

“Ambassadors for Christ”

2 Corinthians 5:20 says, “So, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.” Ambassadors. This is one of the words used to describe followers of Jesus - “ambassadors” for Christ.

What is an ambassador? An ambassador is defined as “the highest ranking representative appointed by one country or government to represent it in another,” or “an official messenger or agent with a special mission.” Countries have their ambassadors here in the U.S. We have our ambassadors in other countries. I attended Wesley Seminary in Washington, D.C., and I remember driving on this street named “Embassy Row”, where quite a number of foreign embassies were located. And the United States has our *ambassadors* located in many countries around the globe.

The Apostle Paul, writing to Christians, says we are Christ’s “ambassadors”! What a rich image to describe who we are and what we should be doing if we are followers of Jesus!

For one thing, this reminds us that we represent another. When an American ambassador to France speaks, for example, he or she is the U.S. speaking, not just they themselves or their own personal opinions. Our country’s ambassadors convey the views, policies, and decisions of the United States. What our ambassadors say, and how they live, is a reflection on our country.

Some years ago a book was written called *The Ugly American*. The book created quite a firestorm of reaction and controversy. The point it made was that many American diplomats and ambassadors were given the job as a political favor. Often these appointees had little knowledge of the country to which they were assigned. They often didn’t know their customs, sometimes didn’t even speak their language. Many saw these political appointment as a chance to get rich and live a life of ease. This was creating hate and resentment towards the U.S., and leaving a scar and blemish on the image of the U.S. abroad.

An ambassador represents his or her country. Their country’s honor and wellbeing is at stake! *If we’ve given our lives to Christ, we represent another – we represent Him!* The moment we confess Christ as our Savior and become part of the Church, people begin to watch us! What we do and what we say and how we live is reflection on Jesus in the minds of others.

In a sense, our Lord’s name and honor is at stake. We can turn people towards God, or turn people away from God. It’s a heavy responsibility! For we can blemish the name of Christ if they look at us and see we are fakes, or that we only talk the talk and don’t walk the walk! But it’s also a great privilege and honor when we represent our Lord well, and people look at us and say: “Now there’s a *real* Christian...”. “She really does live up to what she professes...”. “We are ambassadors for Christ...” 2 Corinthians 5:20. We represent Christ in the world!

Then too, as ambassadors for Christ, we operate in a foreign land. The U.S. ambassador to Japan *lives* in Japan, but he or she is not a *citizen* of Japan. The ambassador is a U.S. citizen on foreign soil. Philippians 3:20 says, “Our citizenship is in heaven.” The Bible says we are “foreigners” “strangers” “exiles” in this world (Hebrews 11:13 1 Peter 2:11). As the old

gospel song has it, "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through."

If you've ever visited another country, you probably didn't feel quite at home. The language may be different. People may dress differently. The food may be different. Customs aren't the same as in the U.S. When I was in seminary part of our requirement was to have a month long seminar abroad. One of the countries we stayed in was Germany. I don't speak German, so the language was a problem. Soon after arriving, we were in a public place and I needed to find a restroom. I found a place where there was a men's room and a ladies' room, but I couldn't tell which was which because the signs were in German. So I figured I would just wait outside until I saw a man or woman come out from one. Soon a lady came out of one of the restrooms and I was about to go into the other one, when I saw her turn and go into the other one herself! Hopefully, she was the cleaning lady!

If we're followers of Jesus we are ambassadors for Christ. We live in this world, but this world is not our home. Our homeland is....heaven! Once we come to Christ and become a new person in Christ, we get a new set of values, a different perspective on life. What this world treasures, and the ways of the world, are often not in sync with Christ and His teachings and example.

So, we shouldn't feel 100% comfortable here. But sometimes we do! We act like everybody else. We get sucked into the things the world worships and overvalues. We live as if this earth is going to be our *permanent* home. A number of studies have indicated that people who confess to be Christians, even evangelical Christians, in many ways show the same values and problem behaviors as those who do not profess Christ.

But if we're living as followers of Jesus and not followers of the current culture, we should not feel totally at home here! Romans 12:1 puts it this way, "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within..." (J. B. Phillips translation). There is a gospel song that has these words: "I don't want to get adjusted to this world, to this world; I don't want to get adjusted to this world. I've got a home that's so much better, I'm gonna go there sooner or later, I don't want to get adjusted to this world."

Jesus had something to say about this too. He told us, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21). As ambassadors for Christ here on foreign soil, we have *just a temporary visa!* Our homeland is God's kingdom, and that's where our heart and loyalty ought to lie.

Then, as ambassadors for Christ, there is a certain risk involved living here. Do you remember the tragic slaying of the U.S. Ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens, in Benghazi, on September 11th, 2012? Most ambassadors serve in friendly countries; but some are in more hostile places. Every once in a while a U.S. ambassador is taken captive or murdered. Jesus is very clear that there is a risk in following Him: we might suffer, or we may be persecuted.

He was open and honest about this reality: “Remember...servants are not greater than their master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also” (John 15:20). The Apostle Paul, who went to jail a number of times because he was a Christian, spoke of himself as “an *ambassador* in chains” (Ephesians 6:20).

Not everybody wants Jesus! He stands as an affront to those who want to live a selfish or perverted life! And because we should represent what is right and clean and good, we shouldn't expect to be well liked and accepted by everyone! There are many places in the world where to say you're a Christian puts you at risk for your life! This is not so in the U.S., but our culture is becoming increasingly hostile towards the Church and Christianity. Our “suffering” may simply mean being excluded from certain groups or events, or called unkind names, or laughed at because we choose not to do what some of the ungodly people around us are doing!

Ambassadors sometimes suffer because of the country they represent! Jesus had these words for those who take heat because of Him: "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you"(Matthew 5:10-12).

One more thing, as ambassadors for Christ, we are here on a very important mission!

Ambassadors are not appointed to a country just to get rich, or to tour the country like they are on a vacation, or to just loaf in the U.S. embassy! There's work to do!

What's our job and task as ambassadors for Christ? 2 Corinthians 5:20 tells us: “We are ambassadors for Christ. God making his appeal through us.” What is it that God is appealing to others through us? *Be reconciled!* 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 says, "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 people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." God has entrusted to us the message and ministry of reconciliation!

One of the basic needs of every person is the need to be reconciled with God. To “reconcile” means to “make friends again” “to bring together two conflicting parties”. For example, family members quarrel. There's a rift. But they talk it through and reach a mutual understanding. Two friends have a fight and don't talk to each other. But they settle their differences, and are on friendly terms again. This is reconciliation.

The Bible says that by nature we are separated from God, enemies of God. This enmity between God and us is not because of anything *God* did, but what *we* have done! We are alienated from our Creator because of our sins and our rebellion against God and His will. Noted Bible scholar and commentator William Barclay wrote: “The New Testament never speaks of God being reconciled to (people), but always of (people) being reconciled to God... the whole process of

salvation takes its beginning from God...it is not that God is estranged from (humans) but (we humans are) estranged from God. It is not God who erected the barriers, but (us)...God's message...is an appeal from a loving Father to erring and wandering and estranged children to come home where love is waiting for them."

There is this awesome, profound phrase in this section of Scripture: "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ..." (2 Corinthians 5:19). In Jesus' life, death and resurrection, God was paying the price for our sins and overcoming the distance and enmity between us. We can be on friendly terms with God and part of His family.

Until we trust Christ to make this happen and commit our lives to Him, we are isolated and separated from God, no matter how religious or good we may be. Paul pleads: "We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20. Maybe you need this yourself!

Once we turn to Christ and are reconciled to God, then God says, "Ok, now I'm trusting *you* with this message of reconciliation. You're my ambassador – get the message out!"

How do we do this? Well, there are as many different ways as there are people and their needs! It may mean quietly and faithfully doing what's right when others around us are into all sorts of questionable behaviors. It might mean sharing with a non-Christian going through a rough time how God helped you get through a difficult time in your life, or sharing with someone who's lost hope how you've found purpose and hope with Christ in your life. Getting the message of reconciliation with God out to the world may involve embodying God's gracious love and acceptance to someone in jail, or a lonely person in a nursing home, or a teenager acting out and angry at the world. It could be humbly sharing with someone who's not a Christian what you believe about God or Jesus or the Bible.

"We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). If the President of the United States called you and asked you to be a U.S. ambassador to a foreign country, you'd consider it quite honor, wouldn't you? There is an even higher honor: that is to be an ambassador for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in a country that is not our homeland!

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