

Living as ambassadors for Christ

30 May 2009 – Catherine Barker

DL Moody, the American evangelist, said, "The Bible wasn't given to increase our knowledge but to change our lives."

As I pour out the way in which the Bible has transformed my thinking in a particular area I pray that anything of the flesh will fall away leaving behind scriptural truths. My prayer is that these truths may enlighten you as they have me.

Firstly, I would like to explain how this message came about. Some time ago I heard a number of non Christian friends and colleagues all making the same kind of observations in different ways; each of them commented about the unfavourable behaviour of Christians they knew whose words or actions seemed opposed to their faith. Their comments really impacted me as I realised how much as Christians we are being observed, and held accountable, by our non-Christian friends, family, neighbours etc. As these thoughts were circling in my head the following scripture came to mind:

'Now then, **we are ambassadors for Christ**' (2 Corinthians 5:20)

At the same time I felt a 'seed' drop into my spirit and I knew God was revealing something to me. When I got home I sat with pen and paper and asked Him to speak. As I did this, God brought into sharp focus in my mind the awesome privilege and responsibility we have as we represent Christ to a watching world and that's what I would like to share through this letter.

First, let's take a look at the role of an ambassador so that we can grasp more about this calling we have. The dictionary gives the following definitions of ambassador:

1. *a diplomatic official of the highest rank, **sent by one sovereign** or state to another as its **resident representative** (Online Dictionary)*

Since the Bible tells us we are Christ's ambassadors it is Jesus Himself who sends us; He is Sovereign over our world, our nation, our church and our lives. We are to be His representatives within our circle of influence.

2. *an important official who lives in a foreign country to represent his or her own country there, and who is **officially accepted in this position** by that country (Cambridge Dictionary)*

The Bible instructs us to be in the world, not of it. Even though most of us will not be called to be ambassadors abroad we are all Christ's ambassadors within our circle of influence. Often our family, friends, neighbours and colleagues accept who we are in Christ, even if they don't yet understand what that means. Sometimes there is hostility towards our faith but even then it is

usually acknowledged that we have a faith, even if it's not accepted, so we have a *huge* responsibility to Christ to live a life worthy of that calling. Our lives and our lifestyles are a living testimony to the watching world.

So what does Scripture say about what we are to do to live out this calling as ambassadors for Christ?

[**2 Corinthians 5:20**](#) (NIV)

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.

[**2 Corinthians 5:20**](#) (New Living Translation)

So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"

So, we are to *implore* others to come into relationship with Christ. We can do that through words ie evangelism and through living out our faith in a daily walk with Christ. The Bible tells us we are to be doers of the Word, not simply hearers of it (James 1:22). If we live out the peace we have in Him, if that shines through when we're under pressure, and if we give God the glory when people comment on it this can be our plea to, "Come back to God!"

[**2 Corinthians 5:20**](#) (The Message)

God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. We're Christ's representatives. *God uses us to persuade* men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you.

To *give* something is a considered, conscious action. It's a choice God has made. This task hasn't fallen into our laps by chance. God *chose* to put that calling on our lives. It's up to us to *choose* to what degree we live out that calling. He doesn't draw men, women or children to Himself by force, He uses us to persuade and then He waters the seed. His word tells us in Isaiah 55:11

So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.

So, if we live out our calling God will do the rest, He'll take responsibility for the outcome. This is an awesome privilege and responsibility and He's handed to us!

If our lives and our lifestyles are a living testimony to the watching world then what are the consequences of that? The consequences are that even seemingly small things that we say, do or don't do speak volumes to the unchurched, watching world and those who don't yet know Christ.

These things can speak volumes in such a way as to advance or hinder the Kingdom, depending on the outcome of our actions and lifestyle.

An ambassador to a country understands the culture of the country he is living in. He spends time learning about that culture and how it differs from his own. If he is brash and insensitive to those around him, or 'rubbishes' the culture of those in the country he's living in he won't be welcome and people won't listen to him. BUT that doesn't mean he has to lose his distinctiveness and blend in. So, we can live out our distinctiveness as followers of Christ within our circle of influence BUT we have to walk a fine line between not condoning the choices of others, which may be contrary to the Word of God, and not rubbishing the choices of our culture which may close ears to the testimony we are called to share through word and deed.

The British Ambassador to Nepal



Local people in Nepal

(Except the one 2nd from left!)



Here's an example; we can see straight away in these pictures an example of how the lifestyle of two cultures can be so different. The ambassador couldn't just walk in to this new place and tell the people that they should be doing things his way without an understanding of the culture and how it reached the point it's at. Unlike this example, we are outwardly the same as those around us, yet if we have accepted Christ as our Lord and Saviour we are inwardly totally different. Consequently to be distinctive in our communities as followers of Christ, whilst at the same time being a living testimony, we should attempt to understand how our culture has reached the point it has. Although we must not generalize we can attempt to understand people's motivations for their actions.

To illustrate this let's take a look at a couple of our basic human needs.

- A need for love
 - Each of us has a need to give and receive love. God's gifts to us include family, marriage, friendships, fellowship etc but ultimately love that satisfies is found in Him. Many people are looking for love in the wrong places. Looking in the wrong places leads to dissatisfaction. We have a message to bring, God's love brings freedom!
- A need to find purpose
 - In our current economic climate many people are experiencing great pressure. Jobs are being lost; families are under financial and emotional pressure. There is

a huge sense of loss of purpose for many people and with this can come a fear for the future.

- We are not immune to these hardships but the Bible says that God has a plan to prosper us and not to harm us, to give us a hope and a future (Jer 29:11) We can lean on Him in confidence that He'll reveal His purposes to us whatever our circumstances. We have a message to bring, God's love brings hope!

An understanding of our culture will equip us with empathy and compassion as we evangelise and live out our faith within our communities and circles of influence; without it we could become judgmental.

So if we are to walk in our calling as ambassadors of Christ then **how** do we do it? We know that Christ makes provision for everything he accomplishes in us and through us. His word tells us that,

'We can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like Him.'

2 Cor 3:18 (TLB)

This scripture has really challenged me; do I reflect His glory? Do we reflect the Christ we know and love to the watching world? I am sad to say that over the years I have known more than a few folk who have been hindered in their search for Christ because of what they perceive as hypocrisy from Christians; Christ's representatives on earth. Some of those stories, one very recently, have grieved me greatly so how much more do they grieve the Holy Spirit? As I've been pondering on this scripture I've felt God enlighten me as I've been walking in His creation. I've been looking at reflections in ponds, rivers, lakes and reservoirs and I feel that some of the observations I've made have spiritual parallels. Firstly, I noticed that the brighter the sunlight the sharper the reflection. Equally, the more time we spend in the 'Son light', reading God's word, communicating with Him, listening to Him through prayer and quiet times, being accountable within the Body of Christ, the more sharply we reflect His glory. Secondly, I noticed that the clearer the water the sharper the reflection. Again there is a parallel. If we allow Holy Spirit in us to become polluted then our reflection of Jesus will be murky. We need to be mindful of the choices we make, how we spend our time and money, what we look at. Allowing inappropriate material in through the eye gate, or by spending too much time reading literature other than the Bible will affect the sharpness of our reflection. There is plenty of sound Christian literature out there which can challenge, inspire and teach us but even reading too much of that can be unproductive since it is diluted, unlike Scripture which is God breathed. I would suggest that reflecting Christ's glory starts with an inward process which then becomes an outward manifestation. It *starts* with intimacy with God. It *becomes* about our character, who we are when no-one is looking. Since the Bible tells us we were living by our sinful nature when Christ saved us the process of being transformed into Christ likeness is ongoing. Our character can be dramatically transformed after an encounter with Jesus but often it is a gentle, gradual transformation. One of the numerous, beautiful attributes of God is His faithfulness. We're never

too young or too old for Him to mould us, to transform our character. If we are willing to submit to His perfect will and authority then being transformed into Christ likeness is an ongoing process which won't be complete until we meet Him face to face.

So, if we are called to be ambassadors who reflect Christ to a watching world does that mean we must be perfect? Thankfully not! We are called to be Christ like but only Christ is perfect. So then, what do we do if we mess up and realize we have not behaved in a manner fitting to our calling? We need humility – if we are walking in submission to God we will quickly discern when we are out of step; out of love for Him we will want to put things right through repentance and possibly action. Firstly, we might look at why we acted in the way we did. If we don't know then we can ask for wisdom, the Bible says,

'If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.' (James 1:5)

Are we exhausted, at the end of ourselves and needing refreshment from Holy Spirit? Are we hurting, grieving and feeling lost or empty? We can get alone with God and cry out to Him through the pain, we can ask for prayer from our leaders or our friends, we can acknowledge that we're struggling and ask for help. Asking for help can feel like a weakness but if we're walking in humility then it's a strength; acknowledging our limits and by God's grace accepting support from those He has put around us is a strength. Or did we react because something pressed on an unhealed wound? We have the full armour of God available to us (Ephesians 6) but just as a soldier can have a chink in his armour where enemy arrows could penetrate so we also can have chinks in our armour from unhealed hurts inflicted in our past. Enemy arrows can stab at these unhealed hurts and we can react out of pain. If Holy Spirit reveals this to us then Jesus, our Healer, Jehovah Rophe, will restore us to a place of wholeness in time, if we are willing to submit to His healing touch. If we have behaved inappropriately we should repent before God, perhaps we also need to offer a sorry to others, perhaps there are other things we need to do to restore the situation. If we're acting with integrity then we have nothing to fear because we've got nothing to hide.

Finally, if the Bible is to transform our thinking, transform our behaviour and ultimately transform our lives then we must accept its authority and apply it to our daily walk in our homes, our streets, our schools, colleges, work places, when driving our cars, when trying to find a car parking space, wherever we go! God, by His grace, has ordained it that we are vessels through which He will accomplish His divine purposes on earth. He equips us for this calling; the calling is for *all* of us, not just for some of us. We are never too young, too old, too broken, too unworthy to live out the calling. And so I leave you with a question – am I, are you, are *we* living a life worthy of our calling as ambassadors for Christ?