

Food for Thought--Ambassadors for Christ

2 Corinthians compares our role in the world to that of skilled and sincere ambassadors whose job is to draw people to God, something it calls the "ministry of reconciliation." It is a beautiful passage, and it is one that deserves pause and thought. What is the assignment, the work, of an ambassador? What do good ambassadors do in order to do this job well? And are we actually doing the work of a good ambassador?

One thing that ambassadors (and their embassies) can provide is a refuge for those who are in danger. Do we do this? Are we a refuge for people? Can people come to us with their troubles and find us someone safe to talk to, someone who will listen and care, someone who will offer help?

Ambassadors are probably above all to do their best to create and/or sustain peace and a good relationship wherever possible between their own country and the host country. They are to find common ground between their country and the host country and to use that as a starting point for a good relationship. And they are to do their best to explain their government's messages and positions in as careful and gracious a way as possible.

To do this job well, an ambassador has to read and learn about the people of the host country, their history and their culture, and to learn their language. This takes time and effort. Do we take time to learn the "language" of those around us? Good ambassadors try to understand how things look through the eyes of the people of the host country. Are we willing to make this effort? Are we willing to make the effort to think about how others see life and find ways to communicate with them in ways they can understand? A good ambassador also keeps an eye out for good things about the host country's people and culture and compliments them on the things they do well, the things that are admirable about them. This is important because it signals to the host country that we do pay attention to them and see something good about them (even if we also see things that are not good), and doing that provides starting points for dialog—good things both our culture and theirs respect or applaud or agree on. It is a first paving stone in our efforts to connect with the host country and communicate the messages and worldview of our own country.

Being an ambassador can be risky, especially in countries which are unstable or countries where feeling towards the ambassador's home country are very negative. An ambassador can be killed. Being an ambassador for Christ also carries risks. We risk the pain felt at the times when people reject us or our Lord even after the investment of much time and caring. Those who try to communicate the love of Christ in dangerous

parts of the world put themselves at far greater risk—the risk of torture and death. These are also the prices Jesus paid, the ultimate reconciler of man to God.

But the rewards of being an ambassador for Christ are also great—we learn a great deal (a good reward), we come to know and care about many people (an even better reward), we have joy when we can tell others are feeling the encouragement or love we are trying to show them, and we rejoice greatly when someone becomes reconciled to God, the goal of our ambassadorship. And there is, finally, the joy of doing the job the Lord has given us.