

2 Corinthians 6:1-18 – “The Marks of Ministry”

Last week we looked at the great privileges we have of being *‘in Christ’*.

We have been given the ministry of reconciliation and have been committed with the word of reconciliation. We’ve been enlisted as Ambassadors for Christ.

So as we continue on today we’re going to look at several features of what this ministry looks like:

The Calling of Ministry – 6:1-3

The Conditions in Ministry – 6:4-5

The Capability for Ministry – 6:6-7

The Character of Ministry – 6:8-10

The Care in Ministry – 6:11-13

The Concerns for Ministry – 6:14-16

The Clarity of Ministry – 6:17-18

1. The Calling of Ministry – 6:1-3

6:1-2 - *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.*

Remember in the original manuscripts there’s no chapter references or verse references. Each book is a continuous flow. So if you’re looking in the book of Matthew and trying to get someone to reference a passage, you’d need to tell them to go to the part where Jesus says... These chapter breaks came afterwards by the translators to have easy access to specific passages and references.

Chapter 6 is not a good chapter break because it’s really keeping in the same theme and flow as to what Paul has been saying at the end of chapter 5. Just as Chapter 7 is another bad chapter break. This section of Corinthians must have been when they got the new guy to take over.

Anyways, the end of Chapter 5 spoke of this great ministry we have and how we are called to be ambassadors for Christ. Paul now says, ***we then, as workers together with Him***... The words *we then* are tying together what was just said. We’re not just ambassadors for Christ, we’re workers together ***with Him!*** Remember we read that *we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us...* (5:20). Well now Paul says we ***also plead with you...***

Paul's heart's desire was to see people reconciled to God and remaining in relationship with Him. He didn't want to see the good news go out only to have people refuse it and miss out on the wonderful invitation God was giving.

- **1 Corinthians 15:10**, *"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."*

We are saved by God's grace, we continue on in grace, and we seek to grow in this wonderful grace of God. We don't get saved to just sit around and wait for heaven. We get saved and we become new creations that have a new drive and a new desire to serve our Creator. So don't let God's grace be wasted on a life that just wants to get by. Live for Him! Be a vessel for Him to work through! Don't allow the greatness of God's grace to be wasted or in vain.

- One of the definitions for this word **vain** (Gk. *kenos*) is 'empty handed'. We're going to stand before the Lord one day (2 Corinthians 5:10) and I don't want to appear empty handed. I'm not trying to bring my own righteousness or works, but I want to be found faithful and have fruit in heaven from my earthly labors for the Lord.

We also know that Paul was contending with certain false teachers at Corinth. They were trying to bring people under legalism and works. Paul wants the people to know that salvation is a matter of simply trusting Christ. It's all by His grace.

This is why he quotes from Isaiah 49:8. In that passage God is speaking to Jesus that He will help Him in the day of salvation. That day has come and gone and that word was fulfilled when Jesus rose from the grave and our salvation was forever secure in Him. But now Paul's audience needs to recognize that this day of salvation is still at work. They still have opportunity to receive salvation and proclaim salvation.

- Jesus said in **John 9:4**, *"I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work."*

People all around us are putting off the most important decision they could ever make. They think they can decide another time. Some are fooled into thinking they can plead for forgiveness when they stand before God. We must receive Him while it is still day. And thankfully, **now is the day of salvation**. May we take this message to those who need to hear it, and pray for those that need to respond to it.

One thing that could potentially get in the way of people responding to this glorious gospel of grace is the inconsistency they see in other Christians. This is why Paul says...

6:3 - *We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed.*

Paul didn't want anything in his life to throw people off or give them an excuse why they didn't need to accept Christ. People love to hold up other people as the reason they don't want to follow Christ. But can we all just agree that humans are weak, frail, and prone to sin and mistakes. Stop looking to humanity and look to Christ who will never fail you.

- Having said that, we should live in a consistent manner by which people are drawn in by a life of integrity, and purity, rather than pushed away by hypocrisy and sin.

"As we pointed out previously, the ministry here does not refer to some dignified, ecclesiastical office, but rather to the service of Christ. The idea of human ordination is not involved. The **ministry** belongs to all who are Christ's." ¹

And we need to be ready to handle this ministry. Don't be surprised when things become challenging, or when things are difficult. That doesn't necessarily mean God is correcting you or unhappy with you, but rather He's working in you and through you to reveal a greater side to this life in Christ that we wouldn't be able to show otherwise.

2. The Conditions in Ministry – 6:4-5

6:4-5 - *But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, ⁵ in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings;*

Paul never wanted to commend himself or bring accolades upon himself. This is what some of the false apostles would do. Paul says simply we commend ourselves as ministers of God. Whatever he does is done as a servant of the Lord and for His glory.

¹ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (A. Farstad, Ed.; p. 1843). Thomas Nelson.

And when we truly live as servants of the Lord and recognize all that we do is to be done for His glory, it strengthens us to endure through some of these things Paul lists now.

in much patience... this is a patient endurance through struggles and difficulties. It's not just having patience when your child is learning to tie their shoe and their just not getting it. This is more about steadfastness and bearing up under tough circumstances.

in tribulations... this is our friend *thlipsis* which was introduced to us in 2 Corinthians 1:3. It speaks of an immense pressure. It was a tactic Romans would use to get a confession out of someone (by rolling a heavy stone across a board that was on the chest of an individual). If they didn't confess that weight would eventually crush and kill them.

This is what Paul describes as his life as a minister. But it's a life he endures willingly and gladly as a servant of Christ. This life is far greater than any life apart from Christ.

in needs... Paul knew what it was like to have much and to have little.

Philippians 4:11–12, *"Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: ¹² I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."*

in distresses... this speaks of a very precarious position in which one can't escape; extreme affliction and anguish. The Greek word gives the sense of a person trapped in a very confined space.

in stripes... this is the beatings (whipping) that Paul endured.

2 Corinthians 11:24–25, *"From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;"*

in imprisonments... Paul was no stranger to prison life. Many of his epistles were written from prison. It didn't harden him, it caused him to be an even greater minister of God.

in tumults... disorder and violent rioting. Think of Paul in Ephesus when all the people filled the theatre in a mob frenzy out of anger for Paul spreading the good news.

in labors... Paul worked hard in being a minister. While in Corinth he worked as a tent maker. He didn't live a soft life.

in sleeplessness... Paul missed out on sleep at times because of the rigors of ministry. He also missed out on meals to (***in fastings***...).

This wasn't a path that Paul chose for how he could benefit from it. This list shows that it was quite the opposite. There was nothing you could pin on Paul to make him appear anything less than a true servant of Christ.

Paul moves from the external circumstances he contended with to share the internal qualities that governed him. He lists here some of the godly traits that exemplified his life and the power that was at work through his life.

3. The Capability for Ministry – 6:6-7

6:6-7 - *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,*

Paul lived a life of ***purity*** (here meaning chastity). Paul was holy and set apart for the Lord.

He had a ***knowledge*** of Jesus and understanding into the Christian life.

He was ***longsuffering***, which meant patient with difficult people. Whereas in 6:4 it was patience in difficult circumstances.

Kindness was on full display in Paul's life by the way he gave himself for others and for the sake of the gospel.

All these traits could only be afforded him by the power of the ***Holy Spirit***, which he of course gives credit to. This is simply the outflow and fruit of a Spirit filled life.

By ***sincere love***. The fruit of the Spirit is love. This is what should motivate us on in ministry – love for God and love for others.

All Paul spoke was a conveying of God's truth. He wasn't interested in giving his own thoughts or wisdom, or bringing a message that put him in a good light. His desire was just to communicate God's word.

- This should always be our desire. It's the **word of truth** that sets people free. Everything else aside from that is empty.

Everything that Paul saw that was fruitful and successful he knew full well it was **by the power of God**. *"Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might"* (Ephesians 6:10).

Knowing that he was saved and made righteous allowed him to persevere through the most adverse conditions. In fact, it was this **righteousness** that was like an armor to him. Nothing could knock him down or wound him. He's been made righteous through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus.

- "Someone has said, "When a man is clothed in practical righteousness, he is impregnable." If our conscience is void of offense toward God and man, the devil has little to shoot at." ²

So far we're seeing a life that is lived in utmost integrity. As ministers our walk must always be lining up with our talk. The distance between what we believe and what we live must always be narrowing in our lives.

4. The Character of Ministry – 6:8-10

6:8-10 - *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.*

These contrasts reveal to us (so it would seem) some of the accusations Paul's critics were hurling at him. Regardless of what they might say, Paul knew his true character, and he knew how God saw Him.

This is the beauty of the Christian life. What the world sees may cause them to scorn and mock, but what we know to have in Jesus always gives us cause to rejoice.

² MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (A. Farstad, Ed.; p. 1844). Thomas Nelson.

5. The Care in Ministry – 6:11-13

6:11-13 - *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.*

Paul passionately pleads with the Corinthians and tells them he simply has been speaking openly and truthfully to them. He's done so with a heart of love toward them (***heart is wide open***).

The people were not restricted in any way because of Paul, but rather because of their own attitudes and affections that were becoming divided. The false teachers had corrupted them turned them against Paul. The Corinthians were beginning to have greater affections for the things of the world.

So Paul begins to speak out against these things that seemed to be restricting them and appeals for the church to have some separation from the false teachers and from the world.

- "It is unfortunate that the important doctrine of separation has been misunderstood and abused in recent years, for it is an essential truth. Some sincerely zealous Christians have turned separation into isolation, until their fellowship has become so narrow that they cannot even get along with themselves. In reaction to this extreme position, other believers have torn down all the walls and will fellowship with anybody, regardless of what he believes or how he lives. While we applaud their desire to practice Christian love, we want to remind them that even Christian love must exercise discernment (Phil. 1:9–11)." ³

6. The Concerns for Ministry – 6:14-16

6:14-16 - *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? ¹⁵ And what accord has Christ with Belial [Satan]? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you 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."*

Here's a verse that is often quoted but do we really understand the implication or practicality of it?

³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 652). Victor Books.

Being unequally yoked would have been a very relevant and fitting picture for the people in this day. This spoke of putting a harness over an animal to have them pull a plow or other instrument useful for farming. It comes from **Deuteronomy 22:10**, “*You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.*”

The ox was a clean animal to the Jew, but the donkey wasn't. And on top of that, these two animals had 2 very different natures; natures that would oppose one another and make being yoked together a very unpleasant and painful experience.

When we come to Christ we're to be yoked to Christ. In fact Jesus said in **Matthew 11:28–30**, “*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*”²⁹ *Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*”³⁰ *For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*”

If we're yoked to Christ and yet try to hitch ourselves to something that is not of Christ, we're going to be pulled in different directions. That yoke is going to become an irritant and a painful one at that.

We are in this world, and we're to be in relationships, but we're not to be joined together in partnerships that will inevitably pull us in opposite direction and create unnecessary conflict and potential compromise.

- How often this has happened in marriages between an unbeliever and a believer, or a business relationship. This often times results in severed relationships.
- The Bible makes it quite clear that there cannot be any kind of health or union under those circumstances.

“Note the nouns that Paul used: *fellowship, communion, accord* (harmony), *part, agreement*. Each of these words speaks of having something in common. The word *accord* gives us our English word “symphony,” (Gk=*symphonesis*) and it speaks of beautiful music that comes when the players are reading the same score and obeying the same leader. What chaos we would have if each instrumentalist played his own tune in his own way!”⁴

For you are the temple of the living God... This is huge! We're to be different. We now have the privilege of God dwelling inside each of us.

⁴ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 652). Victor Books.

7. The Clarity of Ministry – 6:17-18

6:17-18 - *Therefore “Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.”¹⁸ “I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”*

We’re called to be separate from the world. We’re not to isolate ourselves, but we’re to be different. It’s one thing to have a boat in water, but when you have water in the boat, you’ve got problems!

We see the fruit of this holiness – we experience this relationship with our heavenly Father as it was meant to be.

“If we are linked to the world, it limits His ability to be a Father to us. Think of it this way...

If I wanted to take my family out to dinner, but my kids were all muddy from playing outside, I’d say, “I want to take you out to dinner. Go wash up.”

Now, if they responded by saying, “We don’t want to wash. We like this mud,” they’d still be my children, but I couldn’t take them out for dinner.

So, too, God says to us, “I will be a Father to you, taking you great places, doing wonderful things for you if you’re separate and clean. If you’re not separate, you’re still My child, but I can’t do for you what I would have done in and with and through you had you separated yourself from the world.”⁵

⁵ Courson, J. (2003). *Jon Courson’s Application Commentary* (p. 1124). Thomas Nelson.