



God's Diplomatic Corps

Topic

Ambassadors for Christ

Theme

Believers are ambassadors for Christ.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will exhibit excellence as an ambassador for Christ.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 7

Scripture Focus

2 Corinthians 5:16–6:10

Summary

This lesson focuses on the fact that believers are ambassadors for Christ, seeking to reach a lost world. The apostle Paul's life and ministry provided an excellent example of what it means to serve in God's diplomatic corps.

Outline

I. The Ambassador's Work (2 Cor. 5:16–6:2)

- A. Message (5:16, 17)
- B. Ministry (5:18–6:2)

II. The Ambassador's Example (2 Cor. 6:3–10)

- A. His blameless life (6:3)
- B. His hardships (6:4, 5)
- C. His spiritual qualities (6:6, 7)
- D. His consistency (6:8–10)

Memory Verse

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

GETTING STARTED

Use the following activities to spark your learners' interest in this week's lesson about exhibiting excellence as an ambassador for Christ.

Ambassador Selection

ASK: Suppose you were appointed as an ambassador of the United States. What country would you want to be appointed to? (Q1)

ASK: What are your reasons for picking that country? (Q2)

Ambassadorships are important appointments. Ambassadors represent their nation and sometimes are put in harm's way as a result. This lesson portrays all born-again people as ambassadors for Christ. Representing Christ to the lost is a privilege that doesn't belong to a select group of Christians; it is every Christian's privilege and responsibility. We ought to take it seriously and realize that sometimes it requires sacrifice.

Being an Ambassador

ASK: What does it take to be an ambassador? *Appointment by the head of the government; knowledge of one's country and leadership; knowledge of the customs and people of that country; people skills; a sterling reputation; willingness to represent the country while putting personal preferences and desires aside.*

Most of us would shudder at being appointed as an ambassador for the United States. That is a lot of pressure, and in some countries, there is a lot on the line. But we are ambassadors for Christ. The apostle Paul wrote the church at Corinth to remind them of that fact. We should take our ambassadorship for Christ just as seriously as we would an ambassadorship for the United States.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. The Ambassador's Work (2 Cor. 5:16–6:2)

A. Message (5:16, 17)

In 2 Corinthians 5:16 Paul declared, *Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh.* What did he mean? Did he mean we cannot identify people based on their physical appearance? No. Paul meant we do not evaluate people in the same way the world does. The world judges people by their clothes, by race, by wealth, by title. The world lives for itself and wants to be judged according to the flesh. Children of God are to no longer live for themselves (2 Cor. 5:15). God looks beyond the exterior and judges the heart. Paul followed God's pattern of estimating a person (5:12).

In the second part of verse 16 Paul stated, *Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.* As an unbeliever, all Paul knew

about Christ was what others had told him. To him, Jesus Christ was merely a man. After his conversion, Paul no longer believed Christ was just a man. Jesus was more than He had appeared to be. He is God incarnate, even though in the flesh He had appeared to be just another man.

TESTIMONY: How did your perspective of Christ change after you were saved?

Paul affirmed that every Christian is a new creation in Christ (5:17). Regeneration revolutionized Paul's thinking about Jesus Christ. Indeed, it revolutionized his whole life, as it does for us today. Believing sinners become *new* creatures in Christ. This message was particularly encouraging to the Corinthian believers, since many of them had led wicked lives up to the point of their salvation.

The Greek language had two words for *new*. One described something recently made—new in time, even though it was the same as previous models. The other word for *new* described something new in kind or quality, something of a different order. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul used the word that meant *new in kind or quality*, something of a different order.

CREATIVE THINKING: Ask the class to name a color that depicts the old unsaved life, then a color that depicts the new life in Christ. Also, ask the class to describe a nature scene that depicts the old life, then one that depicts the new.

The opportunity for new life was the message Paul carried as an ambassador for Christ. When he first went to Corinth, he shared the new life with a people who, though they were dead in their sins, were living it up. The message transformed their lives. It had transformed Paul's life too.

READ: 2 Timothy 1:9–12. **ASK:** What new direction did Paul's life take? What was he assured of? (Q3) *He became a preacher and an apostle. The keeping of his soul; eternal salvation.*

ASK: After you were born again, what changes did you notice in your attitudes? in your behavior? (Q4)

Though at salvation a believer begins a new life, he or she does not from that point on live a perfect life. The sanctification process continues throughout life.

READ: Galatians 5:19–23. **ASK:** Which sins listed in verses 19–21 do you see occasionally in the lives of Christians, perhaps in your own life? (Q5)

ASK: Which godly qualities listed in verses 22 and 23 do you see most prominently displayed in the lives of Christians? (Q6)

While sanctification continues, the believer can rest assured that his or her salvation is secure and that he or she is reconciled to God.

B. Ministry (5:18–6:2)

Because of Adam's sin, a schism, or separation, occurred between God and

people. People walked in a path of deliberate disobedience. Sin stood between God and humanity. Since God is holy, He could not look with favor upon sinful humanity. Every person lived as an enemy of God. But because of Christ's death, a great change took place. God reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:18). Christ died to pay in full the penalty for sin. Because of Calvary God can now be merciful to us. Christ's death was a propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:2).

God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself (2 Cor. 5:19). To reconcile means to bring two parties together. It means to mend broken relationships. When we were enemies of God, sin stood between us. But because Christ's death took care of our sin, God can now act with favor toward us. In the middle of verse 19 Paul declared that God does not impute our trespasses unto us. To impute something means to put it to our account. Because of sin, our account showed a great debt that had to be paid before we could be clear. Since Christ died to take away our sin (John 1:29), God no longer reckons it to be on our books.

PROBLEM SOLVING: Ask the class to decide possible terms of reconciliation in the following situations:

- **A Stormy Marriage.** Brianna complains that her husband, Kurt, spends practically no time with her. He works overtime, bowls evenings, or works out at the gym. When she confronted Kurt, he became angry and threatened to leave her.
- **A Lengthy Strike.** Employees at a machine shop have been on strike for six months over poor working conditions and low pay. Management admits that conditions and pay could be better but insists the employees' demands are too high.

ASK: What similarities and differences do you see between the terms of reconciliation for these crises and the terms of reconciliation between God and sinners? Does God need reconciliation to individuals, or do individuals need reconciliation to God? Explain. (Q7) *Individuals need reconciliation to God because they are the offenders.*

People need to know that Christ paid the penalty for sin. That is why God *hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation* (5:18). This is an important point, which Paul repeated in verse 19. It is with this ministry of reconciliation that we represent Christ, the King of Kings, to the world. Our ministry is to take the message, *Be ye reconciled to God* (5:20), to the lost.

ASK: How did Paul support the truth that salvation is initiated and completed by God (v. 18)? (Q8) *He used the phrase all things are of God, which leaves nothing for mankind to claim in the process of salvation. People did not come to God; God came to them with the offer of reconciliation.*

What made reconciliation to God possible? The fact that God made Jesus, the sinless Lamb of God, to be our sin offering. The guilt of our sin was placed on Jesus Christ. He was our substitute. He was our vicar. God imputed our sin to Christ's account. Conversely, we have been *made the righteousness of God in him* (5:21).

Christ's righteousness is imputed to our account. His right standing before God becomes our right standing. Our sins have been imputed to Christ. His righteousness has been imputed to us.

ASK: What three words would you use to best describe Christ's death on the cross? (Q9)

ASK: Is a Christian perfectly righteous in God's sight even when he doesn't feel righteous? Explain your answer. (Q10) *Yes. A Christian's righteousness in Christ never changes.*

READ: 2 Corinthians 5:18–21. **ASK:** What is involved in fulfilling our ambassadorship from Christ? (Q11) *Urging sinners to be reconciled to God and live in such a way that Christ is seen in us.*

ASK: How well do you think Christians generally are fulfilling this responsibility? (Q12)

RESOURCE: Display resource 7. Fill in the first box: Serve as a minister of reconciliation.

Ambassador Profile
Corinthians 5:16–6:10

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	5.			

Paul, Timothy, and Silvanus were Christ's ambassadors. Together they urged the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God in vain (2 Cor. 6:1). How could they receive it in vain? First, some say Paul was exhorting the Corinthians not to lose their salvation. But Scripture rules out this explanation (see, for example, 1 Peter 1:5 and Jude 24). Second, others claim it was an appeal not to have lives devoid of the fruit of good works. Third, others insist it was an appeal to the Corinthians not to turn their backs on the gospel of grace that Paul preached. This third explanation seems to fit the context.

Verse 2 does indeed speak of salvation, as Paul quoted Isaiah 49:8 in the first part of this verse. The second half is not a quotation but rather Paul's own comment. Right now is the perfect time for salvation. What better time could there be than right now?

II. The Ambassador's Example (2 Cor. 6:3–10)

Paul presented his ministry as an ambassador for Christ as an example for the Corinthians to follow (2 Cor. 6:3–10).

A. His blameless life (6:3)

Paul lived in such a way that he was not a stumbling block to others. His ministry was unblemished (6:3), and his life "approved" his ministry. His opponents therefore had no legitimate reason for attacking him or rejecting his ministry.

B. His hardships (6:4, 5)

In 2 Corinthians 6:4 and 5, Paul listed his hardships. *Patience* speaks of perseverance. Paul did not quit under pressure. The next nine hardships come in triplets. First come three trials: *afflictions* are troubles, *necessities* are hopeless

hardships, and *distresses* are tight spots with no way out. Next comes a triplet of sufferings: *stripes* are beatings with a whip, *imprisonments* speak of being thrown into jail, and *tumults* are riots, or periods of civil disorder. Last comes a trio of personal hardships: *labours* speak of wearying toil, of plain old hard work, *watchings* are periods of sleeplessness, and *fastings* are periods without food. The description *worn out, tired, and hungry* summarizes these last three trials.

READ: 2 Corinthians 6:4. **ASK:** Which should the life of an ambassador for Christ reflect: a tourist on vacation or a soldier on a tour of duty? Explain. (Q13) *A soldier on a tour of duty. Ambassadors for Christ are not enlisted so they can enjoy the scenery and have a good time.*

God does not save us to a life of pampering and ease. We are ambassadors in the middle of a hostile war zone. Paul recognized that fact. He responded by patiently following God’s leading even though it meant troubles, hardships, and distresses.

READ: 2 Corinthians 6:5. **ASK:** Who inflicted Paul’s stripes, imprisonments, and tumults? (Q14) *Those who opposed him.*

ASK: How should an ambassador for Christ expect to be received by a lost world? (Q15) *Ambassadors for Christ should expect to be rejected and persecuted by the world.*

Paul submissively followed God’s lead in going to a lost world even though the world hated him and often beat him for Whom he represented as an ambassador.

RESOURCE: Display resource 7. Fill in the second box: Responds to God’s leading.

READ: 2 Corinthians 6:5. **ASK:** Who instigated Paul’s *labours, watchings* (sleeplessness), and *fastings*? (Q16) *Paul.*

ASK: How seriously should ambassadors for Christ take their jobs? Explain. (Q17) *Ambassadors for Christ should see their calling as life-encompassing.*

Though Paul suffered at the hands of those he was trying to reach, he inflicted himself with labors, sleeplessness, and fasting. Obviously he took his ministry as an ambassador for Christ quite seriously.

RESOURCE: Display resource 7. Fill in the third box: Takes the job seriously.

C. His spiritual qualities (6:6, 7)

READ: 2 Corinthians 6:6, 7.

What characterized Paul during his labor as an ambassador? Did he complain, whine, or pine for another appointment? No. Paul was characterized by purity, spiritual wisdom, kindness, and long-suffering. He relied on the Spirit’s empowerment



Ambassador Profile
2 Corinthians 5:16–6:10

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Ambassador Profile
2 Corinthians 5:16–6:10

	1.	2.
	3.	4.
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to produce in him genuine love for others. He upheld the word of truth, relied on the power of God, and used the armor of righteousness. Even during difficult persecution, Paul remained an excellent example of an ambassador for Christ.

RESOURCE: Display resource 7. Fill in the fourth box: Live an exemplary life.

D. His consistency (6:8–10)

In verses 8–10 Paul gave nine pairs of contrasting circumstances in which he maintained a consistent testimony. He remained patient through all the circumstances—not an easy task, since he endured hardships and then was criticized by those who misunderstood his ministry.

RESOURCE: Display resource 7. Fill in the fifth box: Endures criticism patiently.

Paul excelled as an ambassador for Christ. He represented Jesus Christ well. He honored Christ by living uprightly and by sharing the gospel forthrightly. And when persecution and other hardships struck him, he did not quit. How well do we represent our Lord?

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Use the following activities to help the learners apply the truth that they are ambassadors for Christ.

Evaluation

ASK: Suppose you received an evaluation from God on your role as an ambassador for Christ. What would the evaluation say? What changes would God require? (Q18)

Encourage the learners to share how God pricked their hearts as they looked at Paul’s example.

Getting to Know the Locals

To be an ambassador for Christ, you must constantly build relationships with the *locals*.

ASK: What have you done recently to build relationships with the lost? (Q19)

ASK: What more can you do to build relationships with the lost? (Q20)

Summary and Memory Verses

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: By God’s grace I can exhibit excellence as Christ’s ambassador. Encourage your learners to memorize 2 Corinthians 5:20. Give them an opportunity to quote the verse in class next week.

Ambassador Profile
2 Corinthians 5:16–6:10

1.	2.
3.	4.
5.	

Waves of Grace

By God's grace I can ...	7.
1.	8.
2.	9.
3.	10.
4.	11.
5.	12.
6.	13.