

## 2 Corinthians 6

Good morning and thank you for joining us. You have many choices of places to worship, and we're grateful you're here. We're continuing our VBV study of 2 Corinthians, so would you please turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 6?

Last week in our study we only studied the last 4 verses of chapter 5:18-21. But now our pace picks back up, and we'll study both chapters 6 and 7 this morning as they are so closely tied together.

The title of this morning's message is the Marks of the Ministry  
Let's pray

Last week we saw how each of us are ministers of reconciliation, and ambassadors for Christ. And verse 1 continues this thought...

**1 We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.** Pause here. Notice, we not only work for Jesus, but we work with Him. Jesus doesn't send us out on assignment, wishing us luck as we leave. Rather, moment by moment Jesus is with us as we talk with, share with, and love other people. This is why we can have confidence in telling others the good news-He's right there with us!

Many years ago as I mowed my lawn my son Caleb would be right there with me with one of those toy lawnmowers. **SHOW PIC** For the sake of pure efficiency, I should've sent him away because he would often get in the way. But as a dad it was so

wonderful for my child to work with me! Because I love my child, I want him to work with me! **CLOSE PIC**

See it isn't that God needed Paul, nor does God need any of us. God desires for us to be workers together with Him, and it's always for our good!

And we can't let the word "workers" pass us by. Never forget God created work. Adam had to tend the garden before sin ever entered the picture. God wants us to be workers together with Him. We need to be about our Father's business

Verse 1 continues...**also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.** God doesn't want us to receive His grace and then just shut down in a rapture ready position. Paul knew that God gives His grace, we work hard, and the work of God gets done.

And this is where we can struggle as Christians. Is God supposed to do the work or am I supposed to do the work? The answer is, "Yes!" God does it and we do it. Trust God, rely on Him, and then get to work and work as hard as we can for His glory! If we neglect our end of the partnership, God's grace doesn't accomplish all that it might thru us, and is therefore given in vain.

**2 For He says:**

**"In an acceptable time I have heard you,  
And in the day of salvation I have helped you."**[fn]

**Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."** Here Paul quotes Isaiah 49 as he implores the Corinthians to have a sense of urgency in their work for God.

You and I know that we have a limited time on this earth to work with God to share Jesus with this world. And as you look at our society today, the temptation we all face is to allow our lives to be consumed with self-focus, and endlessly pursue comfort and ease. But that's the opposite of what Jesus calls His disciples to do isn't it? **Luke 9:23 Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily,[fn] and follow Me.** Just as our savior did, our lives are to be focused on others.

**3 We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed.** Paul was bold, he wasn't afraid to speak the truth. But Paul was very careful to make sure that his style of ministry wouldn't needlessly offend someone. And Paul was willing to make significant sacrifices to ensure this didn't happen.

We learned back in 1 Corinthians 9 that he was willing to forego his salary as a minister of the gospel. We repeatedly see that Paul was willing to allow others to be more prominent. And of course Paul was willing to work hard and endure hardship.

By its very nature, the Gospel by itself is offensive. You and I shouldn't go out of our way to offend people unnecessarily.

Now verse 4 marks a bit of a transition as once again Paul spends time defending himself.

It's wisely been said, "A ministry that costs nothing accomplishes nothing." The Corinthians didn't realize all that Paul had gone

through physically, emotionally, and spiritually to bring them the Gospel.

So in the next few verses Paul details the price he has personally paid

**4 But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience,** Pause here. The ancient Greek word for patience is hupomone, which isn't just waiting like at the BMV, no it's active endurance.

**...4 in tribulations, in needs, in distresses,** As a co-worker with Jesus, Paul often found himself in incredibly difficult situations that caused him much fear and trembling.

**5 in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults,** Pause here. Stripes were the wounds on Paul's back from the whippings he endured.

Imprisonments speak of the frequent time Paul spent in jail, and tumults speak of violence from angry mobs. You can read Acts 14-19 and it gives many of these details, too numerous for us to go through this morning.

The rest of verse 5 is very interesting

**...5 in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings;** the last part of verse 5 describes Paul's self-inflicted hardships. No one made him work so hard, or have sleepless nights, or go without food so often. These were difficulties that Paul willingly chose to be a more effective co-worker with Jesus Christ.

This isn't the description you'll find of Christian ministry in any seminary's brochure. Of course most of us will never encounter extreme hardships like Paul faced, but every follower of Christ

must prepare themselves for both good and hard times. We need to endure, and the next few verses tell us how

6 by purity,  
by knowledge,  
by longsuffering,  
by kindness,  
by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, 7 by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, verses 8-10 Paul described some of the conditions under which he ministered and some of the methods he used

8 by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; 9 as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; 10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things. The contrasts in these verses give us an idea of the accusations that Paul's critics were throwing at him. It's always super painful when the people you love misunderstand or completely misconstrue your actions of love towards them. You can imagine how Paul's heart ached, and this is why he says in verses 11-13

11 O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open. 12 You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections. 13 Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open. What's Paul saying here? Well he has opened his heart and shared it with the Corinthians, and he's pleading with them to have the same self-searching honesty that he just displayed.

Yet what was holding them back from doing this? Some of the Corinthians were not open-hearted toward Paul because they were doing things that they knew were wrong.

14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? **SHOW PIC** unequally yoked together describes a plough pulled by two oxen. The necks of the animals are in a wooden harness, or yoke. It causes pain if one oxen doesn't cooperate with the other. The yoke chokes the one who pulls ahead and pinches the one who lags behind. The yoke is specifically constructed to force the oxen to work together.

**CLOSE PIC**

Mix a donkey with an ox, and you ensure friction and frustration. Different species have different natures that pull apart and fight each other. And likewise, a believer in Jesus and an unbeliever are separate breeds with different natures.

A believer has been born of God - alive to the things of the Spirit. Whereas the unbeliever, though perhaps a nice person, they're oblivious to God's Spirit. Put these two breeds in the same yoke - a marriage, a business partnership, a roommate situation, a serious dating relationship - and it'll produce long-term frustration.

At first, the two parties might work well together, but over time they'll inevitably move in separate directions. They'll pinch or choke the other.

Paul is not suggesting that Christians never associate with unbelievers **1 Corinthians 5:9 I wrote to you in my epistle not to**

keep company with sexually immoral people. 10 Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

The principle is that we are to be in the world, but not of the world. Think of boat for a minute. A boat is only valuable when it's in the water, but a boat becomes of little use if the water is inside the boat.

Romans 12:2: And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Are we being conformed to this world, or are we being transformed by the renewing of our mind?

The Corinthian Christians had allowed compromise to creep in, and they allowed it because of their ungodly associations and tolerance of sin.

15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? Belial is a word borrowed from Hebrew, meaning worthlessness or wickedness. Here it's used as another word for Satan to show complete opposites.

Some things obviously don't mix: oil and water, water and electricity, buckeyes and wolverines, and... believers and unbelievers!

Remember Chapter 5 calls us to be ambassadors for Christ. So we can't completely withdraw from the world and still be ministers of reconciliation.

It's one thing to have contact - it's another to enter a contract! We can interact - but we step over a lethal line when we get too intertwined and interconnected.

16-18

16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you<sup>[fn]</sup> are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

"I will dwell in them  
And walk among them.  
I will be their God,  
And they shall be My people."<sup>[fn]</sup>

17 Therefore

"Come out from among them  
And be separate, says the Lord.  
Do not touch what is unclean,  
And I will receive you."<sup>[fn]</sup>

18 "I will be a Father to you,  
And you shall be My sons and daughters,  
Says the LORD Almighty."<sup>[fn]</sup> So remember the context of what we studied last week. Yes we're to be ambassadors for Christ, and Christ is working with us, but we are not to fit into this world.

Chapter 7



**1 Therefore, having these promises,** Pause here. The commandment to come out from among them and be separate in V17 is coupled with a promise: I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters. When we separate ourselves from worldly thinking and acting, we are promised a closer relationship with God! And because of these promises, what are we to do?

**...1 beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**

We often think of purity before the Lord only in terms of cleansing from all filthiness of the flesh, but there is also a filthiness of the spirit to cleanse ourselves from.

More often than not, it's easier to deal with the filthiness of the flesh than the filthiness of the spirit.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, those who were stained by the filthiness of the flesh (such as harlots and tax collectors) found it easy to come to Jesus. But those stained by the filthiness of the spirit (such as the scribes and Pharisees) found it very hard to come to Jesus.

Our pride, our legalism, our self-focus, our self-righteousness, our bitterness, our secret ambition can all be much harder to deal with than the more obvious sins of the flesh.

The words perfecting holiness at the end of v1 isn't suggesting that the Corinthians could become sinless in this life. Rather in the original Greek speaks of becoming mature.

**2 Open your hearts to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one.** The Corinthian Christians believed several false rumors about Paul — that God wasn't using him, that he didn't have the right kind of image, authority, or power an apostle should have among others. But the issue wasn't that they got bad information. The situation was more serious than that. The church at Corinth had heart problems.

Their hearts had been open to the things of the world, but closed off to Paul. A few minutes ago in the “unequally yoked” passages, Paul told them to close their hearts to the world. Now it's time to open their hearts to him.

When Paul claims he defrauded no one, remember in 1 Corinthians 16 we learned Paul was organizing a collection for poor Christians in Judea and had responsibility over a significant amount of money.

**3 I do not say this to condemn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.** Paul isn't trying to condemn the Corinthian Christians but to restore the bonds of fellowship he once had with them. Despite how they treated Paul he still loved them deeply.

And even though Paul had been deeply hurt by this church he had planted, look what he says in verses 4-5

4 Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation.5 For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. This was Paul's life in ministry. It was a life of great blessing but also a life of many conflicts and fears. On the outside, Paul was constantly in conflict with enemies of the gospel and worldly minded Christians. On the inside, Paul daily battled with the stress and anxiety of ministry.

6 Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, When Paul was going through the wringer internally, externally, emotionally, and physically, how did God comfort him? Through Titus.

We'll learn later that Titus was one of Paul's students, one of his disciples. After sending him to Corinth with his first letter, Paul says it was when Titus returned that Paul was comforted.

I'm afraid my reaction would have been, "Oh, it's just Titus. Lord, why didn't You send me someone famous or with a big ministry, or someone who knows exactly what I'm going through? But Titus? He's just one of my boys. How can he help me?"

Think about Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. **Luke 22:41 And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, 42 saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."** **43 Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him.**

Jesus could have said, “I’m way above the angels.” Instead, He received the ministry of the angel.

In a beautiful picture of humility, Paul received encouragement from Titus because he recognized that the Lord often comes to us in an unexpected person at an unexpected time in an unexpected way....

7 and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more. Titus had come to Paul with an encouraging update from Corinth, that the people were sorry that they had been disloyal to Paul and they wanted to see him again.

And it’s a reminder that when we’re hurting or suffering, our tendency is to withdraw and isolate. But when we do, we’re actually turning away from the comfort God wants to give us through other people.

8 For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while.

When Paul first wrote the “sorrowful letter” carried by Titus, he didn’t relish the idea of being so confrontational with the Corinthian Christians, even though they deserved it. And because there was a positive response to the letter, Paul was happy for the effect the letter had. That’s why he wrote, “I do not regret it.”

9 Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. (Military term for doing an about face) For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. Notice that the Bible makes a clear separation between sorrow and repentance.

A person can be sorry for their sin without repenting from their sin. See sorrow describes a feeling, but repentance describes a change in both the mind and action, as verse 10 shows us.

10 For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Sorrow in itself doesn't produce anything except bad feelings, but godly sorrow produces repentance.

Remember, repentance is a change in both thinking and action, so we can tell if sorrow is really godly by seeing if it produces repentance. Godly sorrow cannot be measured by feelings or tears, only by what it produces. And it takes time to see what is produced.

And what did the Godly sorrow produce in the Corinthians? Paul lists 7 things

11 For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, Repentance means to turn around, and it takes diligence to stay turned around and resist that sin.

**what clearing of yourselves**, Its a clearing of guilt and shame, from knowing that we brought our sin to God and we now walk in the right way.

**what indignation**, Indignation is anger or annoyance of being treated a certain way. Don't you ever get indignant at yourself for your foolishness in sin. Don't you ever get indignant and be like-i can't believe I allowed myself to give into that temptation?

...11 **what fear**, Paul isn't writing about a fear of God here as much as a fear of sin, and fear of our own weakness toward sin.

**what vehement desire**, This is a heart that really desires purity and godliness and doesn't want to sin any more. This vehement desire is expressed through heartfelt prayer and dependence on God.

...11 **what zeal**, The ancient Greek word speaks of heat; we are hot towards God and His righteousness. Instead of laziness, we have zeal in our walk with the Lord.

**what vindication!** You are vindicated as a Christian, even though you have sinned. The issue isn't if we sin, no we are still sinners, rather the question is if we repent.

**In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.** Paul identified seven good things that had come to the Corinthians because they had responded properly to his rebuke.

It wasn't words or feelings that proved them to be clear, but actions.

12 Therefore, although I wrote to you, I did not do it for the sake of him who had done the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you. Paul's purpose in writing the "sorrowful letter" wasn't to take sides in a dispute among the Corinthian Christians. No he loved them and wrote to them so they would correct their behavior.

But it's always hard to receive a word of correction isn't it?

Proverbs 27:6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend,  
But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

13 Therefore we have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. The Corinthians' reaction to Paul's disciplinary letter had encouraged Paul. In addition, he was encouraged by the way Titus had been refreshed by all of the Corinthians. Even though the church in Corinth was in turmoil, Titus had taken on the challenge of delivering the tough news to the Corinthians. No one—not even Paul—knew how the Corinthians would respond. Yet Titus was pleasantly surprised. The Corinthians welcomed him and his message.

14 For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I am not ashamed. But as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting to Titus was found true. Even though the Corinthians had caused Paul so much pain and grief Paul still was proud of his spiritual children. He refused to focus on their weaknesses and failures; instead, he praised their strengths.

Hey is our tendency the same? Do we focus on the failures of others, or on their strengths?

**15 And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him.** Now there's been a lot of talk here from Paul about Titus, and next week we'll understand why. Paul was sending Titus back to them to collect money for the Jerusalem church.

**16 Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything.** So back in the letter we don't have, the sorrowful letter that Paul previously referred to, there was no praising of the Corinthians Christians. But here, Paul is rejoicing over them. What was the difference? It was their repentance.

It's been said ministry would be easy if it weren't for the people!