts as background, we can better ascertain what Paul means when he tells the Corinthians, "that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." At least two things are meant. First, that, in Jewish terms, we are living, breathing examples of God's faithfulness to His covenant, having forgiven our sins because of Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Second, God "made him to be sin who knew no sin," and that is proof enough that God, the righteous Judge, acted in a righteous way by acquitting us through the process of passing judgment on Christ. At the bar of God's justice, Christ took our place, by God's arrangement, so that we might hear the joyous words, "Not guilty!" spoken from the court of God.

In this sense, we are the embodied righteousness of God as His ambassadors and way-makers to the world. What qualifications must we have for this high and holy calling? What is required from us if we are to be the way-showers whom God commissions to bring reconciliation to His estranged creation? Only this, that we be the justified ones who proclaim the Good News that God wants to the world to be right with Him; that we be the reconciled ones who proclaim the Good News that God has already laid aside the basis for our exile from Him; that we be the way-finders who have already experienced in our own lives what it means to be forgiven our sins and to be part of the New Creation.

**Conclusion**

To reaffirm what we have maintained throughout this week's study:

- The way-makers must first follow the Way Maker, Jesus.
- We are not merely the bearers of the Gospel message: we are the message, written on the tablets of human hearts and revealed in the real bodies of human beings who speak, walk and live the Gospel before a watching world.

Builders of the great super highways in our country didn’t have full control of the terrain they sought to tame. Mountains, valleys, rivers, and other natural impediments stood in their way, and so they relied on the stratagems of geo-engineering to “make a way, where there was no way.” So it is with the life of faith. There will always be the impenetrable mass in front of us, hard to traverse and harder to break through. Our humanity constantly reminds us of personal limitations and external barriers to the way forward. From the witness of faith history we learn that God is always the initiator who says, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways” (Isaiah 55:8). Yet our inability is not ultimate, and the Way Maker refuses to be denied. And so Isaiah continues:

10 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,  
11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.  
12 You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.  
13 Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briers the myrtle will grow. This will be for the LORD's renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed" (Isaiah 55:10-13).

**Glory to God! Amen.**