

**The Marks of a Faithful Minister**  
**2 Corinthians 6:1-10**  
**May 24, 2026**

**2 Corinthians 6:1-10...**

“We have all heard the story of the man who preached so well and lived so badly, that when he was in the pulpit everybody said he ought never to come out again, and when he was out of it they all declared he never ought to enter it again... We do not trust those persons who have two faces, nor will men believe in those whose verbal and practical testimonies are contradictory. As actions, according to the proverb, speak louder than words, so an ill life will effectually drown the voice of the most eloquent ministry.” (Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 17)

These words came from the well-known Victorian-era preacher Charles Spurgeon in a lecture he gave to his ministerial students. He helpfully puts his finger on the reality that true gospel ministry is always two-pronged. To be a faithful servant of Christ, the eternal riches of the glorious gospel must spring forth from one’s lips! But to be a faithful servant of Christ also requires one to live a life that is consistent with the gospel.

But I must point out that this important truth did not originate in the mind of Spurgeon. Rather, it originated in the pages of holy Scripture. Specifically, this concept is central to the main point of our passage this morning.

In 2 Corinthians 6:1-10, the Apostle Paul describes two marks of a true minister of Christ.

- I. The Message of Christ’s Ministers (6:1-2).
  - Ministers of Christ are co-laborers with God and are marked by urging sinners to receive the great grace of God.
- II. The Conduct of Christ’s Ministers (6:3-10).
  - Ministers of Christ do not do anything to discredit their testimony before men, and instead, their sincerity, suffering, and spiritual virtue are evidence of their truthfulness.

And it is my hope and prayer this morning that as we study this passage, every follower of Christ here would understand that they are called to a life of Christian ministry and that the Lord would help us to live in such a way that our message and manner of life are testimonies of faithfulness.

Let's begin by looking at the first thing that marks a servant of God: The Message of Christ's Ministers (6:1-2). He writes, "6:1-2."

### **I. The Message of Christ's Ministers (6:1-2)**

Our passage this morning really needs to be read in unison with the previous verses at the end of Ch 5. We saw last week "The Great Exchange" in 2 Corinthians 5:21, which thunders forth the glorious gospel truth that "[God the Father] made [God the Son] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

And in the verses before and after 5:21, Paul is focusing on how he and really all Christians are heralds of this good news. In 5:20, Paul said that Christians are "ambassadors of Christ" and that as we "beg" others "on behalf of Christ" and that it is "as though God were making an appeal [to others] through us." And now, in 6:1-2, Paul is really just reemphasizing this, but in slightly different words.

There are a couple of important things I want us to slow down and note about this.

*First*, I want us to note the close connection between Christ and His messengers. Look at v.1. Continuing on with the idea from 5:20 that he, as one involved in gospel ministry, is an "ambassador for Christ," he then reiterates in 6:1 that he is "working together with Him [i.e., God]." To put it in other words, Paul is saying that he is God's co-worker. In fact, the NIV actually translates this verse as referring to Paul and his ministry partners "as God's co-workers."

This is how Paul and his ministry companions thought of themselves. This was a part of their identity. Here in 6:2, Paul directly quotes from Isaiah 49, which is about the Messiah/Servant of the Lord, Jesus Christ.

And Jesus's mission as the Servant of the Lord is to be the Savior of Israel and also be "a light to the nations so that God's salvation will reach to the ends of the earth."

But before His ascension, Jesus commissions the church to carry out His mission on the earth. There is such a close connection between Christ and His ministers that it can be said that Christ's ministry of salvation and reconciliation of sinners is being accomplished and fulfilled through... you. And me. And all the church. That is why Paul can say in 5:20 that "we are ambassadors for Christ" and that "God makes his appeal [to sinners] through us!" That is why Paul can say we are "co-workers" with God in 6:1.

This was true of Paul as an Apostle, but it is also true of all believers. 1 Peter 2:9 says that the entire body of Christ is to minister as "a royal priesthood" unto the Lord. Ephesians 4:11-12 says that God gave church leaders for the purpose of "equipping [all] of the saints for the work of ministry" (NKJV). Scripture teaches this concept of the "priesthood of all believers," meaning that we are all involved in gospel ministry. We are all gospel ministers.

**Brothers and sisters, may God use this verse this morning to solidify your understanding and belief that you are a gospel minister.** You are co-workers with God! We are not called to be observers, but servers. May Cornerstone Community Church never look like a Cal Trans crew, where a couple of guys are doing all the work, and everyone else is watching (no offense to those who work for Cal Trans, I'm sure you are hard workers). No, we are active participants in gospel ministry. We are all messengers of Christ, and as we share Him with others, we are participants in the ministry that He is doing here on earth.

By God's grace, may we faithful workers with Him...

But there is a second thing I want us to note from these verses. I want us to note *what* a co-worker of Christ does. He writes, "And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the gospel of God in vain."

The work that a co-worker of Christ is involved in is that they call upon individuals to “receive the grace of God.” The “grace of God” refers to the message of reconciliation with God by grace through faith in the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ (5:20-21).

And then Paul provides an OT quote as a Scriptural support for this point. Specifically, Paul directly quotes from the first half of Isaiah 49:8 when he writes, “At the acceptable time I listened to you, And on the day of salvation I helped you.” And if you were to continue reading there in Isaiah 49, it also says, “And I will keep You and give You for a covenant of the people, To restore the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages; Saying to those who are bound, ‘Go forth,’ To those who are in darkness, ‘Show yourselves’” (Isaiah 49:8b-9a). Specifically, God says there will be a time when He will give the Servant to be “a covenant for the people,” which I believe is a reference to the New Covenant. And this New Covenant “day/era of salvation” has been inaugurated and begun through the ministry of the Servant of the Lord, Jesus Christ. This is why in 6:2, Paul applies this text to the current day.

Isaiah 49 spoke metaphorically of individuals being freed from their bondage/enslavement to sin, those in spiritual darkness being given light, and salvation being brought to all the nations.

In the broad sense that this era of gospel grace has begun. And more narrowly, there is also an urgent need to receive this grace of God “now.” “Now is the acceptable time” and “day of salvation.”

This is the message of Christ’s ministers. As fellow workers with Jesus, what we talk about is the gospel. This is the message that the whole world needs to hear.

But it is also the message the church needs to continue hearing. Remember, Paul is writing to the Corinthian Church here. And he found it necessary to continue to preach this gospel to them. Specifically, he felt this need 6:1 says because he does not want them to “receive the grace of God in vain.”

Now, you may be wondering, what does it mean to “receive the grace of God in vain?” What this verse is teaching us is that it is possible to have a false/fake/empty faith. A type of belief/reception of the gospel, but it was not a true saving belief/reception. The Lord Jesus gave us an illustration of this truth in Luke 8 & the Parable of the Soils. If someone apostatizes then they would be like the “rocky soil” in Luke 8, which is described as “receiving” God’s word but ultimately “falls away.”

Specifically, here in 2 Corinthians 6, we need to remember that Paul is defending his ministry against false teachers. And I think Paul probably has in mind that some of his hearers are being tempted to turn away from him & the true gospel to follow after false teachers who were trying to smuggle the OT Law into salvation. The Apostle later in this epistle writes in 2 Corinthians 11:3–4 (NKJV), “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or *if* you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted— [I fear] you may well put up with it!” Paul feared that the Corinthians would fall for a false gospel! So, the concept of “receiving the grace of God in vain” speaks of apostasy. Some may have appeared to “receive the grace of God,” but in reality, it was in vain. It was not real.

And this is why Paul is so passionate in this section! He does not want this to happen to anyone. *This is the third* thing I want us to note. I want us to note not just the “what” of Paul’s message, but “how” he says it.

Paul says in 6:1, “We *URGE* you not to receive the grace of God in vain.” Paul says in 6:2, “*BEHOLD, NOW* is ‘the acceptable time,’ *BEHOLD, NOW* is ‘the day of salvation.’” This is an urgent message that demands a response!

So, if there is anyone in here that has not yet received God’s grace, I urge you and plead with you, be reconciled to God! You are a sinner who stands before an infinitely holy God. But God in His grace has made a way of salvation through the Servant of the Lord, Jesus Christ. 5:21: “[God the Father] made [God the Son] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of

God in Him.” And this is all of grace. It is a gift that God offers you in this moment. The day of salvation is now. The acceptable time to receive this gift is now. In this moment, God is speaking to you through me. This is not just a message from me, but from God. God urges you and pleads with you, repent of your sins and place your faith in the God-Man, Jesus Christ, and His perfect life, substitutionary death, glorious resurrection, and ascension into heaven. God calls upon you to receive this gift and be reconciled to Him.

And to those who are members of this church, I urge you to continue to believe in the gospel. Do not be moved from this foundation. Keep on believing in the gospel and keep on proclaiming the gospel to the world.

Because this is the first thing that marks God’s people. This is The Message of Christ’s Ministers...

But God’s servants are also marked by a second thing. And that is our second point, The Conduct of Christ’s Ministers (6:3-10).

## **II. The Conduct of Christ’s Ministers (6:3-10)**

I am sure you noticed when I first read this passage that we have quite a list here. There are nearly 30 different descriptions given in these verses! But to put it simply, the overarching way to understand this is that all of these items describe the conduct or manner of life that marked the Apostle Paul and thus also serve as marks of faithful Christian living in general.

And to help us grasp this expansive list, we are going to break it into a couple of groups. First, in 6:3-4a, we see that God’s servants are to have **Conduct Marked by Sincerity**. He writes, “6:3-4a.”

Paul shows here that we can think of sincere Christian living as two sides of a coin. One side focuses on the negative things we avoid, and the other on the positive things we do.

*First, in v.3, Paul says that he “gives no cause for offense in anything.”* The word “offense” speaks of an obstacle or a stumbling block. So, Paul is saying that it is marked by the absence of anything negative that would be an obstacle or stumbling block to others receiving the gospel or anything that would discredit his ministry.

*But, second, in v.4, Paul says, “in everything commends himself as a servant of God.”* Paul is saying that he not only avoids negative things that would discredit him, but he also evidences himself to be a true minister of Christ through his manner of life.

So, here is how we should think of living marked by Christian sincerity: On one side of the coin, there is the absence of negative/sinful acts that would discredit us. And on the other side of the coin, there is the presence of positive/righteous acts that commend us.

So, in light of this, we must ask ourselves some questions: Is there anything in your life that, if it came to light, would discredit your testimony? Are you living in secret sin? Is there something in your life that places a stumbling block before the gospel?

If there is, then brother or sister, confess this to God and turn from it. God is gracious to forgive and restore, but you cannot continue to keep pet sins. They must be put off, and you must return to your first love and follow Christ with sincerity.

So, leaving here today, we should think about our lives in light of these two sides of the coin. Ask yourself throughout your days... 1) Would what I am about to do discredit my testimony? If it would, avoid it like the plague! Strive to live with a clear conscience to the point that you can be like Paul and say, “I put no stumbling block in anyone’s way in, so that my testimony/ministry will not be discredited.” 2) Would what I am about to do positively promote my testimony and commend me as a true follower of Christ? If it would, then be quick to do it so that you can say that “in everything you are seen to be a servant of God.”

And as we always say, this isn't about perfection. But we are talking about whether we are truly living out our faith. By God's grace, may we "conduct [ourselves] in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1:27)...

So, while it is helpful to consider these two sides of the coin of sincere Christian living, the passage primarily focuses on the positive side. It emphasizes the positive evidence that marked Paul as a true minister of Christ and, by God's grace, will hopefully mark us as well.

Let's take this one by one. In 6:4b-5, we see that God's servants have **Conduct Marked by Faithfully Suffering.**

*Paul begins in v.4 by saying that his life was commendable since he was marked by "much endurance."* The term "endurance" conceptually refers to the ability to remain under something. It is like taking a bar loaded with weight off a squat rack and continuing to stand with that weight on your shoulders. The load of life is on you, and you are able to triumphantly remain under it in faithful perseverance. Paul is saying that he lived a life of *much/great* endurance and faithful perseverance amid the types of suffering we are about to look at...

The rest of this section on suffering can be broken up into three groups of three. *First, in the rest of v.4, Paul says that his life was commendable since he was marked by "afflictions, hardships, & distresses."* These different words all speak of life's pressures, difficulties, trials, and calamities. Paul was constantly being squeezed in life. Life wasn't all sunshine and rainbows.

And there is something important to be learned from this. Brothers and sisters, do not be surprised when "afflictions/hardships/distresses" come upon you. In the words of 1 Peter 4:12, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you" (ESV). This is to be expected. So be prepared for it, and pray to God for endurance. And know that when you walk through these afflictions faithfully, this is a testimony to the world. It marks you as one of Christ's servants. And perhaps your conduct in suffering will give you an opportunity to share the message of Christ with others...

*Next, in the first half of v.5, Paul says that his life was also marked by “beatings, imprisonments, & tumults.”* Throughout Paul’s ministry, he endured being beaten on numerous occasions and thrown into prison. For example, Acts 16:22-23 says, “Then the multitude rose up together against [Paul and Silas]; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.” And the word “tumults” refers to the riots that sometimes ensued from Paul’s preaching. There were times when entire cities were breaking out in mob violence against Paul! And while these are likely not things we have personally endured, this demonstrates that even the most extreme forms of suffering are not beyond possibility for believers...

*Finally, in the second half of v.5, Paul says that his life was also marked by “labors, sleeplessness, & hunger.”* The word “labors” speaks of hard work, toil, and exertion. Paul wearied himself in discipling, preaching/teaching, praying, writing, and church planting, not to mention the work he did with his own hands to provide for himself and others along the way. Additionally, Paul often went without adequate food and sleep. His sleeplessness came from working the equivalent of multiple full-time jobs, not even to mention the sleeplessness from nights of prayer and constant travel.

And while this may seem extreme, there is a principle of application for all of us to draw from this section: Christ’s ministers are marked by a life of sacrificial service. Ministering to others requires hard work, effort, and discomfort.

So, brothers and sisters, are you willing to sometimes forgo comfort for the sake of ministering to others? Are you willing to suffer a night of little sleep for the sake of having a late-night heart-to-heart talk with a family member or friend in need? Or visiting someone in crisis? Or getting up early to meet up with someone for discipleship and prayer? Are you willing to work all day, take care of your family's needs, and then also make the effort to meet up with or invite over brothers and sisters in Christ for fellowship, and then go to bed completely drained? Are you willing to work yourself to the point of exhaustion to see Christ formed in those here at this church?

Now, there is a place for rest and seeking to live at a sustainable pace. But I am trying to get the point across that we should be marked by lives of foregoing comfort for the sake of others. Suffering is standard Christianity, not the things of super-saints...

But in addition to suffering, we find next in 6:6-7 that God's servants have **Conduct Marked by Spirituality & Virtue**. *The first thing Paul lists is "purity."* This doesn't just refer to sexual purity, but really speaks of comprehensive morality and holiness across all areas of life. It is to be holy in thought, attitude, and action. We are to strive to live unstained by sinful defilement.

*Next, Christ's ministers are to be marked by "knowledge."* We should follow Paul and seek to be knowledgeable in the things of the gospel, Scripture, theology, and practical Christian living. Not everyone is a PhD in Theology, but we should all strive to grow in our understanding of God's word. It would be a shame for people who have been Christians for extended periods of time not to know the things of the Lord...

*Next, Paul lists the virtues of "patience" and "kindness."* Both of these virtues are paired together here and in the great description of love in 1 Corinthians 13, demonstrating their close connection. To be patient is to respond to others with forbearance and long-suffering. It is not short-fused & short-tempered but long-fused & long-tempered. Kindness is goodwill in action. It is to be merciful and compassionate and reach out in goodness to others and do them well. This pair of spiritual virtues should govern our actions with others. In response to others' mistreatment of us or their slowness of growth, we react with long-suffering. And then we also are to proactively seek to help others and do them good...

*Next, Paul says that we are to be marked by living "in the Holy Spirit."* Obviously, this should come as no surprise, since this entire section is about spiritual virtue, which can only be brought about by the Holy Spirit. There are so many parallels between this section and the "fruit of the Spirit" in Galatians 5. So, if we are to be known as being servants of God, we must be a people who are constantly seeking to be led by the Spirit of God.

The Spirit speaks to us through His Word, and then we submissively respond to His prompting of how we are to live out His Word in our daily lives.

*The last spiritual description in v.6 is “genuine love.”* See, Paul had a sincere care and love for those he ministered to. It wasn’t merely a front or an act. Paul could be known to be a true minister of God because he had a true love for the people of God in his heart...

*In v.7, Paul then says commendation of his ministry is seen “in the word of truth.”* And as we say each Sunday, this is truth with a capital T. It is the truth of the gospel and God’s Word. This was Paul’s foundation, and it should be ours. We should seek to be known as people who live in accordance with the truth of Scripture, not the lies of the world.

*Next in v.7, Paul says that his life was lived “in the power of God.”* Paul did not live according to the power of the flesh or mere human effort. His spiritual attributes and endurance amid difficulty were a testament to his reliance on the supernatural strength and ability God provided. It is God who provides both the ability “to will and work for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).

*And then finally in v.7, Paul says that his life was lived “by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left.”* Paul here makes reference to the armor of God. Specifically, he may have in mind the sword of the Spirit, which would be grasped with the right hand, and the shield of faith, which would be grasped with the left hand. But his point is that servants of God are those who are sufficiently covered in the armor of God and engage in spiritual warfare.

So, there is so much that could be said about this section and drawn out about how it applies to our lives. But let me suggest one application step from this section. Moving forward, ask yourself: Which elements on this list do I need to grow in? And then pray for it! Pray over these spiritual virtues! Ask God to make you a man or a woman known for spiritual virtue...

So, we have seen that Christ's ministers are marked by Sincerity, Suffering, and Spirituality. But now we come to our last section here in 6:8-10, as Paul explains that God's servants have **Conduct Marked by Seeming Paradox.**

*In v.8 and the start of v.9, Paul says his ministry is marked both "by glory and dishonor," "by evil report and good report," "regarded as deceivers and yet true," and "unknown yet well-known."* Depending on who you talked to, you would get very different reports about Paul. According to one, he would be rightly understood and well known among Christians across the Roman Empire as the Apostle of Jesus Christ, as part of the glorious foundation of the church. But according to another, he was either unknown and a non-factor, or known as the scum of the earth and a peddler of lies. This seeming paradox always followed his ministry. This is why, basically, when Paul came into town, what followed was either a revival or a riot! And a similar thing happens with us as believers today. Brothers and sisters, you will share and live your faith, and some will regard you as hateful, bigoted, and backward. And others will recognize you as a messenger and follower of God. Let us understand that others' reception of us will be paradoxical because our message is one that divides...

*Next, continuing in v.9, Paul gives this paradox: "as dying yet behold, we live" and "as punished, yet not put to death."* In a spiritual sense, Paul died to himself daily, yet began to truly live more and more in Christ. But in a physical sense, the reality was that Paul lived constantly on death's doorstep. His body was deteriorating. And it wouldn't be a surprise if an angry mob or political persecutor eventually ended his life. This is why he wrote in 4:10, "always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body." Paul lived in the paradox of death looming on the horizon, yet truly and fully living, nevertheless.

*Then next, at the start v.10, Paul gives this well-known paradox of the Christian life: "as sorrowful yet always rejoicing."* If you are a believer, I'm sure this phrase resonates with your soul. The Christian life is a strange and glorious mixture of constant sorrow and joy. There are also things going on which bring grief to our hearts... Unsaved family members and friends, straying children, broken

relationships, betrayal, deaths of loved ones... However, amid all this, there is still a tune of joyful worship in our souls.

How can this be? This is so because we are Christians. Our Savior was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). Yet at the same time, He had lived in perfect, joyful communion with the Father, and He prayed in His high priestly prayer in John 17:13 that His joy may be fulfilled in us. So, we are simply following in the footsteps of our Savior as we live paradoxically “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.”

*Then, finally, he gives his last couple of paradoxes in v.10 when he writes “as poor yet making many rich” and “as having nothing yet possessing all things.”* In earthly terms, Paul was a poor man and had not much to give. Yet, despite his earthly poverty, he was used of God to make multitudes of people spiritual and eternally rich in Christ. And personally, with a worldly lens, it seemed like he had nothing to his name. Yet, with spiritual vision, one could see that he had everything. So, despite whatever lack we may have in material wealth, brothers and sisters, the reality is that we have everything in Christ...

These are the seeming paradoxes that mark a servant of God...

### **Conclusion**

So, brothers and sisters, I pray that your hearts have been encouraged by the example of Paul’s life as a faithful minister found in these verses this morning. But, I want to again impress upon our hearts that these marks are not just meant for apostles, but all believers. All of us are gospel ministers. All of us have the message of the gospel and are to call upon others to “receive the grace of God” because “today is the day of salvation.” And all of us should have our conduct and manner of life marked by grace. May we all endure suffering with perseverance. May we all grow more and more to bear the fruit of the Spirit. May we all embrace the paradoxes of the Christian life. By God’s grace, may we never “put any obstacle or stumbling block” before others and discredit our testimony, and instead strive, “in everything evidence ourselves have been the marks of true ministers of God.”