

Introduction

Compelled by Love (2 Corinthians 5:11-15)

I am something of a public debate enthusiast, watching and listening to current affairs programmes, TV and radio discussion panels, following political pundits, etc. There is an attempt to generate public debate about all sorts of things today by all sorts of people and if we don't 'get in there' and contribute to the discussion we lose and so do those who don't get to hear us. I have noticed over the years, however, how people generally have become less tolerant of religious ideas and often seem incapable of understanding what place they could possibly have in public debate. Certainties and absolutes are not popular and firm convictions seem out of place.

We do recognise, of course, that issues of faith are different and in the cut and thrust of claim and counter claim we can lose sight of the fact that we are not simply debating ideas and exploring possibilities. Not pursuing personal enthusiasms, favourite ideas and clever points of political/personal philosophy. These are not what compel believers. In our text Paul reminds us that:

"Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all...that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."

We don't get involved in witnessing, and come to discussion and debate because of some bright idea we recently had or came across. We come because one died for us and we no longer live for ourselves but for him. We don't simply bring an idea but good news. Something amazing has happened and our whole worldview has changed:

"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."

But isn't this just another religious idea? If we have simply come to believe it as we come to believe a political idea or philosophical concept possibly. However, even if it were no more than this it is still important to take seriously the claims of faith because people invest so much of themselves in their faith. It is as important, more important many might claim, to have as clear an understanding of faith issues as of any other major area of life – who we marry, where we live, career choices – simply *because* faith affects major choices in many people's lives. But there is more to it than this. A Christian believes that:

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, not counting men's sins against them."

Something hasn't simply "come to us" but something incredible has happened to the Christian. He or she has been reconciled to God, having their sins forgiven and being made new, "the old has gone, the new has come" and all this from God. We are not saying "I have a great idea" but "I have a great God!"

"We are, therefore, Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.

When Christians enter the public arena and take part in the great conversation our message is not simply one of intellectual enlightenment but:

"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."