

A Study of Second Corinthians

Week Four

2 Corinthians 5:6-6:10

Day One

6 Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. 7 We live by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.

v. 6 – In the previous verse that we studied last week, Paul wrote that we have received the Spirit as a deposit of good things to come. He then continued that thought by stating that he was confident of his ultimate dwelling in heaven with the Lord even though he was confined to his body on earth. I think including what Paul wrote to the Philippians will clarify what he meant here:

I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body (Philippians 1:20-25).

v. 7 – This is a great verse that I often quote out of context. Paul was referring to his ultimate home in the presence of God. I have applied the verse to all kinds of faith topics, daily events and activities. Is it proper to do that? Yes, because the truth of this verse can apply not only to our eternal life with Christ, but also to our daily walk of faith. This verse can apply to money, relationships and ministry. So I apply it to those things, knowing full well that its ultimate meaning concerns our eternal destiny.

v. 8 – Paul actually lived in the reality of heaven, even though he walked on earth. He was so focused on ultimately being in God's presence that he eagerly yearned for it. That contrasts with my own desire to do all that I can to **avoid** heaven for as long as possible. I say I am confident, but do all I can to avoid thinking about and going into God's presence after I die. Paul was ready to enter that next phase as soon as possible and spoke of it with boldness and in a nonchalant way. *Help me, Lord, to have the apostle's confidence and perspective!*

v. 9 – This is a great summary to Paul's presentation and a worthy objective for you and me to follow. Paul made it his goal to be pleasing to the Lord, whether he was here or there, alive or dead. That is so simple! If he departed this life, then Paul knew that was God's will and pleasure:

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints (Psalms 116:15).

If Paul remained, it was because God had work for him to do. So he was content either way, but eager to depart. What a great life philosophy! That is undoubtedly why Paul was so successful in what he did. **What is your life and death philosophy? Could some of your frustration now be due to your lack of perspective on then?**

Day Two

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. 11 Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. 12 We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart.

v. 10 – This sounds like we will stand in God’s presence and be rewarded for our good deeds or bad ones. Many believe that if they do more good things than bad things in this life, then the good will outweigh the bad and they will “get into” heaven. This is a mistaken notion, for our eternal reward is already secured by faith in Christ. What’s more, the good deeds you do were also pre-determined by God:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:7-10).

I need the blood of Jesus to cover my sins and me in the presence of God. That is the protection I need from God’s wrath; a life of good deeds cannot provide that protection. Without Christ, I would be judged based on my own merits and would be found sorely lacking. The same is true for you. You can never earn God’s favor.

v. 11 – Paul knew what was at stake in what he was doing and preaching. He didn’t want any man or woman to perish without knowing Christ. Therefore, he worked and labored, willing to put off his own promotion into God’s presence in order to continue working in God’s vineyard here on earth. Notice too that Paul tried to *persuade* men, not condemn, push, or manipulate them into making a decision to follow Jesus.

There was no ulterior motive in Paul’s life. He wasn’t building his own kingdom, but God’s kingdom. He hoped that this was clear among those with whom he worked in Corinth. **What are your motives for doing what you do? Money? Fame? Self-worth? Or is your motive to extend God’s kingdom and see as many come to know Christ as possible? You may want to spend some time meditating on that question.**

v. 12 – Paul wanted those who had come to know Jesus through his work to appreciate the work that he had done. There must have been quite a group of apostles who were of a different spirit than Paul. And they must have continued to attack his credential as God’s worker. It is so hard to think that anyone could have been Paul’s opponent, but there

many. Today we put a halo around his head; then some wanted to put a noose around his neck. **If people criticized, questioned and opposed Paul, do you think they will do the same things to you?** I urge you to keep in mind what Jesus said:

Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets (Luke 6:26).

Who is speaking ill of you? If there is no one, then you have to ask yourself what's wrong. If no one is speaking ill of you, either you aren't doing anything worthy of comment or you are a false prophet. How does that statement strike you?

Day Three

13 If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

v. 13 – It would seem that someone was accusing Paul of being out of his mind. **Do you see the reality that almost all great men and women are misunderstood while they are alive?** I have often said that they don't build you a monument until *after* you're dead. Before then, everyone is so familiar with your faults that they can't see your virtue!

“A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household! So do not be afraid of them” (Matthew 10:24-26).

v. 14 – Paul was doing what he did out of his love for God and God's people. There was nothing in it for himself, except the joy of doing the will of God. Paul clearly saw the truth that we have *all* died in Christ.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20-21).

What great love that God would give His Son, that Jesus would die for us. The truth of that love should drive us all to do God's will. It's that simple.

v. 15 – I have lived for myself long enough. Even after I gave my life to Jesus, I have been guilty of living for so many things and for so many others except Jesus. Yet no movement, no other person *ever* gave his or her life for me. I am 56 years old and I want

to live my remaining years for Jesus! I want to do what He wants me to do where He wants me to do it. I think that is in Africa, so I will proceed to work for Him there.

Paul's focus was so singular: Jesus and purpose, Jesus and his mission to the Gentiles. Yet that focus did not limit him in any way; rather, it opened the whole world to him. Too often, I think people are afraid that focus will limit their effectiveness for God. Instead, it will actually increase it, just like a laser beam is focused and effective!

What is your focus? How simply can you describe who you are and what you live to do? Peter Drucker used to say that our mission should be short enough to fit on the front of a t-shirt as a motto or saying. Would your focus fit on a t-shirt?

v. 16 – We are not dealing with ordinary things here. We are dealing with the things of God; we are dealing with God Himself! The church isn't a country club and God isn't like our employer or supervisor. We don't vote on God's will, nor do we have veto power over His decisions. We have died because He died. We live in Him because He lives. Therefore, we cannot afford to view anyone as if they were just another person or our jobs or ministries like they were simply employment. Every encounter with another and every work assignment have come from God Himself. **Do you see that? Do you act like that is true?**

Day Four

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

v. 17 – We aren't just renewed; we are a new species, a new creation! The world has never seen the likes of you or me before. I am *in* Christ. I am part of His body. I have the Holy Spirit living in me, a deposit of the eternal life to come. I have gifts that come from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is developing fruit in me. I have a ministry, a work of service, to perform that no one can do like I can. I am nothing like what I was, but I am nothing compared to what I will be. I am new, for resurrection life never decays or winds down. It is always fresh, always full of life and vitality. Thank you, Lord, that I am a new creature in Jesus!

v. 18 – I am a new creature for one reason and one reason only: God did it. I did not earn it, I could not even conceive of what God went on to do for me. I was estranged from God and God reconciled me to Himself through the work of Jesus the Anointed One. And now God has given me the task of helping Him do what He did for me: reconcile! I have listed reconciliation as one of my life's governing values, and I use this verse as the definition of that value.

God isn't angry, but the Church often portrays God as angry. If God were angry, He could express that anger on His own behalf. Instead, He wants us to convey that He stands ready to welcome any and all who come to Him through Jesus. **Are you a minister of reconciliation? Are you accurately portraying the heart of God as you seek to reconcile those around you to Him?**

v. 19 – God is willing to forgive sins, not holding anyone's sins against them. That is the message of reconciliation: God isn't angry. Consider the ministry of Jesus. The only time we see Him angry is with those who didn't have faith after walking with Him, the religious bigots and those who made the things of God a commodity in the Temple. He was not angry at the publicans or prostitutes. I think the church has reversed the order here. We are mad at the sinners and exalt the religious! This isn't God's message of reconciliation.

Jesus said that those who think that they are right with God may be in for a surprise. Those who admit that they aren't right with Him are ripe for reconciliation with God.

v. 20 – We are Christ's ambassadors. Ambassadors always represent their home country and its views, not their own. Our message can't be our own; it must be God's message. And God's message to the world is: I'm not angry, come home to me! **Is your message in line with God's? Are you angrier than God? Does that come through in your words and actions? What can you do to align your message with God's? If it's out of line, then repentance would be a good place to start, along with a prayer that God would change your heart.**

Paul's tactics for delivering the message of reconciliation were basic: He implored, begged, urgently appealed to people that they be reconciled to God. The door to God was open, he urged everyone to walk through it.

I know I am repeating myself, but did you notice that Paul mentioned Christ five times in these four verses? Make sure, whatever you do, that Christ is the focus and result.

Day Five

21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 6:1 As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. 2 For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation. 3 We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited.

v. 21 – If anyone wants to know what God thinks of sin, they need only to see what Jesus suffered to know. When we say Jesus paid the price for you and me, I'm not sure we realize what we are saying. He endured the sentence of death that each of us should have paid as sinners. I heard someone say last year that God doesn't have to give anyone a

second chance after they've sinned. He could destroy the sinner at their initial expression of sin. The fact that He is patient added to the fact that He Himself paid His own penalty for sin indicate God's love and great grace.

Not only did Jesus pay the price for our sin, He paid the price for us to have the righteousness needed to access God. I never come to God on my own merits; it's always based on what Jesus did for me. He became sin for me, God "killed" sin on my behalf, and then God gave me the righteousness that can only come through Jesus. Pretty good deal, huh? If that doesn't make you shout Hallelujah, I don't know what will.

v. 1 – Paul urged them *not* to receive God's grace in vain. That means it must be possible—to receive God's grace and do nothing with or waste it. We have been made the righteousness of God. We are seated in high places with Him. We have access to God's throne of grace and mercy. **So given all those truths, what are you doing with those magnificent privileges? Are you making the most of your standing before God in Christ? Do you live to the fullness of your stature?**

Notice too that Paul referred to himself and the others as God's co-workers. You and God are co-workers. You and God work side-by-side when you are pursuing the work of reconciling others to God. You have a purpose and, when you fulfill it, you are working alongside God. You can go to God for help just like you would someone you work with on the job. **Are you taking advantage of that relationship? Are you doing things that can only be done with God's help as your co-worker? Simply put: What are you doing with the grace of God that is in your life?**

v. 2 – Paul clarified that the day of salvation predicted by the prophet in Isaiah 49:8 is the day of Christ. The day of God's help is here and His help is Jesus! There is no other day to come. There is no other way to come. There is only one way and that way is Jesus. Paul was unequivocal on this point and we need to be as well. This is the message of reconciliation. There is no way that man could or can bring himself into God's presence in an acceptable way; mankind needed help to do so, and God provided that help in Jesus.

There is a lot of talk about whether there is any other way through which a person can come to God. What if someone was a good person but didn't follow Jesus. What will happen to that person? My sense is that God is good and if someone is truly seeking than that person will truly find, and what they find will be Jesus. I think God is capable of doing what He did for the Ethiopian eunuch:

So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him (Acts 8:26-31).

I think everyone who is seriously seeking God hears the message of Jesus. They then either accept or reject that message, but they will hear. I am open to correction on that, for it is only my opinion.

v. 3 – Paul was eager not to put a stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that his message and ministry of reconciliation would not be dismissed by others needlessly. Obviously, Paul had a lot of demonic opposition that caused his message to be distorted and dismissed. But he wasn’t going to do something that would assist the devil in his work. That is obviously why Paul did not take any support from his churches. He didn’t want to lose credibility with anyone if it was in control not to do so. I wish some modern ministry’s would learn that lesson and take it to heart.

Day Six

4 Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; 5 in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; 6 in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love;

v. 4 – It wasn’t about Paul when Paul carried out his ministry. It was always about the message of Jesus. So he was willing to put up with all kinds of things so that the message would go as far and to as many people as God wanted it to go. Paul did not commend himself with a brochure, website or third-party testimonials. He commended himself through suffering, and paying a price to deliver the reconciliation message. Some probably dismissed what Paul was saying, just as the Athenians did in Acts 17. But others would be touched by his total commitment to his cause and that is just what Paul wanted.

How do you commend yourself and the work that God has you doing?

v. 5 – I have often written that there are some who want to be apostles and church leaders because of the benefit it can bring them. They want to travel, speak, collect honoraria and have prestige. I always direct people to these verses when they talk about the apostolic anointing or mantle of men in the modern church. Paul’s apostolic work wasn’t a source of personal gain; it was a source of personal pain and suffering. And I will never understand how a modern apostle can also try to pastor a local church. That is just ludicrous in my thinking. How can you pastor a local church and be away from that local church? It is impossible. If Paul didn’t do it that way, then we shouldn’t either.

I have come to a conclusion that anyone who wants to do something great and change the world must expect and be ready to spend some time in jail! That’s right, jail time is for the successful. Consider Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Martin Luther King, Vaclav Havel, Thomas More, Joan of Arc, Jesus, Paul and others who spent some time in prison or under house arrest. **Are you ready to spend some time in the slammer, as it is commonly known?** I have thought a lot about this and I

would not relish the opportunity. But if I need to do this to get the purpose message out, then I am willing. Why did I write that? Help me, Lord!

v. 6 – Paul not only did active things to advance the message, he also did passive things that made him an exceptional role model to follow. Paul was active when he needed to be, but he didn't discount the need to *be* something so he could *do* something. Don't ever neglect the character formation that is such an important part of what God wants to do in your life. Consider the lives of Moses, Daniel and David and you will understand how God prepares a leader for maximum exposure and effectiveness.

Can you look back and trace how God has been preparing you to do what it is that He has called you to do? I did a time line recently and it showed how God “moved” in my life with significant changes and events every five years. The time line is now a permanent part of every journal in which I write—it was a very helpful exercise.

Day Seven

7 in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; 8 through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; 9 known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; 10 sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

v. 7 – Do you think Paul exaggerated his ministry results as we are sometime apt to do? No, he used truthful speech and backed it all up with the power of God. He was also ready to do some spiritual warfare with “both hands,” with all his strength as represented by both hands. A warrior who fights with one hand may be effective, but one that can fight with both hands would have been a formidable opponent. I would think that Paul was a tough opponent as he faced off against Satan's schemes. Yet he admitted earlier in this letter that sometimes he didn't know what to do next; then God intervened and helped him.

v. 8 – There have been too many times when I have literally collapsed when someone said something negative about me or what I was doing. I want to change the world, but I will cry if someone says something bad about me. That doesn't make sense! I am doing much better than I used to in this area, but I still have a long way to go. They called Jesus a man in league with the devil; what can I expect that they will say about me? And why should it surprise me or affect my decisions of what to do? Too often the bad report and dishonor have almost done me in. And some considered Paul to be an imposter, a false apostle and prophet. That is simply amazing! *Help me, Lord, to be stronger so I can do what You want me to do.*

v. 9 – Paul listed some more challenges for the man of God. There were some who didn't want to associate with him. What's more, he had been beaten for his faith and treated as a dead man! Paul had to learn to function no matter what he faced. Now we understand

why Paul had what we call a Damascus-road experience. For what he was going to face, Paul needed a dramatic reminder for when he went through dark and trying times.

I have heard people say that they would like a Damascus-road encounter with God. Then I have known others who have had some kind of dramatic encounter or confirmation to show them the will of God. I always tell people who have had that happen, “Remember this for you’re going to need it someday!” And if you seek such a dramatic encounter and receive it, then be sure you will need to refer back to it again and again.

v. 10 – As has been said so often, the way up in God is down. Paul was sorrowful, poor and had nothing in the natural. Of course, he said that he didn’t base his life on what could be seen but on what could not be seen in faith. So while sorrowful, he stated that he was always rejoicing. While poor, he saw how he was enriching the lives of others. While having nothing, he saw that in reality he had access to everything he needed to do God’s will.

What tremendous affirmations Paul made! Some would say he was crazy, for if you’re poor, they would say that you’re poor. But Paul knew the truth about God that Abraham had discovered centuries earlier:

As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed — the God who gives life to the dead and *calls things that are not as though they were* (Romans 4:17 emphasis added).

What are you saying about your current situation? Are you talking about what you can see or what can’t be seen? Are you talking about things that aren’t as though they are? Is it time you stopped talking negative and instead speaking positive?