

THE HARDSHIPS OF THE MINISTRY
2 Corinthians 6:1-18

The last part of Chapter Five⁵ [20-21] is very encouraging. And yet Paul also knew that the Corinthian believers had to live in a cruel and unsympathetic world of unbelievers.

What had Jesus told His disciples to expect from the world?

Matthew 10:22

... and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Luke 14:25-33 {see also Matthew 10:34-39}

²⁵ Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

John 16:29-33

²⁹ His disciples said, "Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! ³⁰ Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God." ³¹ Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? ³² Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. ³³ I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Contrary to the lies of the “Prosperity Gospel – God’s Best for you now,” the Lord Jesus told us the truth. The fiery trials will come but the peace of Christ will sustain us; not some promise of “health and wealth.”

1. RESPONSIVENESS TO GOD’S GRACE 2 Cor 6:1-3

Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. ²For he says,

"In a favorable time I listened to you,
and in a day of salvation I have helped you."
Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

³We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry...

Back to 5:17, “IF” - Now is the time Isaiah was telling about.

This passage is appropriately used for an evangelistic call to faith in Christ but its context is to believers, “God’s fellow workers.”

There were those in Corinth who would return to the Old Covenant system and Paul says, “...we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain.”

The ministry of grace includes, but is not limited to three things:

1. In 5:14-17, Paul was compelled by love not to regard people from a worldly point of view, not counting people’s sins against them [19], and appealing for reconciliation to God [20-21].
2. Ministry from grace understands that this is a time for grace and not for condemnation [6:2].
3. And, ministry from grace means being an example of one who practices what he preaches [6:3].

The ministry of grace does not compromise the truth. The message of Christ crucified in the place of sinners will offend the self-righteous. Neither do we soften the message [2:16; 1 Cor 1:18]. We must present the Gospel in truth which will offend some. Try not to be personally offensive so as to give anyone an excuse to reject the message.

2. PERSEVERANCE UNDER PRESSURE 2 Cor 6:3-10

³ We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴ but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵ beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶ by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; ⁷ by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸ through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹ as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

Can you imagine any circumstance that would allow a believer to deny his faith? Paul insisted that in all circumstances he conducted himself in a manner consistent with being a servant of Christ.

- a) Paul gives us a list of some of his personal hardships (4b-5).
- b) Paul lists his Spiritual resources (6-7).
- c) Paul gives the contrasts between how the ministry of grace is seen by the world and by believers (8-10).

Afflictions: He lists several examples of troubles that have tested his endurance. These troubles resulted from circumstances beyond his control, and which at times there did not appear to be an escape.

Spiritual Resources: With the indwelling of the Holy Spirit we have much help in our troubles. Viz.

purity {holy living; devotion to God};

knowledge or understanding {insight into what God is doing};

patience {the ability to endure personal injury without retaliation};

kindness {a gentleness of spirit that puts others at ease};

sincere love {unhypocritical agape love};

truthful speech, and, the power of God.

Contrasts: worldly view versus the view in Christ.

dishonor	glory;
bad report	good report;
imposter	genuine;
unknown	known;
dying	we live on;
beaten	not killed;
sorrowful	always rejoicing;
poor	making many rich;
having nothing	possessing everything.

3. OPEN-HEARTEDNESS TO FELLOW BELIEVERS 2 Cor 6:11-13

¹¹ We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. ¹² You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections.

¹³ In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.

Christians do not grow spiritually in isolation from one another.

One of Paul's purposes in this argument for living in consistency with grace was to show that the accusations of his enemies were unfounded and to clear the way for reconciliation with the Corinthians. Many of his troubles came from within the church and Paul may have been tempted to withdraw, isolating himself from more hurt. But grace commanded him to reach out to them and ask them to do the same to him. Be open and honest; it works both ways.

4. AN UNHOLY YOKE 2 Cor 6:14-18

¹⁴ Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵ What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

"I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them,

and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.
¹⁷ Therefore go out from their midst,
and be separate from them, says the Lord,
and touch no unclean thing;
then I will welcome you,
¹⁸ and I will be a father to you,
and you shall be sons and daughters to me,
says the Lord Almighty."

There are those with whom believers can not spiritually bond. It is not possible for believers and unbelievers to have a proper spiritual relationship.

The word **yoked** means in "double harness." This is the only uses of this word in the NT. The warning is taken from the OT prohibition against plowing with mismatched animals, specifically an ox and an ass [Deut 22:10]. It also may refer to not breeding different species of animals [Lev 19:19]. The idea is that there are some things so fundamentally incompatible that they can never work together and were never intended to be brought together.

5. SEPARATING RELATIONSHIPS

2 Cor 6:16 – 7:1

The ultimate thing that sets apart believers and unbelievers is their salvation in Jesus Christ. Jesus said His "yoke" was easy [Matthew 11:29-30]. What is the concept of an "easy yoke?" We are under God's authority; He bought us and He owns us.

The instruction not to be in harness with unbelievers does not mean that Christians should have no dealings at all with unbelievers. We are in the world but not of the world. It does mean that we can have not trusting relationships with unbelievers.

In the early church a man complained to Tertullian that he was forced to offer incense to Caesar else he would lose his job. "I have to eat" the man said. Tertullian responded, "You don't have to eat, you have to be loyal to Christ."

Much of the Greek and Roman social life involved pagan temples dedicated to idols. Paul wrote, "You cannot have a part both in the Lord's table and the table of demons [1 Cor 10:21].

If a wife became a Christian, often her husband would drive her away. Sons and daughters were disinherited for following Christ. Jesus warned that His followers might find divisions in households.

Separation has always been a part of the Christian faith; we must be wise in its application.