The Foundations of Mission and of all Christian Service

Most of these foundations are found in 2 Corinthians chapters 3-6 and also chapter 5:9-21.

"So we make it our goal to please Him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body whether good or bad.

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. 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 what is in the heart. If we are out of our minds, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that One died for all and therefore all died. 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.

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. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come. All this is from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 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. 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. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."

Paul starts with, ***"We make it our goal to please Him"***. This is the foundation of all we do. We must be changed to serve the Lord Jesus effectively. We cannot share with others something we haven't experienced ourselves. This is clear in verse 18, "***All this is from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation".***

Foundation No. 1

A great change must take place in our lives. We must be reconciled to God. When two people are enemies, hating each other, to be reconciled means they become friends. If two people disagree, either both need to change or one needs to change and completely accept the viewpoint of the other in order to reconcile their views.

In order to be reconciled to God never assume that God is going to change! He does not need to change. He is the same before Creation and He will forever remain the same! Man must change in order to be reconciled to God. The Lord Jesus has made this possible by taking away our sin so we can be in accord with God. When our sin is taken care of we can be reconciled to God becoming friends instead of enemies. Instead of doing our own will, we do God's will because we are reconciled to Him. This is the basis of the Christian life.

This begins at conversion, but we need to experience it on a regular basis. If, for any reason, I am rebelling against God, then God waits for me to come back into fellowship with Him being reconciled through the Lord Jesus as I repent of my rebellious spirit, my disobedience or my sin. If I am to serve God I must be in a continuous state of reconciliation to God.

When we are reconciled to God, we also become reconciled to one another. This is very important. If we are to serve the Lord Jesus as faithful witnesses we must be reconciled to one another. When we sin we not only become separated from God but also from one another. That is the root of all the conflicts in the world. We will never be faithful and true witnesses to God unless we live in a way that all can see we are reconciled to one another in Christ Jesus. So if I am reconciled to God and you are reconciled to God it is automatic that we must be reconciled to one another because God accepts me in Christ Jesus as His child and has made me His minister. He also accepts you as His child

and makes you His minister. If I don't accept you in that way it indicates that I disagree with God. If I disagree with God I am no longer reconciled to Him.

So when we have a disagreement with one another – a man with his wife or parents with children or children with parents, someone must change. If both parties agree to end their disagreement and take the appropriate action this brings reconciliation.

Your colleagues won't be perfect so you can expect some disagreements! Always remember how God accepts your brother or sister. Do you agree with God or not? When you have something against a brother or sister you are disagreeing with God! The foundation of our Christian lives and service is to live in a state of reconciliation to God and to one another.

We can go a step further and say that if we are truly reconciled to God we also become reconciled to ourselves. You must learn to accept yourself. How should I look at myself? The answer is: the way that God does! If God loves me and has given me a ministry that is important to Him and has made me His child, what right do I have to disagree with God? It's of no value to say. *"Lord I'm not valuable. I'm useless to you and I don't know if you really love me."* If I say this I am disagreeing with God and if I feel that way about myself then I must come to God in repentance and be truly reconciled to Him. Many people have never come to terms with this and are very frustrated in their Christian lives and witness. If that is the case they hinder God's work. **So the foundation is to be reconciled <u>to God</u>, <u>to one another</u> and <u>to ourselves</u>.**

In verse 17 we read, ***"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"*** We may accept <u>the truth</u> of this, but we also need <u>the experience</u>. We need to really live as new creatures very different from the old creature. This is vital if we are to be effective servants and representatives of the Lord Jesus.

We can see an example of this in the life of Paul. He had a whole new motivation. He became a new creature in the Lord Jesus. He says, ***"We make it our goal to please Him whether we are at home in the body or away from it"***. (2 Cor. 5:9) **His motivation in life was to please the Lord Jesus** – not himself – not his friends – not his family or anyone else. His aim was to please the Lord Jesus Christ. This was his first motive.

Secondly we read in verse 11, ***"Since then we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men"***. So his second motive was **the fear of the Lord**. There are two aspects to this. I believe he feared the judgement of God. He knew God's judgement would fall on anyone outside of Christ and so he persuaded men because he feared what would happen to them. Another aspect was probably a healthy fear of God in his own heart – a fear of going against God and God's purposes. He says In 1 Cor. 9:27, ***"No! I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize"***. This wasn't the fear that if he took a wrong step God would condemn him. It was a healthy fear of going his own way. He wanted to stay in close fellowship with God in repentance and reconciliation.

True fear of God is always coupled with confidence. Think of yourself as a child who has fallen over and hurt himself. You run to your father. What will he do – get angry or ignore you? No! He will comfort you and heal your wound.

We must put faith and fear together. When we are right with God we enjoy being with Him and we want to be with Him more and more. But if there are desires in our hearts that we know God doesn't like then we certainly don't go running to Him to have a chat! In fact, we would rather not talk to Him at all!

Paul's third motive was **the love of God**. God's love for Paul motivated him. We read, ***"If we are out of our minds, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind it is for you. <u>For Christ's love compels us</u>, because we are convinced that One died for all and therefore all died."*** So Paul's whole motive was to understand how what he said and how he behaved would affect others? God and others – that was his great motivation – an unselfish love.

So this is the change that needs to take place and the more we experience this change the more we will be in a position where God can use us.

Foundation No. 2

God is Our Master. He is the Master of all the work of God. See verse 18, ***"All this is from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation."***

So what has come from God?

1. **The great change in our lives**: We have been reconciled to God. We have been born again by the Spirit of God who comes from God. God has given us a new nature and new motives. The only way I can be changed is by the grace of God. Only God can change me. I can co-operate with Him. I can admit that change is needed, but only God can change me. It is impossible for me to change my motives. I can't just love more. It doesn't work. God is the One who can do this. He is the Master. Any change in our lives for the better is by God's grace. It is His mercy that has changed us.

2. **God gives us our ministry**. We don't choose to serve the Lord Jesus. God reconciles us to Himself through Christ and gives us the ministry of reconciliation. So the ultimate goal of whatever we are doing is that men and women would be reconciled to God. This ministry is given to us by God. God is always the Master. If God gives us the ministry, then the authority for our ministry is from God. It is job not from some body of people who have elected us to do a particular service. We must be absolutely convinced that God Himself has called us and we are backed by His authority. This is essential as we step out to serve Him.

We read in verses 19-20, ***"God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors as though God were making His appeal through us."*** In chapter 6 Paul calls us, ***"God's fellow workers"***. We see that God is the One who enables us and it is God who works through us.

When we fully understand this it is a great relief! It is not my work! It doesn't depend on me! As God gives us a ministry we can trust Him to enable us to do it. We are responsible to Him day by day.

Paul's job was very widespread – no planes and no cars. He travelled by donkey or on foot. Sometimes he went by ship and some ships got wrecked. His was a huge job – the care of all the churches he planted – the work of an evangelist – pastoral care - Bible teaching. He was involved in all sorts of work and had great responsibility. We read in 2 Cor. 3:5-6, ***"Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter but of the spirit; for the letter kills, the Spirit gives life."***

Clearly God is the Master. God is in control. God is capable of taking care of everything. This means that we are responsible to Him.

Foundation No. 3

We have a ministry. This ministry, given to us by God, is the ministry of reconciliation. This means that the goal of missions – evangelism, church planting, literature work, radio work, film and TV work etc. all have the goal that men and women and children should be reconciled to God, to each other and to society. This is the ministry of reconciliation.

In 2 Cor. 3 and 4 there are other characteristics of this ministry God has given us.

3:6, ***"He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter but of the spirit; for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life."***

So the Holy Spirit enables us to accomplish the ministry. It is a ministry of life not of death. It is not a ministry of legalism leading people into different kinds of bondage. It is a ministry of liberty. We see this in 2 Cor. 3:16-17, ***"But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the***

Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." 'The veil' – all that blocks the vision of God – is taken away. In its place is the Lord who is the Spirit.

So the purpose of Christian mission is to bring liberation – deliverance to all men women and children. This liberation is being delivered from themselves – from being at enmity with God and with each other and coming into the freedom of the Lord Jesus.

It is also a ministry of **light**. We see this in 2 Cor. 4:4-6, ***"The God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so they cannot see the light of the Gospel of the Glory of Christ who is the Image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God who said, 'Let the light shine out of darkness' made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the Glory of God in the face of Christ."***

So our ministry is to proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ. To do this we live out a Christ-like life and pray and work that His life may penetrate many hearts. In this way people will be delivered out of the Kingdom of Darkness and brought into the Kingdom of the Son of God – The Kingdom of Light. Our ministry is one of righteousness and not condemnation. ***"If the ministry that condemns men (women) is glorious how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness".*** (2 Cor. 3:9)

The ministry of the law was to bring people under conviction of sin. So how much more will the ministry of righteousness bring glory? What is this righteousness? ***"God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."*** (2 Cor. 5:21)

In 4:1 we read, ***"Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart."*** Again we read in 4:16, ***"Therefore we do not heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day"***.

Paul is saying that God has given us this ministry and since it is from Him we don't give up. We don't stop. God will accomplish His work through us. It isn't my ministry it is not me fulfilling my big task. It is God's work. We don't give up because we have received our ministry from God and we are doing it for Him.

In 5:10 we read, ***"For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body whether good or bad."*** This is another reason for us to consider seriously our responsibility to fulfil the ministry God has given us. We will all appear before the judgement seat of Christ so each one can be rewarded for his/her deeds in the body.

This is not speaking of the final judgement between those who believe and those who don't believe. It is the evaluation judgement of every child of God as to how he or she has accomplished the ministry God has given to him or her. We will appear before Him. That is why we need to seriously fulfil every task God has given us. In Paul's case it was largely speaking. Sometimes it may be more a matter of serving. The goal is the same: that men and women should be reconciled to God.

Foundation No. 4

We have been entrusted with God's message. We must be changed. God is the master and He has given us a ministry**.** Lastly, we have been entrusted with God's message.

5:18-19, ***"All this is from God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation"***.

Here are four great statements.

1. God's message: it is the Word of God and it must not be changed.

4:2, ***"Rather we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception nor do we distort the Word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."***

Paul says we have not 'distorted' the Word of God. God has committed to us His message, His word, and it must not be changed. This means that all the Bible is inspired by God. It is without error not only in that which is important for faith – i.e. for our religious life, but also where the Bible speaks about history or science it is without error. It is infallible! It is our authority – the Word of God. And because it is God's Word that has been given to us we must not change it. We must not add to it. We must not subtract from it either by taking parts of it away or by saying some parts are not so true therefore we don't need to look at them as much. We must not change the message of God. It is God's message!

2. The message God has given us is the Gospel and it must be a Christ-centred message. ***"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."*** (5.19) Notice that God was in Christ. The whole message of reconciliation is through Christ Jesus. He is the only way.

Notice in chapter 4 concerning those who don't believe, ***"The God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the light of the Gospel of the Glory of Christ"***. We see here that the message of reconciliation to God is the whole Gospel message. The Gospel (good news) **is** the Lord Jesus Christ. We must preach Jesus Christ as Lord. God was in Christ. We must teach that the Lord Jesus was fully God and fully Man – the only Mediator between God and man – the only way of salvation. There is no other way apart from the Lord Jesus. If we are going to preach the Gospel we must preach His Gospel – that Jesus Christ came and died and rose again. He is the way of reconciliation. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.

3. We have this message and it must be communicated. There are two ways this must be done. Firstly it must be communicated by word. Here the emphasis is on speaking. It is the word of reconciliation. See 4:13, ***"It is written, 'I believe therefore I have spoken'. With that same spirit also believe and therefore speak"***. God spoke through holy men and that is why we have His Word in written form.

Secondly we must also communicate it by our lives. Look again at 4:2 where Paul says, ***"Rather we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception nor do we distort the Word of God. On the contrary we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God"***. See again 4:5, ***"For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus sake"***!

So there was the manifestation of truth and there was him being a servant to communicate the message of God. He was a servant of Jesus Christ. He goes as far as to say in 4:10-11, ***"We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake so that His life may be revealed in our mortal body".***

I don't presume to fully understand this! But it does say to me that somehow the Lord Jesus wants to be manifested in my life and through me. His life is seen in us! That is communication as people see something of the way we live and how we behave.

When you look at the life of Paul and all that he went through, one thing you notice is his love for the Lord Jesus and his commitment to Him. His ambition was to please Christ. He wanted to glorify Christ. He served Christ. He preached Christ. His ambition was to know Christ. Through his life you could see something of the Lord Jesus. This is how we also need to communicate God's message.

4. We have God's message and we must not simply communicate it. Rather we must urge it upon people. This is an amazing thing. Notice how Paul spoke, ***"Knowing the fear of the Lord we persuade men"***!

In 5:20 Paul says, ***"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."***

Again in 6:1 Paul says, ***"As God's fellow workers, we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. He says, 'In the time of My favour I heard you and in the day of salvation I helped you'. I tell you, now is the time of God's favour now is the day of salvation"***.

So persuade, entreat, urge! Never share the Gospel in an attitude of indifference – a take it or leave it attitude. When Paul communicated the Gospel he didn't say, *"Well friends these are God's facts. Do as you like."* No! He urged. He persuaded. How easy it is to 'urge' all manner of secondary things! If you are captain of a rugby team you urge your team to win usually with a lot of shouting. There is no half-hearted attitude!

So what about the Gospel? Do we urge? Are we in earnest about proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ? We all need a sense of urgency in speaking about the Lord Jesus to others. It is God's message. It is God's Word and it must not be changed. This glorious good news must be urged upon people.

So, in conclusion, to be a good minister of Jesus Christ I must first of all **be faithful to My Master**. I must be faithful in doing what He tells me to do. I must be faithful in representing Him. An ambassador represents his government. He has no business just expressing his own opinions! We are always to represent the Lord Jesus day in and day out whether we are in the office, at college, among immigrants etc. Whatever we are doing we must be faithful to Our Master all the way through our lives. This is our priority – to be faithful to Our Master and to those to whom He has sent us. As servants we must be unselfish. Remember, we don't serve ourselves! We are to serve others. Unselfish service is our ministry. We are also God's spokespeople on behalf of Christ whom we serve. We must urge men, women and children to be reconciled to God. We must be earnest in our message of proclamation. If we stay faithful to these great truths we will, by the grace of God, be effective servants of the Lord Jesus Christ.