

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

MAY 25TH–26TH, 2024 // 2 CORINTHIANS

DON'T RECEIVE GRACE IN VAIN (2 CORINTHIANS 6:1–2)

Paul has been explaining the nature and integrity of his ministry to his critics in Corinth.

- In spite of all the hardships and pain, his ministry has been triumphant (chs. 1–2), glorious (ch. 3), sincere and honest (ch. 4), and based on faith in God and the hope of eternity (ch. 5).
- The ministry God has given Paul and his missionary team is that of reconciliation.

"WORKING TOGETHER WITH HIM [GOD]..."

Throughout the narrative of Scripture, we get a sense that although God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and fully capable of doing anything and everything independently of anyone or anyone else, He still desires and chooses to work through and with humanity to accomplish His purposes on planet earth.

- Genesis 1:26
- Genesis 2:19–20
- We are not saved by our works, but we are saved in order to do good works—to work together with God and other Believers to accomplish His will and purposes on planet earth.
- As Believers, God's best for us is not a life of ease and self-indulgent pleasure.
- God's best for our life is for us to be busy about His work and to do it all for His glory (1 Cor. 10:31).

"DON'T RECEIVE THE GRACE OF GOD IN VAIN."

To receive God's grace in vain is to be given God's merciful and gracious salvation and then to fail in some way by not responding appropriately to it.

- It is to squander and waste our lives by being lazy, passive, and selfish instead of receiving God's grace and out of a heart of gratitude and love getting busy serving God and other people.

Paul then quotes Isaiah 49:8 to help these Believers get a sense of urgency.

- God has listened to us, and in our hour of need, He helped us and offered us salvation—now we have a responsibility to get to work, and the work is urgent because Jesus is coming back soon.
- "Now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation!" This is no time for us to consume our lives with ease, self-focus, and comfort.

"...MAKING THE MOST OF THE TIME, BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL." (EPHESIANS 5:16)

We have a very urgent God-given mission, ministry, and message to preach the gospel and rescue men and women from hell and eternal separation from God.

- Our lives are incredibly short—Jesus is coming soon, and we don't know how long we have.
- Now is the time to get busy.

GOD'S MINISTERS (2 CORINTHIANS 6:3–13)

EVERY CHRISTIAN IS CALLED TO MINISTRY.

Not every Christian will serve in full-time, vocational, church ministry, but we're all called to minister and participate in God's mission.

- This ministry is so important, so we should never give an "occasion for offense" that would discredit, hinder, and tarnish the work we're called to do (v. 3).
- How we live can discredit or disqualify us.

Paul's lifestyle has not discredited or disqualified his message or ministry; in fact, his life has commended his ministry.

- Despite all of the hardships and difficulties Paul and his missionary team have faced, they have maintained their character and integrity with great endurance (vs. 4–10).
- How can we live in such a way that proves we actually believe the message we proclaim?

ENDURE SUFFERING, HARDSHIP, AND SACRIFICE (VS. 4–5)

Paul's team endured afflictions, hardships, difficulties, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labor, sleepless nights, and hunger all for the sake of seeing others know Jesus.

- When it comes to serving God and others in ministry, many of us throw in the towel the first moment it starts to feel inconvenient.
- If it costs us nothing, it probably is worth nothing.

MAINTAIN INTEGRITY, CHARACTER, AND SINCERITY (V. 6)

Our inner lives are to be characterized by:

- Purity - thoughts, speech, behavior
- Knowledge - of Scripture, theology, and God
- Patience - with others and on God's timing
- Kindness - friendly, generous, considerate
- Sensitivity - to the Holy Spirit's leading & work
- Sincere love - no hypocrisy or phyness

HOLD FAST TO SOUND DOCTRINE, TRUTH, AND HOLINESS (V. 7)

The "word of truth" is the Bible (2 Tim. 2:15, James 1:18), and specifically the gospel (Col. 1:5) message.

- Satan is working overtime to undermine, dilute, and outright assault the authority of Scripture in the life of the Church and the Believer.
- We are to rely on God's power as we live by it and see it as our primary weapon of righteousness (Eph. 6:17, 2 Cor. 10:3).

REMAIN STEADFAST EVEN WHEN IT HURTS (VS. 8–10)

Paul speaks of experiencing dishonor, slander, being regarded as a deceiver, being unknown, dying, being disciplined, grieving, being poor, and having nothing.

- Yet, even in the midst of the painful realities of living for God and doing His work, there's great honor, joy, beauty, and abundance involved that you can't experience anywhere else.
- When you pour out and share your life with broken, hurting people, it's going to cost you something.
- Often you will feel ostracized, misunderstood, criticized, slandered, or attacked by the ones you're giving your life to try to serve and love.

- This is one of the main reasons people walk away from ministry and from church: "church hurt."
- When others hurt us, we can't use that as a reason to give up on our faith, on church, and on serving God.
- People (even Christians) are broken sinners. Jesus is the only perfect one.
- The Church is made up of all kinds of broken people who can and will say and do hurtful, stupid things, including us!

All of these things (and many more), Paul has endured with his heart wide open for the sake of the people God has called him to serve (vs. 11–13).

- Paul essentially says, "I've opened my heart for you, will you open your heart to me?"
- Living with a closed-off, hardened heart that is resistant to Christian service and community leads us to miss out on so much!

UNEQUALLY YOKED (2 CORINTHIANS 6:14–18)

After King David ruled over Israel, a "young and inexperienced" King Solomon was anointed to succeed him (1 Chron. 22:5).

- God endowed Solomon with supernatural wisdom, an encyclopedic knowledge of plants, animals, & human nature (1 Kings 4:32–34), leadership acumen, and great wealth.
- Through Solomon, Israel's purpose to be a light to the nations was realized.

But something hijacked Solomon's great ministry that brought glory to God and blessing to other people—Solomon had a vice.

- At its best, Solomon's vice could be described as a love addiction; at its worst, a sex addiction (700 wives, 300 concubines).
- Through this vice, Solomon was led astray from the Lord and into the worship of false, pagan gods (1 Kings 11:3–8).

"DO NOT BE YOKED TOGETHER WITH THOSE WHO DO NOT BELIEVE."

It doesn't matter how committed you are to serving God and living for Him, if you are inappropriately connected to a nonbeliever or the non-believing world (either in a dating relationship/marriage or in allowing excessive worldly influence in your life), you'll be led astray from your purpose and your Christian life and ministry will be hijacked.

- The word picture is taken from farming.

If the world is influencing us (because we've yoked ourselves to it), we will be pulled away from our Christian work and be unfruitful.

- We're called to live lives defined by the righteousness and light of Christ (vs. 14–15).
- Why would we allow the influence of lawlessness, darkness, and Belial (the Devil) into our lives?
- These things have no place in our lives and we're to be separate from the world.

Being "separate" from the world is a command from Scripture for doctrinal and personal purity even as we live and minister in the world that is impure, sinful, and dark.

- We are to be different from the world in that we are not to live lives of sin, impurity, and darkness: we are the temple of the living God (v. 16).
- The doctrine of Christian separation has, at times, been greatly abused within the church.

Nowhere in the Scripture does biblical separation mean we can't have contact with unbelievers (1 Cor. 5:9–10): how can we win unbelievers to Christ if we don't talk to them?

- It also does not mean we must reject anything modern or "secular" as evil.
- We are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world without allowing the world to diminish our distinctness and our light (Matt. 5:14–16).

Paul quotes several OT passages (Lev. 26:11–12; Jer. 24:7; Ezek. 37:27) to remind these Believers that as the temple of God and as God's covenant people, it is unacceptable and blasphemous for us to join forces with darkness and the domain of Satan (vs. 16–18).

- In order to be effective in our work and witness for God, we cannot be unequally yoked to the unbelieving world.

URGENCY (VS. 1–2)

- There is a real spiritual war going on right now for the souls of humanity and the stakes are high.
- If you're a Christian, you've been saved for a purpose. That purpose is to work together with God as a part of His covenant people to proclaim Christ to those who are lost.
- Who in your life needs to hear? What do you need to do to join in God's mission?

THE COST AND THE REWARD (VS. 3–13)

- "...every one of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple." (Lk. 14:33)
- Living the Christian life and serving God will cost you time, money, friendships, energy, and it might even cost you your life.
- It will require more out of you than any other calling on earth. God will stretch you to what feels like beyond your breaking point time and time again.
- "So he said to them, 'Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left a house, wife or brothers or sisters, parents or children because of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more at this time, and eternal life in the age to come.'" (Lk. 18:29–30)
- Even in the midst of the painful realities of living for God and doing His work, there's great honor, joy, beauty, and abundance involved that you can't experience anywhere else.

THE CALL TO BE SEPARATE (VS. 14–18)

- In order to be effective in our work and witness for God, we can't be unequally yoked to the unbelieving world.
- Missionary dating and barroom/frat party evangelism don't work—there are certain activities and places that just aren't for Christians.
- In your workplace, friend group, or family, are you a spiritual thermostat or thermometer?