

# Ambassadors for Christ

**We are Christ's Ambassadors**

**2 Corinthians 5:20**



**Tabernacle Baptist Church, Penarth**  
**4 studies for Small Groups**



# Ambassadors for Christ

## 4 Studies for Small Groups

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**‘AN AMBASSADOR IS AT ONCE a MESSENGER and a REPRESENTATIVE. HE DOES NOT SPEAK IN HIS OWN NAME. HE DOES NOT act ON HIS OWN AUTHORITY. WHAT HE COMMUNICATES IS NOT HIS OWN OPINIONS OR DEMANDS, BUT SIMPLY WHAT HE HAS BEEN TOLD OR COMMANDED TO say.**

**BUT at THE SAME TIME HE SPEAKS *WITH* AUTHORITY, IN THIS CASE THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST HIMSELF.’**

**(TYNDALE NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES, 2 CORINTHIANS)**

# Introduction

Before Roger left for Cyprus he asked us to get together some small group notes to take us up to Easter. He has been working on a series to take us through from Easter to the summer break.

The original idea was that we would work through Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians. But we've now only got 4 weeks to go before Easter and the first booklet only took us to the end of chapter 5 out of 13 chapters. We can't finish 2 Corinthians in the time still available. So, just like Paul in the passage we looked at a few weeks ago, a change of plans is called for.

The first thought I shared with the co-writers was that it might be possible to select a few passages from the later chapters in 2 Corinthians, and just deal with them. But on reflection it didn't seem right for us to be the arbiters of what to leave out from God's word if the objective was to study the whole book.

When it's unclear how to go forward it's good to ask the question 'Where has God brought us so far?' The answer is the end of chapter 5. Perhaps we should be pausing to see if there is something in those final verses for us to contemplate and leaving the rest of Paul's letter for another time.

Paul's challenge to us at the end of chapter 5 is that we are to be 'ambassadors for Christ'. So in these few weeks left before Easter we're going to consider what that means for us, and what kind of challenge it is for us. What aspects of being an ambassador do we need to apply to ourselves in our service for our Saviour?

God willing we'll have a better idea by the time we get to Easter.

Cedric Longville

March 2017

# Study 1:

## Helping the citizens of Heaven

Helping fellow citizens may not be the most important task of an ambassador, but it's a role that's given some prominences whenever an ambassador's responsibilities are listed.

As an officer of the foreign service an ambassador is expected to protect the citizens of his home country in the host country. He or she may need to make special arrangements in cases of civil unrest, or be called upon to help a fellow national who has been arrested or imprisoned. The ambassador's staff will help find interpreters and legal support. And at the other end of the scale, the ambassador's staff can issue emergency travel documents if someone has lost their passport!

Our role as ambassadors for Christ involves helping and supporting other Christians, our fellow citizens of heaven.

- ✘ Read the following passage from chapter 6 of Paul's letter to the Galatians. How many aspects of this ambassadorial role can you identify?

Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ. If you think you are too important to help someone, you are only fooling yourself. You are not that important. Pay careful attention to your own work, for then you will get the satisfaction of a job well done, and you won't need to compare yourself to anyone else. For we are each responsible for our own conduct. So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith. **Galatians 6: 2-10. NLT**

- ✘ The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has issued a guide outlining the help that the ambassador and his staff can provide to British citizens abroad. It includes two lists. One list is headed 'Where we can help'. Another is headed 'Where we cannot help'. Should we as Christian ambassadors have two lists like that? What would you put in those lists?
- ✘ A pastor in another church told a fellow Christian 'I've helped you through this lots of times. I'll help you one more time. After that you're on your own.' Can you think of any circumstances in which a Christian ambassador may be right to say that?
- ✘ How would you keep in balance these two quotes from our Galatians passage?

*Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ.*

*For we are each responsible for our own conduct.*

In the list of matters where the British ambassador and his staff cannot help is the statement 'we are not funded to give financial help'. As Christian ambassadors we look at things differently.

- ✘ Read the following passage from chapter 9 of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. What are the important pointers to the way in which we should approach supporting fellow Christians who are in need?

*Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves a person who gives cheerfully. And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. As the Scriptures say, "They share freely and give generously to the poor. Their good deeds will be remembered forever."*

For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you. Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. So two good things will result from this ministry of giving—the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God. As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God. For your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. **2 Corinthians 9: 6-13 NLT**

### **Going deeper**

A country's ambassador has a duty to help his or her fellow citizens; and we have a calling to help and support our fellow Christians. Are these responsibilities similar, or are they different in some important respects? After talking about this in your group, have a look at 1 John, 4: 7-12.

# Study 2:

## Working for Peace

One of the most important roles of an ambassador is to work for peace in the country where he or she is stationed. The task can involve working to defeat international terrorism, uncovering the drug trade, and preventing human trafficking. Of course these activities are not the sole responsibility of an ambassador, but whenever possible the ambassador and his staff will seek to complement the work of others in these fields.

As Christian ambassadors we also have a responsibility to work with others for peace and help to defeat evil in this world, this 'foreign land', in which God has placed us as his ambassadors. Many Christian organisations such as Tear Fund, Hope for Justice, Christian Aid, and Christians Against Poverty are involved in this multi-dimensional task.

- ✘ Have a look at this selection of verses and discuss how we should respond to them.

*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.*

**James 2:14-17 NRSV**

*'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour'.* **Luke 4:18-19 NRSV**



Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." **Matthew 25:37-40 NRSV**

In reply [John the Baptist] said to them, 'Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.' **Luke 3:11 NRSV**

How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? **1 John 3:17 NRSV**

They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do. **Galatians 2:10 NRSV**

The US ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens, worked for peace. He helped the Libyans rebuild their country when the Gaddafi regime came to an end. The White House said "he worked tirelessly to support the young democracy, and was a role model to all who worked with him". He was killed in Benghazi, the city he helped to save.

- ✠ As ambassadors of the Lord Jesus we may not be called upon to put our lives on the line, but how do we match up to the challenge of this verse from Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 12?

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. **Romans 12:1**

## Going deeper

Something we need to recognise is that when we follow the scriptural exhortation to feed the poor and help the captives, it is a calling we share with government and secular organisations. Our contribution is vital but it is not unique. When it comes to preaching God's Good News we, the Christian community, are on our own. If we don't do it, no one else will.

- ✘ How can we get the balance right between working for God in fields that we share with secular organisations, and working for God in fields where we're on our own?
- ✘ A local preacher (not from Tabs!) was heard to say 'the social gospel is a mistake'. Was he right? If so, why? If not, why not?

## Going deeper

We haven't included the rest of Jesus' words in chapter 25 of Matthew (verses 41 to 46). They are some of the harshest words that Jesus spoke. What do you make of them?

There is need all around us, both visible and hidden. Ask God to help us to retain the sensitivities displayed by 'the righteous'.

# Study 3:

## When War Breaks Out

At 11.15 am on 3rd September 1939, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain made the following broadcast to the nation:

“I am speaking to you from the Cabinet Room in 10 Downing Street. This morning the British Ambassador in Berlin handed the German Government a final Note stating that, unless we heard from them by 11 o'clock that they were prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us.

I have to tell you now that no such undertaking has been received, and that consequently this country is at war with Germany.”

Imagine being that ambassador! What an awesome responsibility to have to tell Adolph Hitler that Britain was about to declare war on his regime. The name of the ambassador was Nevile Henderson, and shortly after he delivered the note he and his staff were arrested by the Gestapo as enemy aliens. They were allowed to return to Britain a few days later.

In the second study we considered how we could work for peace in this world by offering up ourselves as living sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1). But there is another side to the picture. We are at war with the dark spiritual forces of this world.

Have a look at the following passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that

you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

### **Ephesians 6: 11-20 ESV**

- ✘ Unlike the British Ambassador to Hitler's Germany Paul tells us we are not fighting against 'flesh and blood'. How does that make our fight different?
- ✘ But we are fighting 'the spiritual forces of evil'. How does that make our fight different?
- ✘ What would you say is the greatest comfort we have in the fight against 'the spiritual forces of evil'? After considering this have a look at Ephesians 1: 16-21 and Romans 8:37-39.
- ✘ Make a list of your spiritual armour. Have you got all the equipment?
- ✘ Paul describes his condition in prison (probably in Rome) as being an 'ambassador in chains'. How would you explain what he meant by that? Did he just mean the chains on his hands and feet?

### **Going deeper**

There are many Christians today who have been imprisoned for their faith. Have a look at the website [opendoorsuk.org](http://opendoorsuk.org) and pray for a particular situation the Lord lays on your heart. Pray for their freedom and that while awaiting release they will have the courage and the opportunity to be 'ambassadors in chains'.

## Study 4:

# The Ministry of Reconciliation

Therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. The old has passed away: behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. **2 Corinthians 5:17-20 ESV**

On a bookshelf at home is a small piece of concrete. It's only about 6 centimetres long and it's got a patch of white paint on one side. It's a rather special possession of mine because it used to be part of the Berlin Wall, that infamous stone and concrete barrier erected by the East German regime to stop its people from escaping to the West. For nearly 30 years anyone trying to climb the wall would be shot by the border guards. Hundreds died.

Many of us will remember the outburst of rejoicing in November 1989 as images appeared on TV screens of people taking pickaxes to the hated wall and helping others to climb over it. The repressive East German regime was on the point of total collapse. A colleague of mine was so excited that she jumped on a plane to Berlin to join the celebrations, returning home with some pieces of the wall, one of which she kindly gave to me.

Looking back we might wonder why it took so long for East Germany to collapse. It was the time of the Cold War and the opportunities for meaningful contact between the two Germanies were very restricted. They never exchanged ambassadors. There was no one of that rank to help bring about a reconciliation.

And the Bible makes clear that there is no one tasked with bringing God's message of reconciliation to a fallen world, apart from us—his disciples. We are Christ's ambassadors, and our Lord makes his appeal through us!

- ✘ How would you describe the ‘message of reconciliation’? What are the main points?
- ✘ How would you convey the message of reconciliation to:
  - a child?
  - a teenager?
  - a student?
  - a football fan?
  - a prisoner?
  - a politician?
  - a war veteran?
- ✘ How would your message be different for each one? What parts of the message would be the same for all of them?

Our scripture passage reminds us that the first priority is to take that message of reconciliation to ourselves. We take the message to our own hearts when we confess Jesus as our risen Lord, and trust in his dying for us on the cross for the gift of eternal life. But Paul was addressing the Christians in Corinth when he implored them ‘be reconciled to God’.

- ✘ Why did Paul need to give that message to people who were already Christians? After considering this have a look at Psalm 51:12-13, Jeremiah 15:19 and 2 Chronicles 7:14.

The Tyndale New Testament Commentary includes this quote:

**‘AMBASSADORS ENGAGED UPON HUMAN AFFAIRS ARE CHOSEN ESPECIALLY FOR THEIR tact, THEIR DIGNITY AND THEIR COURTESY, AND BECAUSE THEY ARE GIFTED WITH PERSUASIVE POWERS. THE AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST SHOULD SHOW THE SAME CHARACTERISTICS. THEY MUST NEVER BLUDGEON PEOPLE INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD, BUT MUST SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE, JUST BECAUSE IT IS A GOSPEL OF DIVINE LOVE THAT THEY ARE COMMISSIONED TO PROCLAIM. IT IS SURELY SIGNIFICANT THAT PAUL, PERHAPS THE GREATEST OF ALL AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST, APPEALS TO HIS READERS ‘BY THE MEEKNESS AND GENTLENESS OF CHRIST’ (2 CORINTHIANS 10:1).**

- ✘ What different aspects of being an ambassador are identified in that quote, and also the quote on the contents page?

- ✘ As we finish this short series on being an ambassador for Christ, how would you sum up your role?

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