



together” could be all those who teach the gospel (or the apostles specifically).

Clearly, the apostles had a special sense in which they represented Christ in ways that believers in general do not. If that is Paul’s meaning in 2

Cor 5:20 and Eph. 6:20 it is not a description that can be applied to all believers. To apply it to man-made organizations minimizes this special role. However, if Paul is not using it in its specialized sense, we must still recognize that Christians do not represent Christ to the world in the same way the apostles did. If we are in any way “ambassadors” it is only in the more general sense of messengers who allow our light to shine before men for the glory of God (Matt. 5:16). We cannot legislate, negotiate, or set the terms of that **“faith which was once for all delivered to the saints”** (Jude 3).



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4700 Andrews Ave.  
Amarillo TX 79106  
806-352-2809  
www.olsenpark.com

## Welcome Visitors

We are so glad that you joined us today.  
Please come again.

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ISSUE

13.4

BULLETIN OF  
THE OLSEN  
PARK CHURCH  
OF CHRIST

# Faithful Sayings

January 23  
2011

## Services

Sunday: 9:30 AM  
10:20 AM  
6:00 PM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

## Elders:

Pat Ledbetter  
Jeff Nunn  
Kyle Pope

## Deacons:

Dean Bowers  
Eddie Cook  
Bill Davis  
Steve Dixon  
Pat Goguen  
Jack Langley  
Neil Ledbetter  
Brady McAlister  
Walker McAnear  
Lance Purcell  
Rusty Scott

## Evangelists:

Kyle Pope  
Jason Garcia



## “Ambassadors for Christ”

By Kyle Pope

In Second Corinthians 5:20 Paul declares, **“we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God”** (NKJV). Paul uses a similar description of himself in Ephesians 6:20 when he says, **“I am an ambassador in chains.”** Within the religious world this term “ambassador” is applied to individuals and even man-made organizations that engage in benevolent or evangelistic works. Often, any who would bring religious teaching to others are described as “ambassadors for Christ.” Is that the sense in which Paul uses this word, or is there more that he teaches in describing himself as an “ambassador?”

The word translated “ambassador” is *presbeuo*, which is the verb form of the word *presbuteros* (the noun referring to an “elder”). It is literally “to be an

elder,” however it can clearly have a very special sense. In Thucydides’ *Peloponnesian War* different forms of the word were used numerous times for official representatives in war who alone had the power to negotiate terms of war and peace. Deissmann explains that *presbeuo* is, “The proper term in

the Greek East for the Emperor’s Legate” (*Light from the Ancient East*, p. 374). This is similar to the way our government appoints ambassadors. An ambassador acts as a special representative of the government. He or she acts for the government. An ambassador’s actions are officially recognized as the actions of the government itself. If this is the sense that Paul uses in 2 Cor. 5:20 he is not talking about a role that all believers can play. Only the apostles represented Christ in this way (Matt. 10:40). As those led directly by the Holy Spirit the “**apostles’ doctrine**” (Acts 2:42) was the “**doctrine of Christ**” (2 John 9). It is because of this that the church is said to be built “**on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone**” (Eph. 2:20).

The question is whether that is the only sense that *presbeuo* can have and if that is the only thing it can mean in 2 Cor. 5:20? In a second century text written by a Christian named Ignatius, he urged the church in Philadelphia to appoint a deacon so that he could “be sent as an ambassador of God” to the church in Antioch (*To the Philadelphians* 10.1; cf. *To the Smyrneans* 11.2). One of the earliest commentators to refer to 2 Cor. 5:20, Origen (ca. 185-254) understood “ambassadors” to include all those

who would teach the gospel (*Against Celsus* 8.1). These instances are significant because Greek was the native tongue of both Ignatius and Origen. In addition to this, when ancient translations rendered *presbeuo* they used words that had a rather broad meaning. The Peshitta (ca. 200s) used ‘yzgd’ a word meaning “ambassador; legate; representative,” but the Coptic (ca. 200s) used *faish* a word meaning “news-bearer, messenger.” The Gothic (ca. 300s) used *airinom* a word meaning “messenger,” but the Vulgate (ca. 400) used *legatio* meaning “embassy; member of an embassy; mission.” Even some of the earliest English translations did not use the more technical term “ambassadors” but rendered 2 Cor. 5:20 “messengers,” e.g. Tyndale (1526), Coverdale (1535), Great Bible (1539), and the Bishop’s Bible (1568).

*What does the context tell us about its meaning?* In 2 Cor. 5:20 when “we” is used earlier in the chapter it is talking about what is common to all believers: “**in this we groan**” (5:2); “**we who are in this tent**” (5:4); “**we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ**” (5:10). When that isn’t the case, Paul

uses it of himself—“**we do not commend ourselves again to you**” (5:12); “**if we are of sound mind it is for you**” (5:13). However, Paul begins the next chapter declaring, “**we then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain**” (6:1). *Who are these “workers together” who plead with the Corinthians?* If it is the apostles, then we would have to conclude that *presbeuo* has its special and official sense in this passage. Yet, the next identifier mentioned in the text is in 6:4 where he speaks simply of “**ministers of God.**” That could suggest that “workers



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