

Foreigners in this World

Are we too much at home?

by Terry Kaufman



We are not here as a citizen, nor as a tourist, but as a diplomatic messenger for Christ.

If, as outspoken UK politician Tony Benn has suggested, “All war represents a failure of diplomacy,” then a cynic might suggest that world diplomacy is completely ineffective. On the other hand, it may be true that, were it not for the work of diplomats, our world would be suffering even more from the ravages of war, than it presently is. Of course, not all diplomacy operates on the world stage. Diplomacy is a skill that each and every person must learn and practice in order to function effectively in relationship with others in our world. We are a broken people in a broken world, resulting in the need for diplomacy in almost every relationship we encounter. So we are all diplomats.

But within the world of diplomacy, there are some callings of a higher nature. An Ambassador may be defined as a “diplomatic official of the highest rank, sent by one country to another as its representative who has been given authority to communicate or to act on behalf

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of a ruler.” As Christians we are called not simply to be diplomats, but to be Ambassadors. Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthian church, said,

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is


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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.” (2 Cor. 5:17-21, NIV)

That is a serious calling and certainly worthy of further consideration regarding the implications of such a calling. It may, for example, seem extremely obvious that an ambassador is called to serve in a foreign land, yet that most fundamental of truths is worthy of note. Ambassadors do not serve in their home land. The same can then be said of Christians who are also called to serve in a foreign place. Thus, the worldly view of life, the typical “secular worldview” if you will, should be more foreign than native to us for we are foreigners in the world. James Reston once said “This is the devilish thing about foreign affairs: they are foreign and will not always conform to our whims.” 1 Peter 2:11 says that we are aliens and strangers in the world. We are called to serve in a foreign land!

Of course, acknowledging this fact raises further and somewhat provocative questions, “Are we too much at home in this world? Do we believe (or do we act like) this world is our home? Or do we act as if we have dual citizenship?” Yet spiritual dual citizenship does not exist. You are either a citizen of the world, or a foreigner. A true ambassador of Christ can only be a foreigner in this world.

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A second observation is that a foreign ambassador is sent by a higher authority. In verse 18, Paul

wrote that it was God Himself who gave us this responsibility, a responsibility for which we will be accountable. Our tasks, as ambassadors, are not a matter of personal choice. We have been called, and we will have to answer for that call.

And with that call, comes authority. God has given us authority to act on His behalf. Matt. 16:19 is a powerful verse: “*Whatever we, the church, the body of Christ, bind on earth will be bound in heaven, whatever we loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*” We are not serving in a foreign land empty handed. We have been given a ministry by Jesus Christ and also given authority to carry out that ministry. That is a fact that is both encouraging and frightening at the same time.

We confuse God's message to the citizens of heaven with the message to the citizens of this world.

Paul also reminds us of the nature of an ambassador's task—that we are called primarily to represent and communicate. Verse 20 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.*” God makes his appeal through us, and that appeal is made as we live godly lives, godly lives that are defined by God's rules, not ours. This means that, the picture that the world has of Christ, it will have received from His representatives.

But what is the message that we are to communicate? What appeal is to be made through us? Ambassadors often have to make appeals that are difficult—appealing for human rights where there is little appetite for it, appealing for moderation where extremism rules. But what of our appeal? Is it an appeal of such a controversial nature that we share it with fear and trembling? Verses 18 and 19 articulate what that “appeal” is.

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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.”

While, on certain levels, this is a controversial appeal, it is truly not such a painful message to deliver. Why then do we, too often, cower in our delivery of this message? God has reconciled Himself to us by NOT counting men's sins against them because of the work of Jesus Christ. In Jesus, we have become righteousness. That is the message that God has asked us to give to this world, this foreign land.

Why is it then that we often struggle to deliver the message when it is such a good message? I wonder if sometimes we confuse God's message to the citizens of heaven with the message to the citizens of this world, and then, we deliver the wrong one to the citizens of this world. The message for citizens of heaven is one of obedience and service (among other things), but the message for foreigners is one of reconciliation. Foreigners should not be expected to live as citizens until they actually have been reconciled into citizenship in the kingdom of heaven.

Finally, we are called to remember that an ambassador is, by definition, diplomatic. In verse 13, Paul shares that while, on the one hand, he is crazy about God and crazy for God, he is still controlled and sensible for the sake of those who he is reaching out to. Paul had a tremendous enthusiasm for God, so much so that it could appear to be insanity to some; yet he contained it, so as to be heard by all. We are ambassadors, and ambassadors measure their words and actions carefully, in order to be heard in the land they serve in. This is part of what I believe Paul is saying. We should be so excited about God that we can barely control ourselves, but we contain it so that the message of reconciliation is heard.

We are ambassadors, diplomats of a high order. We are not here as citizens of this world nor as tourists in a foreign land, but as messengers for Christ, servants of the King. That is not an option for us, we have been given this assignment by God, but He is faithful to equip us for that which He has called us to. Of course, we must be sure that we deliver the right message, the message of reconciliation.

Paul leaves no room for a question about whether or not we are called to this office. The only question that remains is,

*“What appeal is being made through your life?”
Welcome to the foreign land Ambassadors! f*