

2 Corinthians 6 Commentary-Wayne Barber

PREVIOUS

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2 Corinthians 6:1-4a What is Involved in Working Together With God

Turn with me today to 2 Corinthians 6. We're going to begin a new mini-series in our studies of 2 Corinthians, as you see what I've been doing. I'm going to entitle this "Working Together With God." That ought to thrill your heart today and the message is specifically, this is part 1, "What is Involved in Working Together with God." So as we enter into chapter 6 I believe you can't put away what we've already studied. It's just a flow like the current of a river. I don't know if you've ever been in a canoe on a river or a raft and you've seen how that current carries you down the river. The Ocoee River was about 45 minutes from Chattanooga, and we would go there quite often. It was a class-4 whitewater river. As you know, in the Olympics, that's where the Olympic kayaking took place on that river. Just not far from where we lived. And it was just really awesome.

Every year when I'd do my camp at Dayton, Tennessee, at Bryan College, we'd always take about 500 kids up there and we'd rent every raft on the river. Can you imagine? And there were 500 some kids going down that river that particular day. There's one place on that river that I really love. The first time he did it I didn't, but we have a guide in the raft, you have a helmet on, you have the life vest on and when he says, "Okay, everybody out of the raft." That's a little tricky when you're in white water. But he said, "Keep your feet in front of you and keep your hands behind your head and just let the current carry you down."

He wanted us to feel the strength and the movement of that current. And as we got over into that water it was just awesome. You thought it would take you straight down the river. It did, but its own path. It would pull you over here, over to here, because that current doesn't run the way you think it's going to run and it's sort of an adventure as you ride the current of that river.

Well, that's the way it is when you study Scripture. It's like getting into the current; the Holy Spirit of God begins to carry you to what He wants you to know. Many times you're reading through Scripture thinking, "Why didn't he address this, and why didn't he answer that?" And God says "It's none of your business. I want you to know what I want you to know. Now get in the current of My river and let Me take you where I want to take you."

This river began for us in 2 Corinthians 1:1-11 when we discovered that God is the God of all comfort. Now why would Paul bring that up? We know from the context of what we've studied that the church of Corinth has not been a pleasant experience for Paul. They've eaten his lunch. They've falsely accused him; they've done everything you can think of. The legalists had gotten in there, the false doctrine had gotten into the church, so the apostle Paul ran to the only place he knew to run and that's to the God of all comfort. That's a beautiful picture of how we ought to be every day in our life.

Well, when we're persecuted and because we've been submissive to Him, He is the God of all comfort. And that's when you discover that for the first time in your life perhaps. This current took us through the truth, beginning in 1:12, of how important it is to let your walk match your talk. You see, when you're falsely accused as Paul had been, the beautiful thing is when your walk matches your talk and you're living to please God and you're not living to please men. What happens is that you can hold your head up. Your conscience does not condemn you when people falsely accuse you. You don't have that inner turmoil inside of you because you know that God knows, and that's okay.

Well, on our journey we learned in chapter 3 that, just like the apostle Paul, that we are servants of a new covenant. That's the most beautiful words I can say to you today. In Christ Jesus we are servants of a new covenant. We saw that because of this Christ has come to live in us in the person of His Spirit and our adequacy is no longer of ourselves. This is where we have to learn, it's a complete change in mind, it's a renewal of the mind. Nothing in my life depends upon my ability when it comes to the Christian life, but it depends upon my availability and your availability to the One that lives within us.

Christ becomes our adequacy in the new covenant and as we begin to see this and understand it and rejoice in it, the current carried

us right into chapter 4, and we learned how to live without losing heart. What do you mean by that? Well, as we studied, going back to the flesh never reaps anything. There's nothing there. It's empty, it's fruitless, there's nothing there. And so we learned that because Christ lives within us and He is our life, and ministry is received, not achieved and all of a sudden we begin to experience this mighty journey of walking with Him and then we can live without losing heart. We don't become faint-hearted because we trusted our flesh.

And as we rounded the corner in the current in this river of 2 Corinthians we rounded the corner of chapter 4. We came into that beautiful, beautiful, long deep-watered area of chapter 5 when we learned how to conquer the fear of death. Death is not an enemy to the believer. Jesus conquered death; He conquered sin, death, and the grave. And so in Christ we have our victory and we don't have to fear it. We don't have to necessarily look forward to the act of dying, but we certainly can look forward to what happens after death.

And then we came into that beautiful deep pool of being ambassadors for Christ and we saw the message that we have: that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself and at the moment of salvation we die, there's a death, and there's a newness of life that we enter into when Christ comes to be our Lord and our Savior.

Well, that brings us in to what we're going to be looking at today. What a journey we've been on. Isn't it interesting how the current carried us over here, carried us over here, carried us over here. You say, "Well, you're not talking about this topic and you're not talking about that topic." That's exactly right. I don't impose upon God what He knows already is the need of people to hear. I just come to His Word and let His current carry us to where He wants to carry us and I promise you, whatever needs you have, at some point He will address in His Word.

Well, as we get ready to dig into our text today, Paul says in 6:1, "And working together with Him." I want those words to just ring in your heart, just to thrill your soul, "working together with Him." Now remember, he's following the thought of that long stretch that we went through as ambassadors for Christ, being ambassadors for Christ, having been given the ministry of reconciliation.

Paul understood that taking the message of the gospel to people, now he could reason with them, but he understood as we've covered already, that only God could persuade the hearts of men. This cannot be done by man alone. This is God's business; salvation is of God. It's a joint effort and we get to work together with Him. It's that yoke. Now, I don't want you to ever miss this. This is what it's all about. Jesus is right here, we're right here. And He leads us through life. It's a beautiful, beautiful thing: working together with Him.

I mean, look at those words, "working together." It's one word in the Greek, *sunergeo*. And it means together. Sun means we're so together with Him nobody can separate us from Him. And *ergo* means to work, to labor. And this is very much like the phrase that Paul himself used in Colossians 1:29. And Paul says this, because a lot of people get on me all the time. "Wayne, this grace message sounds passive to me." And I've been saying this for years, folks, if you think it's passive, you haven't got it yet. God will absolutely wear you out. He won't burn you out, but He'll wear you out. This is the busiest life you could have ever had in your entire life. Listen, this is what Paul says in Colossians 1:29, "And for this purpose also I labor, striving" and some people stand up and say, "Bless God, Wayne finally got it," but they didn't finish reading the verse: "I labor, striving"—how do I labor and how do I strive, listen carefully—"according to His power, which mightily works within me." Do you see the difference?

You see, a lot of people bring that striving labor ethic out of the workplace into their Christianity and they don't have a clue what they're talking about. We work together with Him. I don't live in my strength, I live in His strength. Working together with Him is a 200% relationship: 100% my willingness to get into His Word and renew my mind so His Spirit can transform my life; 100% my willingness to submit and yield to Him in each and every given situation of my life; but it's 100% His power and His presence that enables me as I yield to Him in the various situations of my life.

Just think about it. Yoked together with Him. With Him. I want you to catch those words "with Him." We are "with Him." Sometimes in a message I wonder maybe I don't say it right or something and it just kind of goes "that's good, what's next?" With Him, with Him. You say, "What are you talking about?" Let me just show you that little term "with Him," how we are identified with Him. With Him; we're never apart from Him, never.

Romans 6:4, "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk [with Him] in newness of life." Romans 6:5, "For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin." Romans 6:8, "Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him." Romans 8:17, "and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him." First Corinthians 6:17, "But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him." Ephesians 2:6, "and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus." Colossians 2:12, "having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with

Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions.” Colossians 3:4, “When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.” Second Timothy 2:11, “It is a trustworthy statement: For as we died with Him, we shall also live with Him.”

“With Him,” I tell you what. That’s enough right there to just get on the altar and thank God for the rest of the week, that we’re with Him. You say, “Wayne, you still haven’t touched me yet.” Well, you can’t understand working together with Him until you understand how He’s placed you with Him. How many of you know who Tony Evans is? He’s one of my favorite preachers and I enjoy hearing him when I can. I met Tony and have been there at his church and he always told the illustration that he was the chaplain of the Dallas Mavericks.

And he had four tickets to every game. His family would go with him and when the family didn’t go, he would call his buddies. And he would make up those four tickets; maybe three of his buddies would go. And he said every time he would tell this story as an illustration, and I’ve heard him preach it many times, he’d say, “You just come and remember you are with me. So don’t let anybody bother you when you get to the arena. Just tell them you’re with me and everything else will take place.”

Well, I’ve heard that story, but then I got to live it. I was out there visiting with him, and he called us up at the hotel, and he said, “Wayne, let’s go to the ballgame tonight. They’re playing the Denver Nuggets.” And he said, “Now listen, when you get there, you park in a certain place.” And I said “Well, okay.” He told us what to do. Well, we got down there, traffic was busy, and we started to come in and the policeman with a big badge said, “You cannot park here.” And we said, “Wait a minute. We’re with Tony Evans.” “Oh,” he said, “you’re with him. Okay.” And he moved the barrier and we pulled in just a few yards from where you walk up the steps to go into the arena. It was an awesome place to park.

Well, we were going to go over and get our tickets. About that time Tony was standing over here and he said, “Guys, come on, you’re with me. You don’t have to go over there to get a ticket. I got your ticket.” We walked up and he let us in. I said, “Tony, I’m hungry, I’m about to starve.” He said, “You’re with me, would you relax?” Got on an elevator, went down two floors, walked into a big banquet room and it was free. All the food you wanted. The manager of the team was there and a lot of the wives of the players. And I’m thinking this is nice.

Well, it came time for the game. I said, “Let’s go. I want to get out there and watch them warm up.” He said, “Wayne, you’re with me.” And we walked out a special door and guess who was in front of us? The Denver Nuggets and the two teams were together. I used to think I was tall when I played basketball. Man, I played center when I played basketball in college. I couldn’t even start as guard anymore. I’m too short. These guys, I was looking up at them. Their chin was above my head. And they walked out and you could hear all the people clapping as they introduced the team and then we walked out. People were still clapping.

I found out who sits in those chairs down by the floor. And it was awesome: right down by the floor. We were ten feet from where the playing was taking place, on the second row. And man, it was just awesome. All of this took place because we were with him.

Now I want you to get this. Somehow I’m going to fail if you don’t get this. You’re with Him. Now the next time you start bad-mouthing your circumstances, the next time you start bemoaning your circumstances, remember something: you are with Him. It’s one thing to be with Tony Evans at the Dallas Maverick basketball game. It’s another thing to be with the King of glory that walks with you everywhere you go, that you’re never alone. No matter what comes your way, He lives within you. You are with Him and because of that you get to work together with Him. Do you see the picture? Every day of your life lived on this earth is for a reason. and it’s not to get fat and lazy and see the world. It’s because God has made us His ambassadors in this world and we have been given the ministry of reconciliation. He has moved in, we are with Him; we get to work together with Him.

And Paul’s trying to get this point across to the hard-headed Corinthians that had caused him so much pain in his life. You see, that’s the whole message of living grace: Christ in you. You are with Him. You can’t, He never said you could; He can, He always said He would. Christ in you and you get to work together with Him. So let’s venture into our text today.

Working together with God immediately involves a caution

Three things are involved in working together with God. The first thing is that working together with God immediately involves a caution. And before you even get too excited about it, there’s a caution that Paul throws up. And he says in verse 1, “And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain.”

Now let’s break those words down and make sure we’ve got an understanding of what they mean. The word “not,” he says, “not to receive the grace of God,” it’s the words *me eis*, but it means “not in any single way.” Paul says, “we urge you not to in any single way to receive the grace of God in vain.” The word for receive is the word *dechomai*, which automatically changes the picture. This is the believer; this is somebody who is so excited about the grace of God and salvation. It means to receive with expectancy. There’s another word in the Greek that is translated “receive or to take hold of” and it’s the word *lambano*. And *lambano* is just a

“oh, thank you, I appreciate it,” and dechomai is, “oh man, this is awesome.” To receive with eagerness. Dechomai is that eager, willing, expectant reception of something.

The word for “vain,” when he says “not to receive the grace of God in vain,” is the word kenos. Now kenos literally means “empty.” It means without any content in it whatsoever. Here in our text it means “fruitless, without any success, without any evidence.” In other words, it’s of no use whatsoever. Now you understand “don’t receive the grace of God to where it bears no fruit.” Don’t receive the grace of God to where it’s empty and without substance in your life.

Now listen, Christ is the grace of God, that’s the well, that’s where all the grace comes from, is out of Him. And we must remember back in chapter 3 that Paul showed us that our adequacy because of the grace of God is now in Christ. Everything we need is in Him to live the Christian life. We can’t live it, but He can, and He lives within us. So everything that we need: He is the grace of God.

As I said earlier, we can’t, He never said we could; He can, and He always said He would. You’ve got that down really well. He lives in us, the grace of God lives within us. Now understand, we’re with Him to do through us what we could never do ourselves. Dick Woodward who is with International Cooperative Missions, he is their mouthpiece, he is their voice, he is their radio teacher, is paralyzed from the neck down. Now if you tell somebody that they can’t, but God never said they could and they’re full of energy and full of themselves, you haven’t gotten anywhere.

But this man understands this truth because he can do nothing but open his mouth. That’s all he can do. And he wrote down these four principles of his life. I’ve heard him on an interview and it’s awesome. He says, “I’m not but He is; and I’m in Him and He is in me. I can’t but He can; and I’m in Him and He is in me. I don’t want to but He wants to; and I’m in Him and He is in me. I didn’t but He did; because I was in Him and He was in me.”

And that’s it: grace is the enabling power of Christ in us working through us. Now when that happens, when I’m a yielded vessel, when I’m a conduit through which Christ can do His work, it never turns up empty. It always bears fruit. It doesn’t end up vain as you understand now what he’s saying. What Christ does through us is spiritually successful and it will not burn on judgment day, and we talked about that in chapter 5. We’ll all stand before Him and have our works judged and tested by fire.

So now, with this understanding, what does Paul mean when he says to believers who have received the grace of God with great eagerness and he says, “Don’t receive the grace of God in vain”? You see, grace is good, it is received with eager expectancy, but how many believers receive God’s saving grace with outstretched arms but are wasting the opportunity in the times in which they live to allow that grace to work through them and in the context persuading others in the ministry of reconciliation?

Actually, they’re of no use to God at all. Can you imagine a believer who is so excited about receiving God’s grace but not willing to live in it? Not willing to die to the flesh daily by saying yes to Him? You see, Paul has covered this before. We know exactly what he’s talking about. Galatians 2:20-21, and you know this very well because I’ve quoted it so many times, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”

Paul could have easily have said, “I do not receive the grace of God in vain.” You see, a lot of people will welcome grace within their lives, but then they don’t allow it to do its deep work within them and transform them daily. By saying “not to receive the grace of God in vain,” in this context Paul is saying, “Don’t waste the opportunity that God has given you in the days while you’re here on this earth.” You are an ambassador for Christ. His grace is within you. Don’t receive the grace of God in vain. Be an ambassador for Christ, live in His adequacy and let Him persuade men while the time is near.

Don’t get so excited about His coming to live in you that you do not live daily so that He can live through you and touch others. Don’t miss the point that God’s grace is so that we might see others reconciled to Christ. So many people haven’t gotten this yet. They still think that Jesus comes to live in them to make them healthy and wealthy and whatever else you can add to it because He’s all about down here. And that’s so foreign to Scripture. God is leaving me and you on this earth for one reason: so that we might be recipients of His grace, we might be transformed by that grace, enabled by its power to be His ambassadors as we worship Him and glory in Him; His ambassadors carrying with us wherever we go the ministry of reconciliation.

People say, “Wayne, you’re not evangelistic.” Well, if I’m not then I don’t understand what I’m talking about. That is evangelism; that is missions. We’re not here for any other reason. You say every morning you wake up, ask God, “Why did You let me live another day? God, I don’t deserve to live.” Every time you take another breath say, “God, why are You allowing me to take another breath?” And God says, “Because I’ve got a purpose for you. You’re My ambassador and you have within you the ministry of reconciliation.”

You say, “Well, I’m a little puzzled here. How can a believer receive God’s grace in vain?” That’s easy. If you’ll remember back in 5:15 it tells you the purpose of having received it to start with. It says, “and he died for all, that they who live”—now listen carefully and he speaks of the ones who have received His grace—“should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose

again on their behalf.” That’s pretty clear. When a believer chooses to live only for themselves, when they choose to react to their circumstances instead of respond to the grace of God in the midst of it, when they choose to be so full of themselves and they don’t have their focus on why it is that God is allowing them to live to start with, and why God has given them this life in Christ while here on this earth, then at that very moment they have received the grace of God in vain. And that’s a sad, sad thing.

I’ve been there, surely you’ve been there. I just pray that if you’re there this morning that you understand that God’s grace is still there and you’re still useable but only to the degree that you’re willing to yield and obey Him. God does not work through vessels that are full of themselves. No, sir, so if there are fleshly agendas here this morning, then understand that you’ve received the grace of God in vain. You’ve got to lay those things down and let God be God in your life. That’s what it’s all about. We have an opportunity in this age in which we live and the only way to be fruitful is to allow Christ, the vine, to produce that fruit through us as branches and our responsibility is to abide in that vine, not to receive the grace of God in vain.

Working together with God involves a window of opportunity

So working together with God involves a caution, a huge caution. Be real careful that you realize when you start living for yourself you’re not working together with Him. But secondly, it involves a window of opportunity.

We’ve got to see this life while we’re here on this earth as a window of opportunity. He says in verse 2, “for He says, ‘At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you’; behold, now is the ‘the acceptable time,’ behold, now is ‘the day of salvation.’” And anytime that you see an Old Testament Scripture you have to remember that there were immediate circumstances that the Scripture would apply to, but as you look at prophetic Scripture you have to look far beyond what was just the immediate and the obvious because the actual is much deeper. And Paul picks up on this.

From the 40th chapter of Isaiah all the way through is a prophecy of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He quotes from Isaiah 49:8 and his point in using this Scripture from the Old Testament is to get them to understand the urgency and the privilege of living in the time in which they were living.

The word “time” in the phrase “acceptable time” is the word kairos. Now there’s another word for “time,” chronos. I’ve got a chronometer right here and I’m watching it. There’s nothing like a clock-eyed Baptist. That’s chronos. Kairos is season or opportunity; that’s what the word means. So he says at the acceptable time, acceptable season, at the right opportunity. “I listened to you” is a prophetic verse here.

The word “acceptable time” is further identified in the verse. What is the acceptable time or the favorable time? It’s the day of salvation. Now that can be applied in a physical way, immediately to Israel, but you’ve got to look far beyond that. He’s telling them of the promise that was made to Abram who became Abraham and was passed to Isaac and to Jacob and then Jacob became Israel and you know the story. He’s looking beyond what they would possibly see themselves. So this acceptable time, or this favorable time is the day of salvation.

Let me read it again, “for He says, ‘At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you’; behold, now is ‘the acceptable time,’ behold, now is ‘the day of salvation.’” Now Paul picks up on that and brings it into a future spiritual sense that we’re living in today. The first time the word “acceptable” is used in verse 2 is the word dektos, and dektos refers to that which is the object of divine approval and intent. In other words that’s a time that is scheduled or intended. The second word for “acceptable” is euprosdektos. It lengthens the word with two other words and that means “well accepted.” Boy, you just pushed this out of sight when he says, “This is the favorable time.” The word “behold,” he says, “behold, now is the acceptable time,” “behold, now is the day of salvation,” means, “stop what you’re doing, stop it, stop it, stop it right now and look around you at what you’re missing. Now is the favorable time.”

Make sure you get the picture here and I’m not sure I can adequately explain it. Isaiah 49:6, back up in the context there, he talks about his servant, who is Christ, is not just going to bring salvation to Israel but to all the nations of the world. He says in verse 6, “He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel.’” That’s too small of a thing, it’s much bigger than that, “I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” Salvation will come to all the nations but at great price and cost to the servant, the Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 7, “thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and its Holy One, to the despised One, the One abhorred by the nation, to the Servant of rulers, kings shall see and arise, princes shall also bow down; because of the Lord who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You.”

And then it comes, “but this salvation will be at an acceptable time.” Just like I’ve always been at the right time to rescue you and to deliver you, there will be a future deliverance and it will come at the right time. Verse 8, “Thus says the Lord, ‘In a favorable time I have answered You, and in a day of salvation I have helped You; 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.’” But what you’ve got to see is beyond that. There’s coming a day of great salvation, greater than this deliverance from their captivity, greater than anything else, it’s going to be their spiritual salvation

and it will come at the right time, a favorable time.

Now the Lord Jesus picked up on that term and, oh, if you're not excited yet, strap your seat belts on. In Luke 4:16-21 Jesus does an amazing thing. Verse 16 says, "And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read." Now, wonder what the Son of God is going to read? Think He knows the Word? Verse 17, "And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book, and found the place where it was written"—the word "found" means He knew exactly where it was, just turned right to it. He knew exactly what He was doing—"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord." That acceptable time; that acceptable time. "And He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon Him. And He began to say to them, 'Today the Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'" The time is here: now is the acceptable time. Now is the favorable time.

Paul picks up on this promise and what he's trying to tell them is really simple but you have to go around the block to make sure everybody understands. He's trying to say, "You are living in that favorable time. Salvation is not going to come through the Law like the false teachers talk about. It's going to come through Jesus Christ; only through the Servant that will die for you."

He wants them to pay attention to the fact that they're living in that favorable time. The window of salvation by grace is wide open to both Jew and to Gentile. The false teachers were still trying to get the Corinthians to go back up under law and he said, "Don't you do that! Don't you do that." Just like he said to the Galatians, "Don't you receive the grace of God in vain. If you go back to the Law, that's your flesh, that's your performance and it will never produce anything. It'll be vain; it'll be void. It will end up empty at the judgment seat of Christ. Be fruitful in the acceptable time. Live out the grace that God has put within you."

Paul is pressing them to realize the urgency of the time in which they lived. You know, folks, this is what excites me about it. We're still living in that favorable time. How do you know? Because He hasn't ended it yet—when He comes back for His church. We're still on this earth, and I'll tell you what, think about for a second the people that you know right now that don't know Christ. And you think, "I can't ever do anything there." And God says, "Listen, I'm the One who takes care of persuading men, but I want you to be My ambassador. I want you to be enabled by My grace. I want you to be a vessel so that while you're here on this earth, in this season, in this opportunity, don't squander it, don't throw it away. Let it be fruitful."

Be fruitful; let Christ in you bring about that which He would say is success, when people are persuaded of their reconciliation to God. And I believe God is saying to us in the 21st century to be fruitful, fruitful. Don't play around with this message of grace. You're here for a time; be useable to God in that time. And that's going to affect our evangelism in this city and this state, that's going to affect our missions around the world, that's going to affect our giving, that's going to affect everything that we do because we're not here for any other reason. We're strangers just passing through. God says, "I want to use you while you're here. Stop squabbling, stop being unreconciled to each other and get busy about what I have put you on this earth to be." That's what He's saying to us, folks.

Don't receive the grace of God in vain. How can we be reconcilers of men if we can't even be reconciled to each other? You see the point? So there's caution. Why is there caution? Because there is a window of opportunity and Paul does not want them to squander the grace that has been so beautifully to them. Don't receive the grace of God in vain for now is the day of salvation, now is the acceptable time.

Working together with God involves a lifestyle

And finally, it involves a lifestyle to back up what we say. You know, everybody wants to point a finger when it comes to this. You can't do that. You can't look at my life and I can't look at your life. You've got to look at God and let Him look at your life and my life. You can always tell someone by the way he lives his life whether or not he's received the grace of God in vain. You can tell whether or not he has realized the open window of opportunity in which he lives. You can tell very easily whether or not he's working together with God in being His ambassador with the ministry of reconciliation.

Do you know how you can tell it? The way you can tell it is not by the hardships he has to go through. No sir, that's akin to all of us. But it's by the way he handles them and by the godly response that he has to them. Christ in him, this person who works together with God, who has not received the grace of God in vain, who understands the season of opportunity that he's in, that it not only requires the words to reason with men, it requires a life that backs up those words. You can always tell.

Christ enables that person to live in such a way that does not discredit His ministry. And he's going to explain that, "giving no cause for offense in anything, in order that the ministry be not discredited, but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God." You see, it's not in what happens to him as much as in his heart, his response to the Lord of always willing to be the wrong one when it comes to relationships, of always being willing to totally depend upon God when it comes to circumstances, giving no cause

for offense in anything so that the ministry will not be discredited.

Paul says, “giving no cause for offense in anything.” That needs to be understood today. It’s a present-active participle. Present tense means it’s a consistent lifestyle. In other words, the active voice is used there, which means Paul did not intentionally, because of any agenda that he was aware of in his flesh, give offense in anything that he did. You see, this has a lot to do with one’s motive in what he does. James tells us in the book of James we all offend in many ways. How do you balance those two things? I can’t live that way.

Here’s what he’s trying to say: when Christ lives in us and we’re seeking to please only Him and let Him deal with our fleshly agendas down here and we’re saying yes to Him, we don’t have to worry about this, because by intent we would not intentionally offend anybody. But I promise you that your life will offend; but it won’t be because you intended that to happen.

I told my wife one day, “I think I could stay in bed for a week and offend somebody about every hour, even if I was asleep.” You can’t take that and say nobody can live that way. You’re going to be an offense. Jesus, the gospel, is a stumbling block to the Jews and it’s an offense to the Greeks, it’s foolishness to them. So there is an offense there, but it’s not an intentional offense because we’re out of the way. We have died to whatever it is, our personal feelings, our whatever it is we’re holding on to and we’re just seeking to let Jesus be Jesus in us so that we can be ministers of reconciliation, so that we don’t discredit the ministry that God has given to us.

We no longer live unto ourselves, “giving no cause for offense in anything, in order that the ministry be not discredited.” The ministry he talks about is the ministry of reconciliation, the ministry of being an ambassador for Christ. The word “discredited” is the word *momaemai*, which means to find fault or to find blame. It’s in the aorist tense, at any time, in the passive, which means “nothing we do with intent has caused anybody to discredit who we are and what we represent.” Again, none of us are perfect and we will offend, but it’s not my intent, that’s not the heart of the matter. And then he says, “but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God.”

Boy, this excites me. This is what it’s all about folks. “Oh, Brother Wayne I’m getting old.” Isn’t it funny? I’m 62 and I’m talking about old, other people being old. My Mama when she was right at 70 she was saying, “These old people just bother me.” And at my age, it’s all relative, isn’t it. Folks, listen. Thank God He’s letting you breathe today. I love you and I’m so glad you’re here today. I’m so glad we’re together, working together, working together with Him. Isn’t that awesome, and we’ve got a mission out there. I tell you what, so much of our time is spent with people who are so full of themselves they’ve received the grace of God in vain and they’re not being about the purpose for which God gave them here on this earth.

2 Corinthians 6:4-5

What Can We Expect

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 6. We’re going to look at verses 4-5 today as we push on through this. We’re talking about “Working Together with God;” workers together with God. And today is part 2 of that. Now we’ve looked at what it involves, last time, to be a worker with God, what is involved. Today we’re going to talk about “What Can We Expect?” What can we expect once we choose to be a worker together with God?

Now the apostle Paul introduced that theme in verse 1 of chapter 6. He says, “And working together with Him,” I tell you what, the thrill of being allowed to work together with God ought to overwhelm every one of us today. That God would choose us; “What is man that God is mindful of him,” the psalmist said. You see, Christianity is not going to church on the weekend and just having a Bible Study from here sometime or another, even though it involves those kinds of things. Christianity is moment by moment, breath by breath walking and working together with God. It’s that relationship that we have.

This is so different than any religion of this world. It’s not a religion, it’s a relationship. Christ lives in us, the life inside the coat, to do through us what we could never do ourselves. We are the vessel and He is our enabling power to be what He desires for us to be. Now, as long as we do not receive the grace of God in vain, then we have the privilege of working with Him. Paul cautioned the Corinthian believers who needed this very desperately, not to receive, in verse 1, the grace of God in vain. Receiving the grace of God in vain is when a believer becomes so focused with himself that he is not willing to yield to the will and to the way of the Lord.

God doesn’t use selfish believers who are only interested in what benefits them. He does not use them. When a believer receives the grace of God in vain, he misses out on the opportunity to see people reconciled to God. He’s not a useable part. God wants to use us, we’ve been given like Paul, the ministry of reconciliation; we’re His ambassadors in this hostile imperial province down here called the world today. And everywhere we go, everything that we do, should echo that purpose in our life.

But when we get overwhelmed with ourselves, we miss out on the greatest opportunity we could have ever had. Paul uses a quote in

verse 2 of chapter 6 out of Isaiah 49 to teach the Corinthian believers that the opportunity, the opportunity, was right in front of them. He wanted them to realize that there was a wide open window. He makes a statement and quotes out of Isaiah, "Now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation." The unique thing is today, to you and me in the 21st century, we're still living in that window of opportunity. Now is the day of salvation because the Lord Jesus has come to make that possible in people's lives.

The window is wide open for people to come to Christ and as, again, we're His ambassadors with the ministry of reconciliation. The only thing, the only thing that can keep us from working together with Him and to be about the purpose for which He has for us while we're still on this earth, is when we become focused on ourselves. "What's in it for me?" As it was in Paul's day, there are many believers in our day that are squandering the opportunity that is ours in this time.

Paul continues to exhort the Corinthian believers by reminding them that if the selfish lifestyle is there, it's going to show up and then that automatically discredits what we're saying. He says in verse 3, "giving no cause for offense in anything, in order that the ministry be not discredited." Paul uses his own life as his example, but he teaches us that our walk has got to match our talk. We just can't say it; we've got to live it.

In the phrase, "giving no cause for offense in anything," the word offense is the word *proskope*, which literally means "to cause one to stumble." You see, we don't want to intentionally have anything in our life that causes somebody to stumble. The ministry he refers to would be the ministry of reconciliation. For us to be ambassadors, for us to have this ministry of reconciliation, we don't want anything in the way that causes others to stumble.

Now whatever Paul had in mind, and we could make a list today that would take several pages of what could be in our life that could cause people to stumble, but whatever it was he had in mind, whatever that would cause his ministry to be discredited, he did not allow it in his life; whatever that was. Paul's walk, once again, matched his talk.

This is what I love about studying the apostle Paul, and you notice that by the fact that I study a lot of his epistles. In 2 Corinthians 1:12 he's already set the stage for this. He says, "For our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you."

Well, we left off last week with Paul saying in verse 4, "but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God." The word "commending" there in the phrase "commending ourselves" is the word *sunistao*. *Sunistao* means literally "to place with or to stand with," but here means "to put on display for everybody to see." Now here's what Paul's saying, "I want it to be so conspicuous to everyone that I'm a servant of God, I'm a co-worker with Him."

And you know what it was that is really the bottom line of what made him so conspicuous was not just the hardships, that's part of it, but the fact that he was willing to bear up under them and the strength that God gave him to do that. We're going to talk about those hardships today. And you're going to understand the song, "I'm trading my sorrows, I'm trading my sickness," because what Paul is going to tell us today is what you and I can expect when we become co-workers with God.

But the beautiful thing about it, Christ in Paul kept him alive and well; it kept him buried up under whatever it was that came their way. And when people looked at Paul, they didn't just see him. They saw the One he was a co-worker with. They saw Christ in him. And that's what continued to let his walk match his talk.

The word "endurance," he adds that little phrase to the end of verse 4, "but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance." Now the word "endurance" there is the word *hupomone*. It means "to remain up under, to bear up under whatever comes one's way." You can say it a different way. Christ in Paul enabled him to stick with the stuff. And that's what's so beautiful about his life. Paul adds the word "much," "much endurance". Now if you've got "much endurance" you've got a lot of hardships you have to deal with and this is where he's leading us in the text.

The word "much" is the Greek word *polus*, which means "a great amount." Paul's life was ever lived; it was lived in such a way that no one ever accused him of being a quitter. Never. Life couldn't get too tough for him to bail out on the Lord and let God be who He is in his life. And life was hard for Paul. I'm sure many of you are thinking, "How hard was it for Paul?" Well, that's our text today.

There are three types of hardships that Paul endured because of Christ living in him. Paul endured these three kinds of hardships that we want to look at today and really, he's letting us know that all of us are going to have to deal with some of these or maybe all of them at some point in our Christian walk. What can we expect?

You know, when you turn on the television, recently my wife and I watched some of the religious programming and heard a man say—and it just grates on my heart—he said, "The reason our church is so big and so many people come is that we tell them things that they want to hear. We don't tell them what they don't want to hear. They hear enough bad stuff during the week. We don't want to tell them anything but the good things when they come together." And I thought to myself how unrealistic can a person be?

Do we understand that we live in a hostile world? How many of us understand that this morning? It's a hostile world. We're living in darkness. In his first epistle to the Corinthians he said, "We have been made light." Now what kind of fellowship does light have with darkness? Anybody want to stand up and say, "Oh, it's fun, Wayne. It's wonderful." Listen, the conflict begins the moment we surrender to Christ. The moment we become a co-worker with Him, the moment we begin to walk in harmony with Him and His will in our life is immediately when the conflict begins. And at least we can look at Paul and say, "Thank you, Paul, for telling us the truth of what we can expect if we're a co-worker with God."

We can expect to have to endure inevitable pressure

There are three levels that he talks about. First of all, we can expect to have to endure inevitable pressure; inevitable pressure. Every believer is going to have to go through this. He begins by mentioning three things that have to do with stressful situations which are very common to most believers.

He says "in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses." The word "affliction" there is the word *thlipsis*. Now we have seen this word before. It's "to be pressed in from all sides." It's when the difficulties seem to be coming from every angle and you feel like you're pushed in and you're pushed in to a narrow place. In fact, it's translated sometimes in some Greek texts "narrow place." It means you're so pressed in you feel like you're going to explode.

It's that which comes from without. You didn't ask for it. It comes as a result of your walk with the Lord Jesus Christ and it begins to press in on you. Now all of us, all of us, are going to have to bear this from time to time just from the fact that we're believers and we're willing to confess that to others. Now at times, this kind of pressure that he speaks of, affliction, can be life-threatening. Now this was the case in chapter 1:8 of our study in 2 Corinthians. Paul had to face potential death in Asia and it really caused him a lot of concern.

In 1:8, "For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life." You see, it can come from very hostile people. It can put us in life-threatening situations. But it doesn't have to be that particular type of stress. There are other kinds of anguish and stress that come and press us in, causing us much grief on the inside. This is the kind of affliction that Paul had varied experiences with.

For instance, he was so concerned for the believers in Corinth because they wouldn't obey God. Now you wouldn't think that it would cause affliction, but it does. If you're a teacher, if you're a pastor, or if you are a leader of any kind, you know exactly what he's going to talk about right here. The affliction is like you can't take it personally. You're teaching people what it means to walk with God and then you witness what comes out of their mouth and you witness the way they behave and it just kills you. It's like a crushing blow from each side pushing you in and it's hard to endure. It's hard to bear. Only Christ in us can enable us to do that.

Second Corinthians 2:4 Paul mentions this kind of affliction. He says, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not that you should be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you." There's something tender and precious that crushes a person that wants the best for somebody else. Imagine how Jesus felt in John 8 when He spoke the hard difficult things and the crowd left and would never come back. I mean, it's a crushing blow. You may have children in your family that you want to know Christ and you want them to walk with Christ and they turn and spit in your face and walk away and it crushes you. It's that affliction that comes from without.

But the interesting thing about Paul is because Christ lived in him, all of the affliction he had to bear whether it be life threatening or whatever, the apostle Paul called it "light affliction." He had a bigger picture of what was going on. It didn't matter what he had to go through, it mattered what God was doing through him. It says in 4:17, "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." Even though it was difficult, even though it was hard on his life, he said, "I just want Christ to be seen in me." That's the eternal weight of glory that God was producing in him.

A worker with God can expect these kinds of stressful conditions to come. But in the midst of it, because Christ lives in him, he doesn't quit. He doesn't bail out just because it's tough. He allowed Christ to manifest His life in and through him no matter what he had to go through.

The second word he uses here is the word "hardships" which in the Greek is the word *anagke*. It's oddly enough kind of interesting. The word means "that which is necessary." You mean hardships are necessary? Yes, let me show you what I'm talking about. In a good sense it's the necessary hardships we endure because of what compels us to live the way we live. When we simply obey, this necessarily brings hardships many times into our lives.

You say, "Give me an example of that." I'm glad you asked. Paul was warned in Acts by many of the people but especially the prophet Agabus came down and said, "Listen, if you go to Jerusalem, buddy, let me tell you what's going to happen." And he bound his hands and bound his feet. "They're going to treat you in a bad way." But you see, the apostle Paul felt led of the Spirit to go on to Jerusalem. He went anyway, knowing, knowing, that necessarily because of the choice he made, there were going to be hardships

that were going to come in his life. And surely that's when he was put into prison and you know the rest of the story. That's when he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon, and Colossians. I mean, he was there almost five years in prison. They warned him, they told him, but he went out of obedience and the hardship that came was necessary because of the choice that he made.

Now in a negative sense it can be the hardship that we go through when someone tries to force us to do what would not please God. You see, when we choose not to go with the world, automatically there's a necessary hardship that is going to go along with that choice. We're going to have to take the blow. We're going to have to take the consequence of making the choice not to go with the world but to obey God.

The pastor a church in Romania, Cornell, when I first met him was a deacon and his wife contracted leukemia, a beautiful, beautiful lady. And they tried everything to get her some medical help. Well, under Communist countries, I'm sorry, but there's not a lot of help for the people even though they say it's for the people. So they found a place in London and he went to the Communist authorities to say, "Listen, will you allow us to go over to London to get a special treatment for my wife because she has leukemia. We want to get a transfusion and perhaps that will give her longer time to live."

And they said, "Oh, that will be fine if you'll just sign this little piece of paper." And he read through it and what it said was that you must deny the Lord Jesus as being your Lord, as being God. You must deny. And basically everything he'd preached, everything he had stood for he had to sign a paper that said he totally disagreed with it and that he completely disavowed that in his life. He took the paper in front of the Communist officials, there was his wife as sick as she could be, tore them up, put them in the trash can and his wife hugged them because they were together. They walked out of the room and they necessarily had to endure hardship because of the choice they were willing to make to please the Lord God and not disavow what they believed.

That's what the word is: it's the hardship that comes because of the choices we make to be co-workers with God and they're necessary. You can't live in a hostile world without having them and unless we're going to make those kind of choices, then we don't understand the hardship that he's talking about.

The third word that Paul mentioned that all of us can expect is the word "distresses." He says, "but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses." Now the word "distresses" in the Greek is stenochoria. Now this word means "the inner anguish and the discomfort that one goes through when pressure comes from without." Now make sure you understand the difference. Stenos, narrow, chora means a space. It's a "narrow space." Now this is very similar to the word "affliction," very similar. But the difference is this: whereas "affliction" is talking about what's coming in is putting the pressure on us from the outside, stenochoria is the inner anguish that is caused as a result of what's going on out here.

So Paul says basically what he has had to go through, and this really put the stamp of approval on him from God, that he was a co-worker with God. That Christ in him enabled him to bear up under. He didn't quit, he didn't bail out, he didn't get mad at God, he didn't shake his fist in God's face. He didn't become bitter because of the difficult things in his life. But he endured. In Christ we're able to endure, to bear up under. Why? Because he saw the ministry of reconciliation as a much bigger picture. He wasn't focused just on himself; he was focused on what God was doing as a result of the suffering God had allowed to come in his life.

So inevitable stress, somebody becomes a brand new believer in our church and wants to know, "What can I expect?" Inevitable stress. If you're going to walk with God you must understand affliction, hardships, and distresses that are going to come in your life.

We can expect to have to endure undeserved persecution

Secondly, he moves it to a different level. Here he talks about we're going to have to endure undeserved persecution: undeserved persecution. In verse 5 he says, "in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults." Now in our first group Paul dealt with the general stress that every believer is going to have to go through when he gets serious about being a believer and trusting God. But in this list he deals with three things that sometimes we may have to deal with but it's not as common as the first list that he mentions.

Sometimes we're going to have to go through the pain that's going to be caused because we're believers; from the legal authorities and also from the religious authorities. "In beatings" is the first thing he mentions. In Acts 16:22 Luke describes how Paul and Silas were beaten with rods before the Roman magistrates in Philippi. It says, "And the crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them, and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods."

Now the interesting thing is that in that instance Paul could have demanded legal protection because he was a Roman citizen. And if you know that passage you remember when they found that out after they had beaten him, they quickly wanted him out of town to save face. They didn't realize he was a Roman citizen. You could not beat a Roman citizen until he stood trial and they didn't stand trial; they just went ahead and beat him. But to save face they wanted him out of town.

But in chapter 11 of our text, 2 Corinthians, Paul reveals that in total, now listen to this, the religious Jewish authorities were worse in their torture of him than the Romans were. The Jewish leaders flogged him five times while the Romans only beat him with rods

three times. Now he was referring to the Jews in 2 Corinthians 11:24, "Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes." Now that was a cat-o-nine tails and had all the metal in it that would just rip the skin right off a person's body. Forty lashes was considered the death sentence and he said five times they only gave him thirty-nine each time, because 40 would have killed him. Referring to the Romans in that passage in verse 25 he says, "Three times I was beaten with rods," so Paul could claim that he'd been flogged more severely than anybody else that you've studied except for Jesus by both religious and legal authorities of that day.

But not only flogging, the next thing he mentions is imprisonments. He says in verse 5, "in beatings and imprisonments." We know that Paul was jailed frequently because of 2 Corinthians 11:23; "Are they servants of Christ?" Speaking of the false apostles. "(I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments," in the plural. Now what were all these imprisonments? We don't know them all. We know, however, that he was in prison when he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon; we talked about that.

We know that he was imprisoned right before being martyred for the faith. In 2 Timothy, and it's the saddest thing, he wrote Timothy and he said, "Oh, Timothy, I'm lonely, come see me before it's winter." He was in a hole; Onesiphorus couldn't even find him when he went over there. I mean, it wasn't like the first imprisonment. They just stuck him in a rat-infested hole in the ground before they martyred him, took his life. He said, "Timothy, send me my coat, I'm cold. And Timothy, bring me some parchments, bring me something to read or to write on. I'm just so bored. I'm here by myself."

When I hear this "health, wealth" junk, "oh, you can be healthy, you can be wealthy," you tell that to the apostle Paul who died without a penny in his pocket, poverty stricken in our world's terms today, but full of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Imprisonments," he says.

The word "tumult" is the word akatastasia, and it refers to public disorder and to riot. Anytime you ever wanted to find Paul in the New Testament, just look for the nearest jail or listen for the riot that is going on somewhere. He's right in the middle of it. The world either responds or reacts to the message of reconciliation. Specifically to the fact that God was in Christ, Christ was God, reconciling the world to Himself. People can't stand that. They rebel against that and it causes a lot of pain to the people who preach it. Riots were common occurrences in Paul's life as a reaction and it was from hostile religious groups, it was from legal groups, it was from everybody that was there because of the message that Paul faithfully preached.

An example of this was what happened to him in Ephesus. I know you know this story. In Acts 19:29, he had seen so many people come to Christ that they stopped buying those little statues of Artemis. I've been to Ephesus and they had those shops going up to the top where they had that big temple up there. And they stopped buying the little gods because they got saved. She's not their god and the people cried out, "Artemis, Artemis, the god of the Ephesians," and they had a big riot. And it says in verse 29, "And the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia." They couldn't find Paul so they got his companions and drug them into an arena, a very hostile crowd.

Another example of this is in Acts 21:30-32 when the religious leaders could not stomach the message of grace. I want to tell you something. People that love religion cannot stand the message of living grace. They cannot stand it, because they still want it to be up to them. "We can do it, we can do it, we can do it, we can." And the same attitude was going on in Paul's day and they couldn't stand it and some Jews from Asia Minor saw Paul at the temple and they spread a lie. They spread a lie, and they knew what was going to happen. And that lie said that he had taken a Gentile beyond the wall of partition. The wall of partition was where a Gentile could not go beyond, inside the temple. It had a sign that said, "Any Gentile that goes beyond this wall is under the penalty of death."

And they lied; they said he took a Gentile by the name of Trophimus and took him beyond that wall. Stirred up the city. It says in Acts 21:30, "That all the city was provoked and the people rushed together; and taking hold of Paul, they dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut. And while they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. And at once he took along some soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul." And the soldiers arrested Paul to protect him. Then a plan got out to assassinate him and they discovered it. Two hundred soldiers at night took him down to Caesarea. At Caesarea he was stuck there, left alone, forgotten, for two years. Then he was taken to Rome and four years of his life was spent as a result of a crowd that couldn't stomach the message of grace.

So you say, "I'm a brand new believer. What can I expect?" I can tell you that you'll have joy liked you've never known before because it's all in Christ. The fruit of His Spirit is love, joy, peace, and I can go through the characteristics there. But I can also say to you by the authority of the Word of God, when you start living and being serious with God, working and walking together with Him, you can expect inevitable pressure, the stress that's going to come to you whether it's hostile or whether it's agony in your heart because of believers that won't walk with God, but it's also that you may have to endure undeserved persecution.

You know, when I talk about this, most people in America back up and say, "Whoa, I sure am glad we're living over here," and we forget completely that more Christians have been martyred for the faith in the last 25 years than in the history of Christianity. And here we sit and we're healthy, and some of us are wealthy, whatever, but we're living in a country where we're free to come to church. And one of the interesting things to that is people don't even want to come when they have the freedom to come and yet right across the ocean it is entirely opposite.

You know folks, we don't have religious freedom in America, I don't care what anybody says. We have religious tolerance. And I don't know if you know it or not, but the fuse is getting shorter and shorter and shorter. I wonder what's going to happen to churches that entertain everybody when the real crises comes to our country? You see, we need to start waking up and understanding what you can expect when you walk together with God and when you work together with God. It's not fun. I don't even enjoy preaching it because I'm in the midst of it, too.

We can expect to have to endure bodily privations

Thirdly, we can expect to endure bodily privation. Paul adds in 2 Corinthians 6:5, "in labors, in sleeplessness, and in hunger." Now the last three comprise these intense bodily privations that we will all face at one time or another simply out of our willingness to obey God and be a co-worker with Him. It's voluntary. It comes as a choice. Paul says, "labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger."

First of all Paul mentions labors. The word "labors" is the word in the Greek *kopos*, which means "weariness from heavy toil." It's when one works so hard that his body is weary. You know, since I've been here there have been many people that misunderstand living grace. I hear people tell me, "Well, you preach it as if it's passive." If you're hearing that, that's not what I'm preaching. I have said a hundred times: you get in touch with God, you yield to Him, He'll wear you out. You'll never be burned out but you'll be worn out because He will absolutely put on you the heavy responsibility that He lives within you to enable that obedience to Him. It's not passive at all.

Paul is talking about his own laboring until he was dead tired and totally worn out. And by the way, just because you have a work ethic doesn't mean you're a believer. A lot of people have work ethic because work has become their god. That's not what Paul's talking about. Paul's just simply trying to show the credibility of what Christ has been doing in his life. Paul labored to support himself. Isn't it interesting, he championed churches paying their pastors: he championed that. He taught that, but he violated his own rule by choice. He said, "You know, I go to pagan people, they don't understand what I'm doing so I choose not to be paid by them. I choose to be bi-vocational. I'm going to be a tentmaker to provide funds for what I do."

And he worked until he was worn out. Paul labored to support himself because he wanted to be financially independent. Acts 18:3 when he met Priscilla and Aquila, this is right when the church of Corinth originated there, and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tentmakers. They worked hard.

It says in Acts 20:34-35, "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" In Ephesus he labored to defray expenses, he labored to help the poor, and not only that, he taught the disciples in the hall of Tyrannus there daily. He was a busy man.

Acts 19:9-10, "But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he withdrew from them," this is interesting: he didn't waste his time on them. If they don't want to hear, fine; "and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. And this took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." At the same time God had him doing something else. God had him going from house to house to exhort both Jews and Gentiles to repent and to believe. Acts 20:20-21, "how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jew and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."

So these things can be expected. It can be tiresome. And some of you are going on a mission trip down to Long Beach and you're going to see some tiresome days. It's a lot of sweat that goes into this but it's all according to the power that works within you. Paul says in Colossians 1:29, "I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." So it's not just his strength, it's God enabling him and strengthening him. Paul writes that he never stopped warning the Ephesians night and day with tears. This was the mental focus of this. It was much harder than the physical; always is.

It says in Acts 20:31, "Therefore be on the alert, remember that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears." And from his own testimony, trying to come against the false prophets of the day he says in 1 Corinthians 15:10, "But by the grace of God I am what I am," so don't ever credit Paul, don't ever pat him on the back. It's by the grace of God; "His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."

So what can you expect? If I'm going to be a worker together with God there's going to be some tiring days, there's going to be

some weariness that's going to come as a result of what God leads me even in that which He strengthens. But not only in labors, Paul mentions in verse 5, "sleeplessness." Paul knew what it was like to lose sleep. Second Corinthians 11:27, "I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights." That "sleepless" word is only used twice and it's Paul who uses it, so we don't know specifically what it was that caused him to go night after night without sleep.

Perhaps it was due to his burden to pray. This is a beautiful thing about Paul. Like the Lord Jesus in Luke 6:12, "And it was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God." He told the Philippians, "I pray for you always." And so maybe that was what caused his sleeplessness. I don't know. But he knew it. Whatever the situations were that caused sleeplessness, it came as a result of Paul being a worker together with God.

And the last thing that Paul mentions is hunger. Again Paul brings this up in chapter 11 and he adds thirst to the list there. He says in verse 27, "I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food." You know, Paul was a unique guy. In 1 Corinthians 4:11 it says, "To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless." Boy, it just really commutes to the 21st idea of where Christianity is, doesn't it?

As a coworker with God, the beautiful thing about Paul was that he had learned to go with the flow. Whatever God wanted was fine with him because he saw the bigger picture: the ministry of reconciliation; his being an ambassador for Christ. It didn't matter what he had to do, it didn't matter the pain he had to endure. He says in Philippians 4:12, "I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity;" he'd been on both sides of the fence, "in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need."

You see, Christ in Paul led him at times in his life when he didn't have anything. Other times in his life he had a lot. Sometimes he had food all over the table, couldn't eat it all. Other times he didn't have a crumb that he could eat. Paul had been in both times. He knew that wherever God led him, remember back in the early part of 2 Corinthians he's chained to the chariot, so it doesn't matter: he's always walking in the victory that God gave to them.

Well, he lets us in on the fact, I believe, in this passage of what we will have to expect to face at some point in time as we walk and work together with the Lord Jesus. Inevitable pressure, undeserved persecution, and mainly from the religious crowd, bodily privation as co-workers with God, but whatever comes our way, God in us enables us to endure which puts a stamp of approval on the fact that we're genuine and we're truly called to do what God has called us to do. We bear up under.

Paul was a co-worker with God and no matter what came his way he kept his focus because, again, he saw the bigger picture. I don't know about you, but I love Romans 8. It may not bless you this morning, but just kind of humor me because it blesses me when I read it. These are my favorite verses in Scripture. They're so precious. Romans 8:30-39. Listen to what a man who's real, a man who truly understands where Christianity is. Not a man playing games and wanting church to serve him, but a man who is a co-worker with God. Listen to what he wrote:

"And whom he predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and who He justified, these He also glorified. [He sees way in the future.] What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us [and the emphasis here is on the word "who"], who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the One who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? [And then he puts the "what"] Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, 'for Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' [a quote out of the Old Testament] But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

No matter what we have to face, no matter if it's the common stresses that come in, no matter if it's the undeserved persecution from people and places of authority, whether religious or legal, whether or not it just be those hardships that come from saying yes to Christ. Nothing will separate us from the love of God; nothing. Therefore, in Christ we are able to endure and we stick with the stuff and we don't bail out just because it's hard. He saw the bigger picture.

In western Africa it was 14 years before one convert was received into the church. In east Africa it was ten years before one convert. In New Zealand it was nine years before one baptism and two more before another came. In Tahiti it was 16 years before the first harvest. William Carrey labored seven years before the first Hindu convert was baptized. In Burma, Judson toiled for seven years before he had one convert. Once writing to England Judson said, "Beg the churches to have patience. If a ship were here to carry me to any part of the world I would not leave my field. Tell the brethren success is as certain as the promise a faithful God can make it."

Do you see the bigger picture: ambassadors for Christ with a ministry of reconciliation? “But, Wayne, look at all the hardships you go through in being a part of this.” And Paul would say, “Glory, glory.” Always see the bigger picture. Don’t ever look at what’s happening to you. Paul says it’s not even worth talking about compared to the glory that is going to come one day. He saw the bigger picture, and that’s the beauty of being a worker together with God.

So we need each other, don’t we, to pray for one another? Because all of these things we’ll all go through from one time or another. What can you expect? What can you expect?

2 Corinthians 6:6-7a

How Do You Identify a Worker with God

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 6. We’re going to be looking today at verse 6 and the first part of verse 7. We’ve been talking about “Working Together With God” as we push our way through 2 Corinthians. That’s the theme Paul has brought up. This is part 3. Today we want to talk about “How Do You Identify a Worker with God?”

How do you know the people who are real? How do you know the people who are truly surrendered to the Lordship of Christ? They are workers together with God. And I believe you’ll see that in our text today. It’s not just in what they do; it’s in the character that’s behind what is done. The apostle Paul had such a burden for the Corinthian church. He so desired that it would just wake up and realize the marvelous opportunity in which they lived; the chance to be a worker together with God.

He says of himself and of his team in 6:1, “And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain.” You see, when you’re a worker together with God you haven’t received the grace of God in vain. Paul warned them, don’t receive, don’t continue to receive the grace of God in vain. To put it another way as we’re reviewing this, we’ve already preached on it, but to put it another way, stop thinking of yourself long enough to understand that you’re here on this earth for a purpose.

You know there really is no difference in the 21st century, is there? The need of the church today is to have the same awakening in their life. Only when believers stop receiving the grace of God in vain and yield to the Lordship of Christ by saying yes to His Word and to His will, can they even begin to realize that He has a purpose for them, a purpose that started the moment they were saved and will last until the day they see Him, while they’re here living on this hostile planet. It’s almost like coming out of the fog.

We went to Slovenia years ago. Now I knew that was a part of Yugoslavia that had been broken up, but I didn’t know exactly how all that worked. So we landed in Slovenia. Did I know I was in Slovenia? Only because they told me I was in Slovenia. I never could quite figure that place out. It was foggy, it had settled in, we couldn’t see 40 yards in front of us and it was almost like it was down to my head. You couldn’t see above, you couldn’t see out. So we didn’t know if it was a beautiful place or not. They took us to the hotel. It kind of made me feel like we were in a pretty place; I could sense ice out there like a lake, but I couldn’t see any further.

For two days we lived in the fog. We couldn’t see anything. And finally the third day I got up and I pulled the curtains in the room and it took my breath away. The fog had lifted. Oh, my goodness! There was this lake, a huge lake, and it was frozen over and people were ice skating on it like a Christmas card. Snow was about two feet deep and we looked up and there were the Alps on the other side. It was Austria. And I’m thinking what a beautiful place. It was there all the time, but you couldn’t see it for the fog.

So many believers in the 21st century are just like the believers in Corinth. They’re still living in the fog. They think life is about them. Get all you can, can all you get, sit on the can, poison the rest. And that’s the way they live. They don’t understand that every breath they take they take in Him. Every move they make, they make in Him. They don’t understand that they’re here for a purpose and that purpose is not completed until the day their heart stops beating and they go to be with the Lord Jesus Christ.

When the fog lifts, a believer begins to finally realize that his purpose while being here is to be an ambassador for Christ. He is to be Christ’s official representative everywhere he goes. When he’s in the restaurant and he orders beans and they give him peas and they’re cold, wherever he is, Christ in him reaches out and touches that person. He is an official representative of the Lord Jesus Himself. And Paul tried to get these Corinthians to open their eyes, let the fog lift and understand what they were here on this earth to be about. He wanted them to see that they had a window of opportunity that they were so privileged in which to live.

And we need to realize that we live in that same window. In 2 Corinthians 6:2 the apostle Paul quotes out of Isaiah 49, which is the prophecy of Christ. And he says in verse 2, “At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you; behold, now is ‘the acceptable time,’ behold, now is ‘the day of salvation.’” And by using that verse he was saying to the Corinthians, “Don’t you understand the privileged time in which you live? That you’re living in the acceptable time? Christ has fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah and now God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. Behold, now is the day of salvation.”

And what we need to understand today is that we also live in that awesome time; a time when salvation is open to all who would believe. My prayer is for the church in America today that the fog would lift and that people would realize that they don't come to church to be entertained. They come to church to be equipped. Why? To be ambassadors for Christ, to be ministers of reconciliation, to be workers together with Him. To us has been given the ministry of reconciliation.

Paul warned the Corinthian believers that their walk must match their talk. Their walk had to match their talk. In 2 Corinthians 6:3, "giving no cause for offense in anything, in order that the ministry be not discredited." Just like Paul they had to have a lifestyle that backed up what they were doing. And this is really his heartbeat in this text. He wants us to see the character of an individual who truly is a worker together with God. So their adequacy would no longer be of themselves. We live in the new covenant that Paul has already talked about. He says, "I'm a servant of a new covenant," as we've seen back in chapter 3. And he's talking about new covenant language. Christ has come, now is the acceptable time, Christ lives within us, our adequacy is not of ourselves. I can't do it, God never said I could. He can do it, He always said He would.

It's not up to me anymore; it's not up to you anymore. It's only up to us to surrender to the One who will get the job done. Christ lives in us to do through us what we can never do ourselves. And when the fog lifts and we begin to realize we walk with Him, we work with Him; He lives in us to do through us what we couldn't do ourselves, that's when the shouting ought to begin.

We were doing a conference over in Vienna. A fellow from Russia came and he saw it. I'm telling you, there's nothing any more blessed than a teacher who teaches the truth and a student who hears it. That "aha" sound. And he saw it; you could see the light come on in his face. And he said, "I've been so overwhelmed because I know I can't do it, now I understand. Christ lives in me to enable me to do these things." Well, he got so fired up.

And he got out in the middle of an apartment complex; the people live in these huge apartments, sort of a "u" shape. And he got out in the courtyard of that thing, took a megaphone and he began to yell out, "If you want to go to heaven come down here. I'm going to show you how to get there." And the people came down, hundreds were saved, and it all began when the fog lifted in his life and he began to understand he lived in a privileged time, he needed to have a life that backed up what he did, Christ lived in him, he was an ambassador of Christ, had the ministry of reconciliation and that's why God leaves us on planet earth until the day we see Him. The fog needs to lift.

Church is not about us, it's about Christ who lives in us, doing through us what we could never do ourselves. Now we've seen the turn in the passage; from verse 4 on he shows you that once a person has the fog lift, and they begin to be workers together with Christ, that the hardships and the pressures begin to come. Now that's the difficult part of it; that's the down side. Nobody wants to hear this. In verse 4 the key to the whole passage is in this statement, "in everything commending" or presenting "ourselves as servants of God." That's the key to everything he's going to talk about all the way down.

Now what does Paul mean when he says, "in everything"? Paul mentions ten things that we've already studied for which endurance begins the list and is the key one to all of them. In verse 4, by saying, "in much endurance," he opens up the understanding that "in everything" includes pressure and pain that will accompany the people who work together with God. And Paul describes the inevitable pressure that will come our way by using three words. He uses "affliction," which means the pressures which come from without. All of this is because we're yielded to Christ. He mentions "hardships." Hardship is that natural thing that is going to happen when you say yes to God. It's going to offend some; it's going to bless others. It's going to bring hardship in a person's life. And then "distresses;" it's the inner stress that comes from the outward pressure on an individual. Every believer who is a worker together with God understands this. You don't need any more preaching on it.

But he also mentions undeserved persecution that will be a part of being a worker together with God. It's part of the everything. He says, "in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults." Now these things came into Paul's life either from the religious authorities or it came from the legal authorities. They were part of his "everything." Then Paul shows that there is bodily deprivation that must be endured when he says, "in labors, in sleeplessness, and in hunger."

Now the "everything" that Paul talks about in mentioning this last three helps us to understand that Christianity is not a passive thing; that it's very active; that it's 100% our willingness to surrender to Him. No matter whether it cost us hard labor, no matter whether it cost us sleepless nights, no matter whether it costs us hunger and going without food. It's a part of the walk with God; 100% our willingness to obey and 100% His power and presence to enable us to endure the "everything" that comes our way. But you see, in "everything," now we know what the "everything" is now, there are ten things there, and the "everything" is not just what a person goes through; it's the character of the individual who goes through it.

And that's what Paul's pointing toward. We live in a day when if it looks good on the outside, everybody thinks it's right. No, man looks on the outside, but God looks on the heart. And that's what Paul's driving at here. It's not what a person goes through. He can inflict his own hardship. It's the way and the manner in which he goes through what he goes through as a worker together with God.

We're going to see eight things in verse 6 through verse 7, two groups of four. And I just love studying Scripture because every time I get into it it's so perfect, and I know God had to have written it. Nobody could ever convince me it's not God's Word. All of these eight things are in the beginning with the preposition "in." In something, in, in, in, as we have already seen in ten things before. You say, "Why do you bring that up?" Because that preposition next week is going to change.

You see, he's saying something here that's powerful, but the English sometimes doesn't quite grasp it. And it's a beautiful picture of what a worker together with God is all about. These eight things we will study today describe the character of the true servant of God. There are a lot of people going around saying they're servants of God. How do you know the difference of the people that are real and the people that aren't real? Is it the number of people they witness to; is it the number of tracts they pass out? No, it's the character of the individual that does what he does. And that's what Paul's driving at.

So while we're enduring in everything, like Paul, let's look at the character that must be on display as being a servant of God, an ambassador for Christ, a minister of reconciliation. And there are two things and these two things are so powerful.

There is a purity to the servant of God

First of all there is a purity to the servant of God. Verse 6 he says, "in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness." Now here we find four beautiful descriptive words that are a part of a wonderful truth. The word "purity" is the key word. Anytime Paul makes a list, the first word is always key. It sort of sets the stage for the next three that follows. And don't forget now we're talking about an ambassador for Christ, preaching the ministry of reconciliation. He's a person who is a worker together with God now.

What about his life? It demands a character of life. The word "purity" is in reference to the motive of the ambassador of Christ, the motives of his heart. It's the word hagnotes. Now hagnotes can be used for moral purity, but here it means sincerity. It's when something, now listen carefully, is without any hidden agenda, whether it be personal, denominational or anything else. There are no strings attached to what he does, there's no hidden agenda.

It refers here to Paul's heart; to the purity of his motive and all that he does and all that he suffers. But purity alone, and this is something we've got to understand, purity alone is not enough. Good grief, that's the whole key. No, it's not, it's part of it, it's the beginning steps of it, but purity alone is not enough for one to be a worker together with God. And so Paul adds something to this. You see, a person can be pure in his motive and not have knowledge about what he's doing. He can be sincere but sincerely wrong. He can be sincere but totally ignorant of what he's doing. An ill-informed person who has a pure heart can be a very dangerous person in the kingdom of God.

Jesus warned of this and if you know the Scriptures you know this: when people would kill believers, He warned them of a day that people would kill believers out of sincerity, thinking they were doing what was right, that was pleasing to God. You say, "He didn't do that." Yes, He did. John 16:2, "they will make you outcasts from the synagogue; but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God."

So Paul adds to the word "purity" the word "knowledge." You've got to have the two together. The purity comes first, not the knowledge, but the purity comes first. But then the knowledge has got to be given. Either of these words that are left alone are very dangerous things. Knowledge without a pure motive causes one to be arrogant and insensitive to people. He might know what he's doing, but has no heart for it, no burden, no passion for it. He works from both sides.

I was associate pastor in Mississippi years ago, and they assigned me to train the church in evangelism. And they called the course "Reproductive Evangelism." That kind of interested me. So I said, "Okay, I'll take it." And we had 30 people; we had to have an even number because we're going to send them out two by two. I saw that in the gospel, that had to be right. And so you can't have 31 because 2 won't go into 31 so we had 30 people. Cut it off at 30 people.

What I did, I found the biggest skeptic in our church named Tom. Tom and I were good friends, but he would question air. You had to convince him the sun was up on a clear day. He could make you doubt it. I've never been around a person like this. And so I said I was going to let him be the one, the teacher, because I'm kind of creative. The door to the classroom I made like a front door and I put a couch in there and I put an end table and I put a lounge chair. It was kind of like a living room.

And they had to come up and knock on the door and Tom met them at the door. Well, if they could get past the doorway that was a good move and they went in. And Tom, as the skeptic he was, would question everything they said. He would just drive them nuts to see if they knew what they were doing. For three months we did this every Sunday night, and I'm telling you, they just seemed like they were doing so well. And you know how people are, especially Baptists, they love certificates." Oh boy, I got a certificate so I'm spiritual." So we had a service one night and we were going to present them with a certificate for passing the class and now they were going to go out and reach the city for Jesus and we had the choir sing "Onward Christian Soldiers" and all the songs were built around going out and reaching the city for Jesus.

We turned them loose, prospects running out their ears and in three or four weeks I decided to check up on them. I called a meeting and I said, "Let's just share testimonies of what God's done." And you know what I found out? Do you know how many people actually even shared with anybody? Whoever knocked on a door, whoever said anything to anybody, do you know how many people there were? Zero. "Well, wait a minute, they were trained." And this is where we fail, folks. You can have somebody that has all the knowledge in the world, but if he doesn't have the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ burning in his heart it does him no good whatsoever.

But you reverse that and you take a person that has the zeal of God within him and he's just full of that vigor and you put him out there without knowing what he's doing and they'll chew him up and spit him out so fast it will make your head swim.

So Paul says, "Purity," that's your motive, sincerity of heart, pureness of heart, but then he adds "knowledge," because those two things have to go together. The word "knowledge" is the word *gnosis*, and it's the result of something that has been learned or experienced. We have already studied the fact that Paul reasoned with men from the Word of God. Paul was a man full of passion, but Paul was also a very knowledgeable individual. He could even debate with the philosophers on Mars Hill there in Greece in Athens. I mean, he could take on anybody because he knew; his mind was saturated with the Word of God. By the way, that's the Old Testament because he was writing almost half of the New Testament.

He had the purity of motive, but with it he had the knowledge to go with it. We must learn this. The right motive must have the right information, folks. Now once this is in place, then we can tolerate any kind of person. Even when we're afflicted, even when we're persecuted, we're going through the ten things that were mentioned earlier, we can tolerate them. We can actually have a love for them as we will see later on.

To purity and knowledge Paul adds the word "patience." The word "patience" in the Greek is the word *makrothumia*, which means long suffering. Long suffering; there are two words translated for "patience" in the New Testament. There's the word *hupomone*, which is the word we saw back in verse 4; "endurance," it has to do with circumstances. But this particular word is very specific: *makrothumia*. It has to do with people. You see, we've already seen that nobody can predict the response of people when they hear the word of reconciliation. Paul said back in 2:16 that the word of reconciliation will be, "to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?" You just can't predict it. You don't know who will respond and who won't respond. But there will be people who will come very harshly and very cruelly towards you, but God enables us to have a patience to bear up under, to suffer long with people who treat us harshly.

And then to complete that beautiful first list of four he adds the word "kindness." He says, "in purity," which is the heart motive; "in knowledge," which is the information that connects with it; "patience," the ability to bear up under whoever comes your way, to deal and tolerate people that are just cruel; and then he adds the word "in kindness." I love this. It's not just bearing up under, it's not just gritting your teeth, grinning and bearing it. The word "kindness" is the word *chrestotes*, and it's that which has totally tenderized one's disposition to where others are drawn to him instead of repulsed from him. It comes from the word *chrestos*, which means "useful, profitable."

Do you realize what Paul is saying here? This is a person who is so broken on the inside and so tender in his heart, he doesn't fight back, he just loves. And even when he's treated harshly, because his heart is pure, and because the information is right in his head, and when people come at him, yes, he can bear up under. But he does it with a manner and demeanor that is awesome. Oh, I love that when I'm around people who live that way; I want that so badly in my life. You ask a child who has kindness in his life, kindness never is talking about what a person does, that's another word. The word that's used here is the manner of the person. It's what a child is drawn to. If you see a child repulsed by an adult, I don't care if he's passing out tracts or witnessing to anybody, and you see a child cower down and back away from him, that individual is not a worker together with God. He's faking it and he's got a personal agenda in it somewhere.

How do you now people who are real in the 21st century? How do you know that somebody is truly working together with God and doesn't have fleshly minded agendas? It's a person who is pure in his motive, a person who is knowledgeable about what he's doing, he knows the Word of God, knows the God of the Word so he knows the Word of God. A person who is patient but oh, much more than that, a person who is just flat-out kind to all people. And you know it takes two people to fight. He disarms every conflict by the nature Christ has produced in his life.

There is a power to the servant of God

So first of all there is a purity to a true servant of God. But secondly, there is a power to a true servant of God. And the power is not of him. He says in verse 6 again, "in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness," and then he does something. He adds four more things that take it even to another level. He says, "in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in the word of truth," or as some people translate it, "truth's word," and "in the power of God."

Now these next four qualities that Paul mentions are so beautifully positioned in the text that you may wonder at the order in which they come. Why did Paul put them that way? Remember, it wasn't Paul, it was by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God, and it's so beautiful. Of course the Holy Spirit has been involved in everything that we have studied, because He is the Spirit of Christ. But now Paul, for whatever reason, decides to lift Him up and recognize Him. You know, the Spirit never speaks of Himself, He only points to Christ, but he brings Him in to make sure that nobody is missing the source of where all of these things come from.

Paul couldn't put love next without putting the Holy Spirit first. He couldn't put truth or he couldn't put power, because the Holy Spirit is the One that initiates all of those three things. All that a worker together with God does is in the power of the Holy Spirit of God. Now, I'm going to tell you something, maybe you don't know this but surely you do, but when you yield to Christ, when we say yes to Him, we have just said no to our flesh. And at that very moment, the Holy Spirit living in us dresses us in the character of Christ.

You see, in religion you can work from the outside in. You can try to do this, you can do this, you can do that. "I can do it, I can do it, I can do it, I can." But not in Christianity. In Christianity there is no possible way that you can love somebody as you're commanded to love them. There's no way you can be patient with somebody who is teasing you in the wrong way. None of these things are possible unless the Holy Spirit produces that character from the inside out. See, Christianity is from the inside out. It all has to do with your walk with God. Religion is from the outside in.

And so the Holy Spirit dresses us in the garment of Christ. And what is the character of Christ? First John tells us that He's love. God is love. It's not a quality, it's who He is; it's a person. And that love is the word that follows the word Holy Spirit because He has to produce it. Galatians 5:22, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love." And it says in Galatians 5:14, "For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word," and that's the word "love." But none of us can produce it; it has to be produced from the inside out and that comes from the integrity of a walk with God.

Paul says "in genuine love." The word "genuine" originally meant "one who is inexperienced in the art of acting." I love that! One who has this love produced in him can't even think about faking it because it's something that absorbs him, it's something that constrains him; it's something that captures him. It's not something he does as much as it is someone who is love manifesting it through his life. The Holy Spirit produces this love which is Christ's love in him for others. And it is this unselfish love that controlled Paul and his companions. He's already told us this if you've been with us in our study.

Second Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ controls us," it's not only captured us, it controls us, "having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died." The Corinthians had treated Paul in such a harsh way. You know, I heard somebody tell me the other day, I didn't realize this, there's a place in Michigan called Hell, Michigan. Did you know that? I didn't know that. Now, I've been there, but not in Michigan. I understand that phrase. If you would ask the apostle Paul where that would be, he'd say Corinth. Folks, if you lived in Corinth you wouldn't want to join that church. Good grief, they caused him more pain, they were so enamored with the world and themselves but the apostle Paul, because of his walk with God, loved those people. He loved them.

In 2 Corinthians 2:4 it says, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart," caused by them, "I wrote to you with many tears," all of those things were caused by the Corinthians, "not that you should be made sorrowful," he's talking about that third letter, "but that you might know the love which I have especially for you." Now that's God, that's God, folks. You can't teach a class in this one. It better be God working in your heart. You can't love people who treat you in the wrong way, talk about you and accuse you falsely. You can't do that but God can.

At least six times Paul affirmed this love for the believers that he had at Corinth in 2 Corinthians. And Paul mentions the word of truth that follows after that. You see, the Holy Spirit has got to be producing these things. He points to their source and then he mentions the love which is the fruit of his working in an individual's life. Then he mentions the word of truth, or as I said earlier some people translate it, "truth's word." You see, the whole of the ministry of reconciliation is wrapped up in this phrase. Paul is referring to God's Word. We know that because the power that comes from it, you see, the power of salvation is in it. I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for in it is the power for one to be saved. That's what's in it.

And so he mentions the Word of God because if the Word of God is not there then there's no power at all. You see, a lot of people get excited about sharing their testimony, and I think that's wonderful; that inspires; that encourages. But it doesn't convict; it's the Word of God that convicts a person's heart. When it goes deep into his heart and the Holy Spirit takes it and he realizes "I'm a sinner. I'm a sinner."

There was a place that Trans World Radio told me about that was down in one country. One page of the New Testament, but it happened to be a page out of John, was lost and it was years and years and years later they went back into that area and found a church there, people saved. They said, "How could this be? Nobody has ever been here." That one little page of God's Word was where every bit of it had taken place.

Paul adds, "in the power of God." You know, it's God and only God that can reconcile a man to Himself. We saw this earlier, in Paul

being an ambassador for Christ, how he reasoned with men but only God could persuade the hearts of men. I was so blessed in studying this passage, these marvelous eight qualities that so beautifully fit together to define an individual who is a true worker together with God. A lot of people are masquerading as ministers of reconciliation.

I don't question the motive—I don't think I do, I'm asking the Lord not to let me do that—but you know what we've done, folks? We have made how many people you baptize in churches a competition and the one who wins gets the prize. And we've shot ourselves in the foot. You know what blesses me? Last week, those two fellows that got saved came the following week and brought their buddy, and he got saved. One of them walked up to me and said, "My aunt was in the hospital, and I just wanted you to know, Brother Wayne, I went by to minister to her and she prayed to receive Jesus as her Lord and Savior." I turned away from him and there was this couple and they said, "We've been gone for two weeks but let me tell you what happened. We've been at a family reunion in California and while we were over there we led two of our family members to know Christ, they prayed to receive Christ."

I turned,... I've seen this so much in the past several weeks, but listen to me, listen to me, listen to me. You don't put that on a piece of paper and parade it around as if you've done anything. What is wrong with us? These people may never join our church. Praise God. We're not the only church; we're just a piece of the body of Christ. Just let them get someplace where they're teaching the Word of God. But we've done that.

You see, I was a number on somebody's list. "Oh, how many did you have baptized last year?" I was baptized when I was nine years old; I came to know Christ when I was 32. You see a little problem here? Because there are a lot of people that do what they do with a fleshly agenda. Even though it's a good thing, the character behind it is not what it ought to be. Folks, we're in to be praising God, not men.

Let me give you this as I close. I love Bill Bright. He's in heaven. One of these days I'll get to sit down and talk to him. But he wrote this article. This is his words, his article:

"'I don't wear my religion on my sleeve,' the man said, 'my religion is personal and private and I don't want to talk about it.' The man who made this statement was one of America's leading statesmen. He was a professing Christian with whom I was visiting just off of the campus of Harvard University where he was a guest speaker. I had just asked him to become involved with 1,000 key Christian leaders in a great worldwide effort to help fulfill the Great Commission. His statement startled me so I asked him, 'You are a Christian, aren't you?' He said, 'Yes, but I'm not a religious fanatic.' Grieved by his logic I continued to prod him gently. 'Did it ever occur to you that it cost Jesus Christ His life so that you could call yourself a Christian? It cost the disciples their lives also and millions of Christians throughout the centuries have suffered or died as martyrs in order to get the message of God's love and forgiveness to you? Now, do you really believe that your faith in Christ Jesus is personal and private and you should not talk about it?' The man answered quick as a flash, 'No, sir, I'm wrong.' And then he said with a new meekness in his voice, 'Tell me what I can do about it.'"

You know what he can do about it? Exactly what we preached today: to be a worker together with God. It doesn't start with me telling anybody anything, it starts with me walking with God moment by moment, day by day. Then He purifies my heart. Then He teaches me what I need to know. Then He gives me the patience to put up with people who treat me in the wrong way. And He so tenderizes my heart I can even be kind to people who are treating me wrong and have lied about me.

But it's really the Holy Spirit doing all of this, isn't it? And what it sums up to be is the love that He produces in a person's heart that can't be faked. And you see, that love enters into where the truth of God's Word is. We don't only love God, but we love His Word and that love flows out when we share it. And then the power of God to reconcile men to Himself.

So who are the real people today? Who are they? Well, I think Paul pretty well clarifies it for us. In my heart my prayer for you is that you'd be a worker together with God, and I want your prayer for me to be a worker together with God. I'm only 62 and many of you have got me way down the road. And some of you are about where I am and some of you I've got you. But let me share this with you, my prayer: I want to finish well. I think you do too, but you cannot do it living in the fog, thinking only about yourself. We have got to lay it down, lay the past down and let God be God in our life. That's what God's wanting.

I can't do that for you and you can't do that for me. I have got to decide, lay it down. You have got to decide. But I'll tell you what; the best days are ahead of us when we say yes to Him.

2 Corinthians 6:11-18

The Recipe for Right Relationships

Turn with me today to 2 Corinthians 6:11-18. We're going to take a large portion of Scripture today, much more than I normally take,

and we're going to finish up chapter 6. We're going to start a new little mini-series as we're going through 2 Corinthians, and we're going to be talking about the "Importance of Right Relationships." Now we've been talking about being workers together with God; we've been talking about being ambassadors for Christ; now, what's the importance of right relationships in the body of Christ. And today's message is going to be "The Recipe for Right Relationships."

Now, a recipe is important if you want something to turn out right. I was in church recreation for about 15 years. We had a gymnasium, and one day I decided I was going to clean the carpet. I found out how much it would cost to have the carpet cleaned and I said, "I can do that." So we rented a great big commercial carpet cleaner. Now I had to put the solution in to it and it was something like four parts water to one part chemical. I never read directions very well, and so I reversed that and I put four parts chemical to one part water.

I don't know if you know anything about the cleaner that cleans carpet, but it has an ammonia substance to it. And I remember when I started and cranked that machine up, I started crying. I mean, it was like amazing. Wow, this is strong. And I was just working on that carpet. Well, several of the guys on staff came over and they couldn't even stay in the building. They said, "Wayne, what have you done?" I said, "No, it's this carpet cleaner I'm using." Well, come to find out I didn't understand the recipe very well. In fact, for months after that we didn't have to put any cleaner in it at all. We just put water in it and did it because there was enough cleaner on the floor that it carried it for about a year.

A recipe is important to know what's involved in order to make something turn out right. Well, today we're going to see the recipe for right relationships. How do we know that it's a right relationship? Relationships are very important to the believer who wants to walk and to work together with Christ. All of us, you see, are influenced by the people we choose to associate with from day to day. Now, you try to teach your children this, and I understand that, but we as adults need also to get a grip on this thing. The people we choose to associate with influence us either for the good or for the bad. It's in this area of who we choose to associate with that many of us have made our biggest mistakes.

In fact, this is where the wrong information is passed from person to person in the body of Christ. And it's this wrong information from people we should not have chosen to associate with that ends up ruining our relationship with Christ and our relationships with one another. It's a very hurtful thing when you base your feeling on wrong information that came from wrong relationships. In fact, I got an email—and I kind of like this—how to cure a gossip: "Mildred, the church gossip and self-appointed monitor of the church morals kept sticking her nose into other people's business. Several members did not approve of her extracurricular activities but feared her enough to maintain their silence. She made a mistake, however, when she accused George, a new member, of being an alcoholic after she saw his pickup parked in front of the town's only bar for a whole afternoon. She emphatically told George and several others that everyone seeing it there would know what he was doing. Well, George, a man of few words, stared at her for a moment and then just turned and walked away. He didn't explain, defend, or deny. He said nothing. But later that evening, George quietly parked his pickup in front of Mildred's house, walked home and left it there all night." Don't you just love old George?

The apostle Paul knew that the Corinthian believers had wrong feelings towards him. He knew that. I mean, this has been a church that has caused him a lot of grief. But he also knew that the wrong feelings came from wrong information. The wrong information was freely offered by the false teachers with whom they had chosen to associate. That's the saddest thing. Paul was the one through which this church began, and now they have chosen to listen to the false teachers.

In verses 3-10 of chapter 6, and we've already studied them, Paul has bared his heart and for a reason. He wants to counter this wrong information about him and his team. He also wants his relationship with the Corinthians to be healed; that's so heavy on his heart. He tries to show them that he's not what the false teachers said he is. His life did not bring discredit to the ministry in anything that he did. In fact, he and his team, as it says, always presented themselves, commended themselves to others as servants of God and they did this by the way that they lived. Now this was displayed as we studied by how they endured in everything and the way that they endured in everything reflected the character of Christ living in them. Their purity of heart that was so obvious to everybody. And the power of the Holy Spirit working in them pointed directly to the fact that they were working together with God.

The perception of the Corinthians which came from the hateful false teachers was so far from the reality of who these men really were. So Paul says in verse 7b that the righteousness that Christ produced in him—and it was so good for him to know this—protected him on the left and protected him on the right. Verse 7b says, "by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left." We learn from this why it's so reasonable, as Paul says in Romans 12:1-2, for the believer to present his body a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, his reasonable service of what worship really is. Then daily, why it's so important to do that; because, you see, only in this lifestyle, only when Wayne is yielded to Christ, only when you are yielded to Christ, only when we're willing to walk in that covenant, that binding covenant that we have with God the Father through Jesus Christ, do we have protection on the right and on the left. And this protection is especially needed and Paul has alluded to this, when people say things about us. This is the whole problem he's dealing with here. This is the most difficult thing that we all go through. And I've confessed to you that it's the hardest thing I have to deal with.

It says in verse 8, “by glory and dishonor,” that’s what they say to you. And then he says, “by evil report and good report,” that’s what they say about you. And he says you’re going to have to be protected, and only the righteousness that Christ produced in you protects you on the right and on the left. The promise is that whether it’s to our face or behind our back, we are protected and the paradox is that God’s reality of what really is real, is totally the opposite of the perception that men have, the false teachers particularly.

In verses 8b-10 Paul uses seven little couplets to show the difference in the way things appear and the way they really are when you’re walking with Christ. He’s showing the difference that Christ has made in their lives and how that contrasts the false teachers of that day. In verse 8 it says, “regarded as deceivers and yet true; as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death; as sorrowful yet always rejoicing; as poor yet making many rich; as having nothing yet possessing all things.”

Well, today he’s going to get into those relationships, because again he’s seeking to get a unity between him and the Corinthian believers. Christ in us enables us to have right relationships in the body of Christ. But there’s a recipe for it. There are some things that are involved in it that make it turn out right. And we need to know what that recipe is for right relationships in the body of Christ.

The recipe for a right relationship involves a desire to be open and honest with one another

There are three things I want you to see in the text of verses 11-18. First of all, the recipe for right relationships involves a desire, a desire to be open and honest with one another. Look at verses 11-13. “Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide. You are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections. Now in like exchange—I speak as to children—open wide to us also.”

Now in order for God’s people to have right relationships there has to be a reciprocal openness and honesty among the people, a transparency that only Christ can enable. Now, let me ask you a question: have you ever had a friend that shut you out and here you are trying to open and bare your heart to them and be open and honest, but they refuse to reciprocate? Have you ever had that happen? You’ve opened yourself to them but they will not open back to you.

Now, that’s painful, isn’t it? They choose not to let you in. Why? Because of the feelings they have towards you. Well, don’t feel by yourself. Paul had opened up in verses 3-11 in total honesty with the Corinthians in an effort to help them see the purity of his heart. He says in verse 11, “Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians.” The word “spoken freely” is the word *anoigo*. It refers to something that has a lid or a cover over it protecting it, and now the lid has been taken off. It’s like uncovering a box, the lid of a box, that has a treasure on the inside and the idea is that Paul had freely, openly uncovered what would otherwise have gone unseen if he had not shared it.

Paul had been totally honest and transparent with them. He had made himself vulnerable to them; and for that relationship to be honest and right, they’re going to have to reciprocate. And if they don’t reciprocate then there cannot be the right relationship between the two of them. Verse 11, “Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians,” and this is even more important, “our heart is opened wide.” Now when you receive somebody without any reservations it is when your heart is open wide. It’s not restricted, it’s not restrained.

This involves laying aside all that would restrain the relationship. Now, in our context, what Paul is saying is “I’m laying down the pain, I’m laying down the hurt, I’m laying every bit of it down in order for us to have a right relationship.” He wants to clear the air. He says, “Our hearts have been opened to you, O Corinthians.” You see, in fact he further clarifies this in verse 12. He says, “You are not restrained by us.” In other words, “We’ve gotten out of the way.” This is so key in right relationships: We’ve got to get out of the way. We’ve got to be open and honest, lay it all down, be willing to forgive, be willing for it to be under the blood.

He said, “You are not restricted by us, you’re not restrained by us.” The only thing that is restraining them is them. He says, “but you are restrained in your own affections.” Now Paul is hoping that they will open their hearts to him just like he is to them, but he knows something. He knows that the thing that is restraining them in their relationship with him and which fuels their suspicions about Paul was their own affections. Now this is an important thing. The word “affections” is the word referring to the deepest kind of love.

It was kind of interesting, in their culture they would take an organ in the body and they would use that as a symbol of the emotions. The bowels, for instance, would be the deepest part of a person’s affections, and that’s the word that’s used here. You see, their affections had changed. They used to love the truth that Paul taught them, but now their affections had changed. They now loved the teachers and the false teachings that they had gotten into. And if you’ve ever studied 1 Corinthians you remember that they are totally enamored by the world and the way the world does everything. They’re in love with man and man’s ability and there were all kinds of immorality, promiscuity, adultery, everything else going on in Corinthian and their affections had changed.

Now when their affections changed that also broke a relationship with them and Paul because Paul stood for the truth. So Paul is saying “Our relationship is not in any way restricted on our part. I’m not the problem. I’ve opened my heart wide to you; I’ve been

open and honest. The problem is with you. You and your choices," he says to the Corinthians, "are the problem."

So he encourages them to open themselves up to him. Be honest about what you've done. Be willing to confess it, open up to him as he has done for them. He says in verse 13, "Now in a like exchange—I speak as to children—open wide to us also." Paul speaks with the tenderness of a father when he says "as to children." He's not saying as to the immature children as chapter 3 of 1 Corinthians would indicate that they were very immature. They just never came out of the nursery. They would rather live off of what they could do for God rather than let Jesus be Jesus in them. That's not what he's talking about.

What he's saying is, "I feel like you're my children, and as a father I've done everything I know to make this relationship right. And I'm asking you now to open yourself up and stop restraining yourself. It's your affections: you've chosen to go a different route and that has caused a broken relationship between the two of us." It's amazing how so many relationships are soured by associating with the wrong people who are filled with the wrong information. How quickly that happens in a church.

But it's Christ in us that enables us to lay aside the hurt. You see, He lives in us to give us those kinds of relationships, but we've got to be willing to allow Him to do what He wants to do in our lives. We've got to be willing to admit, "Yes, I listened to the wrong person; yes, I got the wrong information; yes, I took it and used it and shared it with other people; yes, I am the problem. And if a person is not willing to do that there cannot be that wonderful cohesive unity that God wants in the body of Christ.

So if we're going to have right relationships we have to be willing to have openness and honesty with one another, which means dealing with sin, which means calling it what it is, which means yes, I erred, my affections changed, I'm no longer enamored with Christ and His truth. I'm enamored with something over here and it's caused a brokenness in relationships with others. So open up and lay aside that which has been founded on wrong information and that will be the first step in having right relationships.

The recipe for a right relationship involves a discipline in avoiding poisonous people

So a desire to be open and honest with one another is the first thing that goes into this recipe of making relationships right. But secondly, what's involved in this recipe is a discipline in avoiding poisonous people. There's got to be a discernment and a discipline in us to avoid people that we know are poisonous in the body of Christ or who at least come and affix themselves up next to the body of Christ.

It only takes one person full of venom to disrupt a relationship. That's all it takes. Let me illustrate it this way maybe to get us down on the right page. A mother and a daughter have a great relationship until one day the daughter befriends someone who is a bad influence on her. Suddenly what was a good relationship between the mother and the daughter is disrupted because there is now friction between them because of this newfound friend. This newfound friend is filling the daughter with lies and filth. This has changed her way of thinking about her mom and overnight there's a broken relationship; and the only way that the relationship can ever be restored is for the daughter to break ties with this poisonous friend.

Well, this is exactly what Paul is talking about. You can't peacefully coexist with the wrong doctrine and the right doctrine. You know, I've noticed something. Help me, correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems like the doctrine is not important to anybody anymore. "Oh, come on. He believes that, we'll believe this. We'll just love each other and we'll just get along together." No, you can't get along; when somebody goes with poisonous doctrine it automatically breaks relationships with those who stand for the truth. There can be no cohesiveness there. There can be no unity there.

That's what had happened to the Corinthians. The Corinthians had made the mistake of listening and accepting the doctrine of the false teachers who really were unbelievers. They were buying into something that came from an unbeliever. This wrong information of their false teachings, the lies that they had believed about Paul had soured their relationship, first of all with God, and secondly with Paul. Most importantly with God, but secondly with Paul.

So he says in verses 14-16, "Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols?" Now the relationship that was being harmed the most and I want to make sure that we keep that ahead of everything, is the relationship with God. God is truth and doctrine and devotion have to go together. If you can find people with the right devotion, it's never right if it's the wrong doctrine. You've got to put the two together.

So Paul says don't be bound together with unbelievers. Now the word "bound together" most translations, I'm using the New American Standard 1995 update, it pulls the word even a different level but it's the word "yoked," unequally yoked. And most translations say that. That's really what it means. The Greek word is heterozugeo. It comes from two words, heteros, which means "another, a different kind," and then the word zugos, which means "yoke." Don't be yoked together with somebody who is unequal to you in the sense of their not believers. They're not like you.

The word allos means "of the same kind." It refers to a believer. He's referring to unbelievers here. And this is open ended here. He

says, "Don't be yoked or bound to someone who is an unbeliever." Now this is, like I said, open-ended. It can go any way. In the context it means don't be bound to a relationship with false teachers, with unbelievers, with someone who does not honor Christ in their life. The word "unbelievers" is the word *apistos*, and it refers to somebody who is really undependable. But in the context, because they have no faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, they don't live by His Word, they don't think out of His Word, they don't respond from having been seasoned in God's Word.

Paul is saying don't be around them. He's not saying don't be around them for the purpose of sharing Christ with them. That's not what he's saying. A boat in the water is by design; water in the boat is by disaster. He is saying don't form a binding relationship with them. Don't enter into what we would call a "covenant" with them. You say, "What's an example of that?" Marriage is an example of that. This is why it is so important when two people come to get married that you find out first of all, above everything else, do they know Christ; because if one of them doesn't know Christ, they're entering into a covenant with an unbeliever. They're entering into a covenant with somebody who is unequal as far as it comes to their position in Christ.

Now listen, let me tell you this: if you have done that you can't go back and unscramble eggs. That's not what he's saying. You can't walk away from a marriage just because you made a mistake back there. But I'll tell you this: God's grace and mercy will get you through it. But I'll tell you this: the people that have done that will be the first ones to stand up and applaud what Paul is saying because they have to live in this every single day. He's trying to do some preventive things here. And they were yoked to these false teachers. Now they can break that yoke. They can walk away from it.

Another example is this, don't enter into a business relationship, into a business partnership, with somebody that doesn't know Jesus, that is an unbeliever. That's the biggest mistake you can ever make, because they don't think the way God thinks. Don't form a partnership with them. "Oh, come on, Wayne, that's not what he's talking about." Excuse me? In fact, everything he says after that supports what he just said. For instance he says, "Do not be bound together with unbelievers." Then he starts off, "for what partnership," that's a covenant, that's a binding relationship, "have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?"

Now Paul begins to show some examples of how absurd it is to form a binding covenant relationship with people that are unbelievers. In the first example he contrasts their lifestyles. He says, "for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness." The word "lawlessness" is the word *anomia*, and it describes the lifestyle of an unbeliever. It is one who has no respect for God's Word and lives under nobody's authority except his own. But the believer lives righteously, which means that his daily walk allows Christ to live His life through them. He lives by what the Word of God says; he allows the Word to renew his mind. He's a man under the authority of the Lordship of Christ and he says, "form no alliance, form no binding relationship with a believer, because he's lawless." And you can never come to a point of agreement with an unbeliever.

The second example, Paul shows the source that is behind that believer and the unbeliever. He goes a step further; he's taking you out of just the lifestyle and going back to where the motivation of it comes from. Behind the believer who lives righteously is light. Of course, that's the Word of God, that's the Spirit of God. God gives us understanding; we can walk on this earth. And behind the unbeliever who lives lawlessly is darkness. Now, how in the world can these two fellowship? He says, "or what fellowship has light with darkness?" You see, this is even more profound. Light and darkness cannot exist together. By their very nature they exclude each other.

When we walk into a room we turn the light on and when we do the darkness has to disappear. The two cannot peacefully co-exist. Paul goes on and shows that they do not and cannot agree in word, purpose or thought. There is nothing there that will agree. He shows us this by identifying the true power behind the light, behind the righteousness, the true power behind the darkness, behind the lawlessness. And he shows this by saying in verse 15, "Or what harmony has Christ with Belial." Now the word "harmony" is the word *sumphonesis*. We get the word symphony from it which is the word, that synergy, when things come together to make a beautiful harmony and melody.

I know that you don't think I'm very cultured but I really am. I really am. You just don't know. I love classical music. I used to be an usher for a Philharmonic Orchestra. At all the different performances I was there and I enjoyed the classical music; I liked that part of it. But if you ever heard those different sounds of the music, and finally somebody steps up and he causes all these uncertain sounds to come together in the most beautiful harmony and agreement and concord that you can possible find.

And what he's saying is that's the word he's using here. He said, "There is no harmony, there is no melody, there is nothing that comes together. There is no agreement with Christ and Belial. You say who in the world is Belial? It's a transliteration of a Hebrew word. Belial is translated in the Septuagint as "a transgressor, as a foolish man." It is used by the ancient writer to describe one who had no regard for God nor man and who was totally wicked. It's a vile, licentious person.

Now the Jews picked up on that word and used it in reference to Satan, and Paul does exactly the same thing right here. The archenemy that all of us have is Satan and there can be no agreement between Jesus and him. Jesus came to destroy the works of

the devil. There can never be an agreement between the two which are the powers behind the one who lives righteously and the one who lives lawlessly. He says, "Don't you think about making a binding agreement with an unbeliever."

Paul next says, "Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols?" Boy, Paul quickly shows us the answer. "For we are the temple of the living God." Now, God is a very jealous God. He does not tolerate other idols in our life. We know this from the Ten Commandments. We're the temple of God. God lives in us. If there's something else that's going to be worshipped, if there's something else that is going to enter in, there will never be a peaceful coexistence. God does not allow it; God does not tolerate it.

You see, we're in covenant with God. We cannot enter into covenant with unbelievers. Covenant is a love word; he uses the word "affection." In fact, we ask the new members to sign a covenant. People say, "No, that's a creed. That's legalistic." No, no, no, no, it's a bond of love. It's something that says, "I agree with you. I am a believer and want Jesus to be Jesus in my life and I want to put my name down and I want to be a part of those who walk that way." It's not a contract; a contract can be broken. It's not a creed; that's legalistic. It's a covenant and if you don't understand the word "covenant" you have missed, you have missed so much of what you have in Jesus Christ. And you can't with your affections, pull it away from Christ and move it over to the world of the unbeliever who lives lawlessly. There can never be an agreement between the two.

All of these examples that he gives, the bottom line is that when a believer forms an alliance, a covenant, with an unbeliever, especially one who teaches false doctrine, he has just made a choice to enter a self-destructive covenant. And it is going to come back to haunt him from that point on. I was just listening on the radio coming in today and it reminded me when we studied Joshua of how they went up to Ai, they were in covenant with God and they were to do everything God's way. They were to inquire of God, but they didn't. And they went up to Ai and they were miserably destroyed. And they were laying on the ground saying, "Alas, alas," and the speaker on the radio said, "You know, that word 'alas' in the Hebrew has the idea of 'it's over, it's over. God, you've got a real problem because everything is over.'" And God said, "You get up off the ground, get yourself up off the ground. There is sin in the camp. Somebody has transgressed My covenant."

And that's what happens when you enter into an agreement with an unbeliever. You have transgressed the covenant that you are to be in with God. That's why you only enter into covenants with believers, because you've already been in covenant with them because you're in covenant with God.

Well, a person that has done this foolishly has chosen to receive their poison and that individual by his own affections shifting to that which God does not tolerate is now a cancer in the body of Christ. That is the one filled with wrong information. That is the one who is going around like Mildred the gossip in that illustration, that's the one spreading all the garbage that's dividing people rather than uniting them.

Something has captured them; something has taken their affection away from walking yielded to Christ. And the apostle Paul says, "Listen, you want to have right relationships? First of all you're going to have to be open with one another and confess it: be gut-honest about it. Deal with the problem both of you," and then he says there has to be a discipline to avoid poisonous people; they're everywhere. God gives us the discernment now we have to make the choice.

You know when you're around somebody who is a poisonous individual. That word in Ephesians says, "Let no unwholesome word be in your mouth." That word "unwholesome" has the idea of rotten. It's my son's tennis shoes when he puts them in the garage and the car backs out by itself. I mean smelly, rotten, rotten. And God will give you discernment when rotten things come out of people's mouths; the poison that can give wrong information which will affect relationships.

You know how to stop the gossip in the church besides parking your car in front of their home? One of the ways to stop it is when somebody calls you up and says, "I was in my quiet time this morning and [that's your first clue] God put it on my heart to call you [that's your second clue] to tell you this, and I know you don't want to hear it but I just feel a need to tell you." Look out; you better have enough discernment to know who the poisonous people are. That's the time that you say, "Excuse me just a second. Do you smell that? Something is rotten in here. I can't stand it. I've got to hang up, I'm so sorry." You just killed all the gossip right there. You just avoided the poisonous person who is going to fill you with the wrong information and I guarantee you it will break relationships if you choose to covenant with them and listen to what they have to say.

The recipe for a right relationship involves a determination to honor God in every choice we make

Thirdly, the third thing that's in this recipe for right relationships is a determination to honor God in every choice that we make. A determination in our heart. The whole focus on right relationships is not with man, the whole focus is with God. Who would be so foolish to walk away from the promises of God in order to enjoy a poisonous relationship? If you put it that way nobody would raise their hand. They're not going to do that, and yet we do when we listen. In 2 Corinthians 6:16 God gave us a fourfold promise. There are four things He promises if we'll choose to walk in covenant with Him. If we'll choose, instead of letting our affections drain over here to the things that are of the flesh, He says He will dwell with us, He will walk with us, He will be our God, and He'll make us His people.

That's precious—you talk about relationships. That relationship starts with Him. Now it says in verse 16, "just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.'" Now that's not just one passage in the Old Testament. It's capitalized if you have a good translation. It's a hodgepodge of verses from times that God spoke to His people. But Paul's bottom line is that Paul is saying that God promised this. You see, Moses didn't say it, Paul didn't say it, it says "just as God said." Yes, God said it through His prophet but God said it. And in the old covenant He promises to be with them; He walked with His people.

But in the new covenant He lives in His people. Bottom line: He's always with those who are willing to say yes to Him. But you see all the promises of God are conditional; they're conditional in a particular respect. Verse 17, "Therefore," now anytime you see a "therefore" always look to see what it's there for. "Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate," get away from them; avoid them, "says the Lord. And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you." Boy, the beautiful reception of God when we're willing to honor the covenant that we're in with Him.

See, God's promises are conditional in the situation that they depend upon our willingness to obey Him. In obeying Him we separate ourselves from that which is unclean. You don't have to worry about what's unclean. Just say yes to Him and you've just said no to that which is unclean. Saying yes to Him automatically says no. Victory is not me overcoming the poisonous things in my life. Victory is Jesus overcoming me. Pagan idolatry was rampant in Corinth, and if these believers did not come out of it, if they did not break their affection for false teaching and wrong doctrine and to follow the way of the world then all the promises that God had made to them, they would not enjoy.

God is a jealous God and will not tolerate any other gods in our life. If we live separate unto Him by yielding ourselves to Him, then look what He says in verse 18, "And I will be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty." Talk about relationships. When we refuse to open ourselves to one another in honesty and integrity and when we choose to form binding relationships with the unbelieving of this world, worshipping the very things that God hates, then we have forfeited the joy of walking and enjoying His promises. And when He says, "I'll be a Father to you," that's the beautiful picture of "I'm always there. I care for you. I'll tell you the hard things because I'm a Father, but I'll love you in the midst of it."

But the "sons and daughters" doesn't mean you'll become a believer. The words "sons and daughters" have reference to the fact you'll get to enjoy all the full adult privileges of being in the family if you'll just walk and honor the covenant that you're in instead of breaking that covenant and forming a binding relationship with that which God says is anathema. So you can live in the fullness of what God offers to you and He will be a Father to you if you're willing to come away from it; avoid the poisonous people because they infiltrate our minds with that which our affections grab hold of and as a result the wrong information always breeds wrong relationships.

Well, most importantly, when we choose not to do this we have soured our walk with God, and that's what I said earlier. With one another, that's just a no-brainer; the problem is we've soured our fellowship with God, our unity with Him. Relationships are so important to our walking and working together with God.

So the recipe for right relationships. What's in this recipe that makes them right? First of all, a desire to be open and honest with one another. And if that involves confessing sin, yes, I have sinned, I have messed up, that's fine. That's open and honest. Paul hadn't sinned and Paul opened his heart to them. Then he says, "Now you open your heart to me." But he said, "You're only restrained because you don't want to give up what you've gotten hold of. You don't want to come full turn. You don't want to do that; that's what is holding you back."

Then the second thing that has reference to that is that once you've done that, you've got to start avoiding and discerning and deciding to avoid these people that are poisonous; and then thirdly coupled with that is a determination to honor God in all our choices. All it is is that little chorus we sing, "Yes, Lord, yes, Lord, yes, yes, Lord. Yes, Lord, yes, Lord, yes, yes, Lord." That's it: that's the simplicity of the whole thing.

So in conclusion, let me ask you a question; because we're coming up to chapters 8-9 and we're going to find out where the idols of people's lives are. What are the idols in your life that have taken the place of Christ being your Lord? See, 8 and 9 are on giving. He's laying the foundation right now; he's laid it for six chapters and now we're going into chapter 7. He's trying to help them understand that when you walk in covenant you don't own anything. And so what are the idols in your life that's taken the place of Jesus today and you don't want to come away from it? Maybe it's a doctrine, maybe it's a wrong doctrine and you've grabbed hold of it. What is the poison you have received from those whom you should have avoided but you listened to and it got into you and now it's been used to break relationships? And how has that poison affected your relationship with your true brother in Christ?

Well, let me close with this thought. I want to make sure you understand that when he says make a binding relationship he's not saying "don't be out there with them." He's saying, "Don't form a binding relationship with them." I love this quote from Vance Havner.

Here's what he said, "We're not to be isolated from the world but we're to be insulated from the world, moving in the midst of evil but untouched by it. Separation is contact with contamination. If you're going to separate yourself you're still in the midst of it. Jesus was wholly harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, yet He was a friend of the tax collectors and the sinners."

So don't be isolated from the world but be insulated from it. Don't ever form a binding relationship with unbelievers. That's what poisons relationships in the body of Christ; it will come full circle. What goes around comes around.