



**2 Corinthians 6:1-10**  
**The Cost of Communicating the Gospel**

Summary: Paul's life was defined by extremes endured for the sake of the gospel.

When we left off, Paul was commending the gospel to the Corinthians. He spoke of the resurrection of believers with confidence that [to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord](#). He spoke of the judgment we all face when we die. And he urged people to [be reconciled with God](#) who offers not only forgiveness, but also, renewal – you remember

[2 Cor 5:17](#) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

And this is possible because Christ has laid down his life for us.

[2 Cor 5:21](#) For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

As Christians we have this marvelous message of truth: that there is a God, who is merciful and kind and who reaches out to us; who offers to forgive our guilt and wipe away our shame and help us live a life of spiritual flourishing. But, we must *respond* to His activity and the conviction He brings. We must confess our need for Him and the wrongs we have done without Him.

Christians, around the world and throughout time, have shared this message with family, friends, and neighbors, out of love for them and love for God. Christians have sold their homes, quit their jobs and traveled around the world to spread this news as missionaries. They have moved to new cities to plant churches. They have struck up conversations with strangers as well as roommates all in effort to see lives transformed by the power of the gospel.

And so, as we jump back into our study of 2 Corinthians we should not be surprised to find Paul continuing to press the gospel message and call for a response. Read with me if you will

[2 Corinthians 6:1](#) We then, *as workers together with Him* also plead with *you* not to receive the grace of God in vain. 2 For He says:

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

[Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.](#)

Perhaps you have heard this verse quoted as someone shared the gospel. It's not uncommon. The point is: if all these things are true, if we face an eternal judgment when we die, and if no one knows with certainty that they will live to face tomorrow, why not prepare for that judgment now by turning to Christ, confessing your sin, and surrendering to His guidance for the rest of your life? Why not receive the grace of God today? He has made your salvation possible, why would you tell Him "Yeah, thanks, I'll consider it."

I'll tell you why – it's because you're thinking of what will need to change in your life, and you're not so sure you're ready for that. Which, if I may say, is exactly the attitude we need to be forgiven of. This attitude, which we all experience, is at the very root of sin. It's exactly what happened with Adam and Eve in the garden. It's this attitude that "Yeah, I know that's what God said, I know that's what God wants, but I like this." Or, "I think it should be like that." Or "I don't know why He won't let me..." So, there's God, but, then there's me too. And I don't always want to do things His way, because I've got ideas of my own.

Friends, we might not say it exactly this way, but this is how we think, and we do it with a straight face as if we're actually equals with God, or maybe even better than He is because we know, or we believe, differently than He does, and so, maybe He's the one who needs to catch up with the way we do things today, or the way I see things.

Now what's absolutely amazing about this attitude, which again, we all experience, is that God doesn't blast us for our outrageous arrogance, resistance, and rebellion. But instead, He is patient with us and sends people and situations into our lives - note Paul's word - [pleading](#) with us to forsake our sin, turn to God, and discover the spiritual flourishing He offers.

So, realize this, Paul's entire life is given over to serving God by telling others, [pleading](#) with others, to give up their selfishness and surrender to God. In fact, he says

[3 We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. 4 But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God:](#)

I want you to see this, and to consider this – Paul is making intentional decisions about his life, limiting himself in some areas and burdening himself in others, *all for the sake of being a good witness for Christ*: [that our ministry may not be blamed](#). He doesn't want anyone to be able to point to anything in his life as an excuse for rejecting the gospel message.

Now, there are two ways we can see that. First if you are a Christian, it's a sobering example. Do you dare to ask yourself: are there things in my life that give other people grounds to blame my ministry, witness, or testimony? Are there things in your life that call the gospel into doubt, that seem hypocritical? Are there things in your life that keep you from being commended as a minister of God?

No, you don't have to be perfect, but are you intentional about growing spiritually, or have you found a way to make yourself comfortable by having a little bit of religion and still

holding on to your way of doing things? It's a sobering and hard question, and we're going to dig even deeper into it next week.

The other way to see this though, is to see it from the perspective of those who need to hear the gospel, because, remember Paul is limiting himself *so that* others might hear and trust his message.

Consider the lengths people go to in order to make it possible for others to hear the good news of Jesus. We have missionaries here with us this morning who have moved to France and the Middle East and another who is preparing to move to Guatemala, not because it's their long-time dream come true to live in those places, but because they're motivated by the love of God and love of others and that compels them to organize their life in such a way that their primary purpose in life is to commend the gospel to others, to **plead** with others to receive the grace of God today.

Brett and Krista Miller have organized their entire lives around sharing the gospel message on college campuses. Pastor Vic and Suebee have organized their entire lives around sharing the gospel and offering counseling to those behind bars. And others in our congregation make intentional choices about the things they do and don't do at work, on the sports field, or in the neighborhood, *so that* they might commend themselves as ministers of God. These people are going out of their way for the sake of reaching others.

I wonder, who did what to make it possible for you to hear the gospel? And, isn't that a gift? That someone else would organize their life out of love for God and love for you in the hope that you would hear and respond to this message? And that, like Paul, they would limit themselves and burden themselves in the process.

Meanwhile, as we're about to see, serving God this way is not easy. We turn our attention now from those who need to receive the gospel, to what Paul endured in order to share, spread it, and commend it. You might think that a life given over to serving God would be easy, fulfilling, and filled with success stories. But then you'd have forgotten that Paul was just **pleading** with people. He's about to describe his life as filled with normal difficulties, coupled with actual resistance from people and powers who resist God while he's giving everything he has to get the work done – it's a sobering account. But he also describes the great tools and great rewards God provides for those who follow Him.

So, Paul says his life and ministry is characterized by

(vs 4 cont.) in much patience,

That's a word we don't really like to hear, isn't it? Technology has taught us to expect things to be fast, easy, and enjoyable. We don't like to wait. But that's the first term Paul uses to describe a life dedicated to serving God and others, it's distinguished, not just by **patience** but – mark this you note takers – by **much patience**.

And then he goes on to list the kind of situations he has learned to be **patient** in. He writes of

**in tribulations**, (affliction) **in needs**, (troubles, crises, hardship) **in distresses**, (calamities, stressful situations)

The words build upon each other amplifying the intensity of the struggle and note: they're all plural. So, it's not just one crisis you went through, it's yet another crisis and the last one hasn't fully passed. Paul is speaking of the tapestry of trials that forms the background of life, these are the situations that make everything else you're doing even harder.

In my experience working with senior leaders, the kind of people whose names you would read in the newspaper, or the kind of person that everyone you know calls boss - this has been a common thread: leaders still have difficult daily lives. They've got a loved one at home fighting cancer, their kids get in awful car accidents, their basements flood – all while trying to lead a major organization, or agency, or department. We had a friend who was able to fly occasionally on an executive jet, yet was crippled by anxiety over flying and could never relax enough in flight to enjoy the luxury and opportunity.

I say all of that to say this: life is hard, don't be surprised. And, here's a really valuable tip: don't compare the outside of someone else's life with the inside of your own. If you had looked at Paul you might have said, oh he's so spiritual, he must have the most amazing prayer life, he's a missionary, he gets to travel and meet people and see God do amazing things and he would have said, "Actually, my life is full of needs, afflictions, and crises just like yours."

You might look at your boss or the director of your agency, department or organization and think they must have it good, must be nice to be able to park there, must be nice to make that kind of money. And you don't see all the stuff they're going through at home. Life is difficult for everyone. Even the pretty girl. Even popular guy. Even the top performer. Just because you don't see all the stuff they're working through, doesn't mean it's not there.

So, give them some grace, and give some to yourself too – don't think it's strange when all kinds of difficulties and trials happen in your life, it doesn't always mean you're doing the wrong things, it might just be the normal challenges of life on a difficult planet, and James says something about counting all that as joy.

So, after listing the regular difficulties of life, Paul goes on to mention the opposition he experienced while trying to preach a message of peace, forgiveness, and blessing from God. He endured:

**5 in stripes**, (wounds that come from beatings with rods, which was a form of discipline and punishment in the ancient world) **in imprisonments**, **in tumults** (riots and angry mobs),

The New Testament lists seven times when Paul was arrested or imprisoned, he says he received lashes five times and once he was stoned and left for dead as the result of mob violence. Sometimes this was done by religious people, either Romans or Jews and sometimes it was done by political forces, but it was always because people opposed his message.

As our culture is swirling and convulsing its way through history, as forces on the right and the left are fighting for control of the future, you need to know that people will always resort to power to control those they oppose. The media of the left wants you to warn you about the dangers of gun-toting Right-Wing extremists, meanwhile groups on the left are attacking Pro-life centers like tantrum throwing toddlers in the wake of the Dobbs decision and members of antifa have shown their willingness to engage in physical violence for the sake of progressive causes.

The world is a dangerous place when you don't share the dominant view. It has always been that way, and always will be that way. But throughout time and around the world, Christians have been willing to take a stand for the truth of the gospel without using guns, riots, suicide bombs or drone strikes to advance their agenda. There are tactics and tools that belong to the state which have absolutely no place in the Christian church. The gospel never advances at the edge of the sword, unless it's in the hand of those who oppose it, and then, in the ancient words of Tertullian "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

The church continues to march on triumphant because God Himself cannot be defeated.

And so, Paul pressed on with his gospel message – though life was difficult, full of crises and needs that you can't foresee or control, though he was radically opposed and physically suffered as a result of his efforts, he was convinced of his purpose and calling, so he pushed hard to get the work done. He was, he says,

[in labors,](#)

That's hard work, to the point of exhaustion. Paul was frequently on the move, sharing the gospel, planting churches, discipling new believers, mentoring Christian leaders, and corresponding with all kinds of people *while* often working to support himself. It was a lot. And so, he was also

[in sleeplessness,](#)

Whether he was working such long days that he wasn't getting much rest, or whether his head and heart were swirling with concerns and questions that kept him from being able to rest well, the point was – the man wasn't lounging around and sleeping in. On top of that, he was

[in fastings;](#)

Hunger can be intentional; it can be a choice to fast for spiritual reasons. And, no doubt there are times when Paul intentionally chose to do that. But it can also mean you simply don't have access to food. We live in a moment of history that is completely abnormal, in a region, here in DC, that is also completely abnormal – you can get blueberries whenever you want even though they're grown in Maine or Chile – that's not normal. Sometimes people are fasting, not for religious reasons, not because it's part of their new trendy diet, but because they legitimately don't have the access to food.

And yet, Paul is committed and he drives on, he presses on, believing that God and the gospel are worth it and people need the message.

So, you might start to ask: is this what life looks like when it's completely dedicated to Christ? Is this what an effective, influential, ministry that is blessed and directed by God looks like? Is this what God is calling me to?

Well, the truth is, each of our lives are going to look a little different – Paul's calling is not your calling. But I can guarantee you this: *life will be hard at times no matter what you do*. There will be crises, there will be needs. At some point, someone is going to oppose you. At some point, you're going to have press hard and you'll need to endure.

But, there is much more to the Christian life than suffering, there's also the hope, the power, the encouragement and the strength of God at work in and through us – because we are never truly alone in Christ.

Look at what Paul says next about how he endures all this hardship, he does it:

[6 by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering,](#)

This is what God is producing in you as He transforms your life. You're going through difficulties, but you're also growing spiritually – discovering the gifts of the Spirit and producing the fruit of the Spirit. As you walk with God He forms in you the ability to endure while being provoked, He teaches you to remain calm while waiting on an uncertain outcome, He teaches you to endure difficult things patiently. And all of this is new to you – this is not your normal temperament or personality traits - you learn these things from Him.

Paul goes on describing the means and methods of his ministry:

[by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love,](#)

You Bible nerds are probably curious, so I'll tell you, yes, this [sincere love](#) is agape love. It's a love that is more than just a hormonal reaction, more than just an emotional feeling, it's a love of commitment, a covenantal love. And this kind of love, this kind of concern for and willingness to suffer for, others is a hallmark of Christian conduct. Jesus even told His disciples, outsiders will know you are My disciples, by your [love](#).

But note: all of this hinges on God. To grow in the Christian life requires you to no longer try to live alone – we invite God in, and not just at home, not just in private, but we invite God into our relationships, into our work and studies, into our activities, hobbies, and interests – and more than that, we submit to Him – we let Him help us but also direct us and influence us in all these areas so that we really and truly are ambassadors for Christ wherever we go. We're never truly alone. In fact, Paul says he's dependent on

7 by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand (where you hold your sword) and on the left (where you hold your shield),

Again, the gospel advances, and the Christian advances, by the strength, the provision, and the equipping of God. Three times in 2 Corinthians Paul contrasts the power of God with human weakness. And elsewhere God tells Paul "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness."

In other words, it's OK to feel like you can't do this, because all by yourself, you can't.

But, God knows your situation, and He knows your needs, and He promises to equip you well for the work He assigns. So, as we see all the things Paul endured – the difficulties of life, the opposition, and plain hard work - I want you to know that you can endure as well – by the same method- by pressing into the gospel, the Word, the Spirit, and fellowship. Your weakness actually facilitates God's provision of power.

And here's what it's all going to look like. Read with me as Paul contrasts the external and temporary circumstances of his situation with the internal and eternal realities. He describes a like marked

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.

Friends, life is full of hardship, opposition, and frustrations, *that is true for all people*. But, there is another layer of truth in it for the Christian who swims against the flow.

We live in two places at once – still surrounded by the things that are breaking down on the outside, but strangely thriving on the inside. We are emptied, but then we are filled. We struggle and strain in the trials of life, but through it all God makes us strong.

Friends, God knows your trials. He knows the forces and people that oppose you. He knows how hard you're working. None of that is a surprise or new to Him.

But He also offers Himself fully to you, to walk with you through it all, to guide you, direct you, sustain you, empower you so that while you have reason to sorrow, you're able to rejoice, while you feel unknown, unseen and unloved, you're experiencing intimacy with

Christ and His church, while people lie and gossip about you, God records everything you're doing in His book and commends you.

All this as you simply follow the path of Christ who endured all of the same things for us. We've read about the experience of Paul and his ministry companions here, but we could just as easily be reading about Jesus.

He was a man of sorrows who wept over the death of his friend and the circumstances He found in the world, and yet He also rejoiced and was often the source of joy for others.

He was poor. Other people kept the purse for Him, and they stole out of it. He knew what it was to be tired, hungry and thirsty, yet he provided for the needs of many – turning loaves into fish, water into wine, and taught us to pray “give us this day our daily bread.”

He had nothing – no home, no estate, when He was killed the soldiers cast lots for his meager belongings, and yet He is the Maker of all things and tells us to come to the Father with our needs.

If you are on this path, I encourage you, my brother, my sister, patiently endure like Paul depending on God as your strength.

If you are not on this path, I encourage you to listen to words of Scripture,

*Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*

This is God's message to you. Repent of your sin and be born again.

Let's pray





## Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

### 2 Corinthians 6:1-10 The Cost of Communicating the Gospel

Summary: Paul's life was defined by extremes endured for the sake of the gospel.

- 3 We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. 4 But in all *things* we commend ourselves as ministers of God
  - Why would it be important for Paul to have this approach to ministry?
  - Where have you seen actions, attitudes, or words tarnish the appeal of the gospel or a Christian?
  - How far should you go in order to make the gospel appealing to someone else?
  - Is this something you ever consider for your own life? If something were legitimately blameworthy or deserved criticism in your life for distracting from the gospel, what would it be? What do you do about that?
- Paul says he was pleading with the Corinthians not to receive the gospel in vain. Did anyone have to plead with you to accept the gospel? Have you had to plead with others?
- Paul breaks down his difficulties into three categories: difficulties of life, opposition he faced, and the nature of hard work. Which of these pressures do you feel most often in your life?
  - Do you think Paul should have had it easier since he was in full time ministry?
  - Where do you expect your life to be easier?
  - How does reflecting on the difficulties of Jesus' life help reshape your expectations for ease vs challenges in your daily life?
- Paul lists the gifts and fruit of the Spirit and the help that God provides, which ones do you see operating in your life? Which ones do you need more of? How can acquire what you need?
- Paul provides a list of contrasts of what his life looks like from the outside and what it feels like on the inside. Which of these contrasts have you personally experienced? Are there any which you feel like you're only experiencing the negative half of the pair? How could the other side be true for you?