

## 2 Corinthians 6:1-18

“Showing Ourselves As Ministers”

God has held nothing back in order that He might extend the offer of salvation to man. Though salvation is a free gift make no mistake it's anything but cheap, it cost God greatly. Jesus said, “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*” John 3:16-17 People sometimes think that God is sitting up there with the giant flyswatter of judgment in the sky just looking for the opportunity to swat them when in reality God wants to *save* them. The Holy Spirit through the apostle Peter reminds us there in Ch 3 of his 2<sup>nd</sup> epistle that God isn't willing that *any* should perish, but that all should come to repentance. and The avenue to repentance before God is open through the person of His Son, Jesus Christ It's not open through Muhammad; it's not open through Buddha; it's not open through really any particular path one may choose as long as they're sincere. Jesus said, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*” John 14:6 It was *in* Christ (as He laid down His life there on the cross) that God was reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them. **Which means that in any other context our trespasses are imputed to us, it's only *in* Christ that we find ourselves reconciled to God. and God has committed the ministry, and the message of reconciliation to us. Which is to say that God has opted to partner with man, to speak to man, through man of the gospel of Jesus Christ whereby we might receive the remission of sins.** Notice Vs 20-21 of Ch 5 (read)

and That's the good news in a nutshell, that God made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin (was in all ways tempted as you are and I am yet with out sin) to be sin for us, (not a sinner, Jesus wasn't a sinner, but He took our sin upon Himself) that we might become the righteousness of God *in* Him. and Of course Vs 20 reminds of those 2 statements that leave us mesmerized, sorta shocked and stunned wondering which is more amazing. **That knowing who we are, where we've been, what we've done and what we deserve that God would use the likes of us as His ambassadors, His representatives, to be His voice, to be the reflection of His Heart and His love to a hurt and dying world. Or the idea of God not only allowing His Son to suffer in our stead, but then to actually plead with man, beg man to be reconciled to Himself through Christ.** I mean who are we that God should plead with us? It should be the other way around, yet God so loves us that He reaches out to us in everyway possible just shy of saving us against our will. He won't do that, He *died* for you, He *pleads* with you, but He won't force you to come to Him, that's a choice you have to make of your own volition, your own will.

But this idea of God actually wanting to use man to reach out to man on His behalf is the point that Paul picks up on here in Ch 6. Who is sufficient for these things? But that's part of the great news, left to ourselves we're nothing but dirt balls, but in Christ God takes us, touches and transforms us and accredits us with the very righteousness of God, we're not just forgiven we're new creations altogether.

Oh in a practical sense we're still pretty "dirt bally" but positionally you're robed with Christ's righteousness, and you're being transformed more and more into His image as by His Spirit everyday. God saved you because He has a plan, and a purpose *for* you, He wants to *use* you, to partner *with* you in the message and the ministry of reconciliation.

**Vs1**

Here Paul underscores again the fact that we are *workers together* with Him. and It's not that God needs us, but that He wants to have a relationship with us, to spend time with us and so He calls us to work with Him.

We've spoken before about the dad out mowing his lawn with the little boy following along with a little bubble mower. Now in truth the little boy is probably a bit of a hindrance, if it was all about pure efficiency dad would just say, "Go inside I've got work to do." **But dad loves his boy, looks for the opportunity to cultivate a relationship with him, bond with him, and so he wants him to *work together* with him. How much more does your heavenly Father want to spend time with you, cultivate a relationship with you, and work together with you?**

and I want you to see the fact that God calls us to be workers together with Him; there's something about the word "work" that we just naturally recoil from. But believe it or not God's best for our lives isn't always an arena of self serving, convenient comforts and indulgent inactivity. **God doesn't call us to be couch potatoes together with Him, or church chair potatoes together with Him, but rather *workers* together with Him. Christ didn't come to be served, but to serve and give His life away as a ransom for many.** and He said with regard to serving rather than being served, "...*I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.*" John 13:15

and I want you to see that God has called *us* to be workers together *with Him*, He's not a worker together *with us*, we're workers together *with Him*. and That's important because it's not our work that He's joining in on, the work is His, He simply allows us to take part in it. **and Even at that we realize that it's not really us, but Him in us doing the work. Before I came to Christ I didn't have any desire to further the agenda of the Kingdom of God. But once Christ had my heart as His home things were different. Because now God was at work *in me* and He was working *through me* to further His purpose and His plan by me, but it's all Him.**

Remember Phil 2:13, "...*it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*" In Christ both the "want" and the "work" are the result of His doing in your life, He puts the *desire in* you, and then He *does it* through you for His glory and His good pleasure. and It's great, He does the whole thing and then He rewards you as though you had something to do with it. There's only 1 ability that God looks for in man, and that's avail-ability, you make yourself available to the Lord and He'll take it from there. God desires and delights to use you as a worker together with Him. and So Paul says here,

**Vs1**

God pleads with man to be reconciled to Him through Christ, and here Paul says that as workers together with Him we *also plead* with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. What does that mean? Well, with in the context I wouldn't say that it means they're not believers because if you weren't a believer you wouldn't have received the grace of God in the 1<sup>st</sup> place.

The question wasn't one of whether or not they had received God's grace; it was one of God's grace having God's way in their lives. He's pleading with them not to stand guilty of having received the grace of God in vain. and It seems to me that the idea here takes us back to what we were speaking about in Vs 9-10 of Ch 5. We talked there about the fact that we're accepted *in* Him, the bible says we're accepted in the Beloved meaning that God accepts us in Christ. But leading a life that's accepted *in* Him Vs a life that's acceptable *to* Him are 2 entirely different things. God wants to see your life in motion for Him, He wants to challenge you, and change you, take you and transform you more and more into the image of His Son, He has a plan that He wants to propel through you. Remember when Jesus said, "...why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" Luke 6:46 Which is to say, "You've trusted Me to be your Savior, but you really haven't *submitted* to Me as your Lord." A lot of people have the impression that God's grace is simply the substance that makes up for the sin in their lives. But that doesn't even come close to the reality of what the grace of God does *for* you, or accomplishes *in* you, or works *through* you.

Paul told Titus, "... *the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,*" Titus 2:11-13 So God's grace does way more than simply make right all the things we've done wrong. It teaches us, and trains us, instructs us in righteousness, both to the negative and to the positive. To the negative grace of God teaches us to *deny* both ungodliness, and worldly lusts. To the positive it trains us to *live* soberly, righteously, and godly in the *present*, and trust confidently in *promise* of the return of Jesus Christ So the idea here is to let God's grace have God's way in my life which will translate in to me not using the grace of God as a cloak for vice (or to fulfill ungodly notions and worldly lusts) but rather to be growing and moving forward in godliness whereby God might use me (work through me) unencumbered by the various vices in my life that I give precedent to over Him. If I'm not being taught by grace, being trained by grace, if God's grace in me isn't in someway translating into a life of consecrated service to Him *from* me, then there is a sense in which I'm receiving the grace of God in vain.

Now when I talk about consecrated service I'm not referencing the pastorate, or vocational ministry, or necessarily being involved at church (though I think serving the body of Christ in the fellowship is both a great and important thing to do). But what I am saying is that you are and I am to be submitted to Jesus Christ not given over to the lusts of the flesh, the pride of life, the cares of this world, things of that nature. and That wherever I am, whatever I may be doing, God I'm open to You in it, I'm willing to head a different direction if it's not what You have for me, I want to lead my life sanctified, set apart, and in service to You. In other words God's grace toward you isn't passive, it's active, it's aggressive. Paul wrote in 1<sup>st</sup> Cor 15, "... *by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*" 1 Cor 15:10 So the grace of God sets us in motion, moves us forward in our walk and relationship *with* the Lord and our service *unto* the Lord.

## Vs 2

In other words there's a sense of urgency about this work that God has called us to partner with Him together in. We're in what's commonly referred to as the "Age of grace" a season of time whereby the offer of God's grace and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is going out to mankind, there's not time to slack, we should be busy about our service. This, "acceptable time" won't last forever, now is the time to be busy about getting out the gospel to the world around us. God is clear about the fact that His Spirit won't always strive with man, but now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. That's the *interpretation* here don't receive the grace of God in vain, but rather allow it to transform you, to take you and make the person that God has purposed for you to be (you decreasing, Christ increasing in your life) that you might be busy about His business, delivering the ministry of reconciliation to those who are with out hope being with out God in the world.

But there's another *application* in here as well. It's amazing to me how many people will put off receiving Jesus Christ into their heart, into their life thinking that they'll always have time to do it later. Perhaps after they've sown their wild oats, or they've grown a little older and have nothing better to do, or they get something else done that they consider more important for now. What could possibly be more important? What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his own soul? I was talking with someone the other day and they mentioned to me something they were doing on new yrs eve and basically he was just hanging out with some buds being goofy because (as he said) he doesn't party or do anything like that so what else were they going to do?

and I was like, "Well, you could've went to church and hung out, had a good time with whatever they had going for new yrs." and He kinda danced around that for a second and I just said, "Listen man, when are you going to give your heart to Jesus Christ?" and He started talking about getting through school, and listing out some things he needed to take care of 1<sup>st</sup>. and I was thinking of that situation there in Luke Ch whereby all these people were telling the Lord that they *would* follow Him, but for whatever reason they just couldn't *right then*. and I said, "Man what does it profit you if you get all that done, gain the whole world, but lose your own soul?" and That started a whole other conversation, but he said, "You know it's just not my priority right now." But I'm working with him, traded watching a few little "You tube" things he'd put together (none of which would compromise me) for him downloading and listening to one of my studies. I haven't figured out which one yet, maybe this one.

But the bible says, "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts." Heb 4:7 *Today is the day of salvation, now is the accepted time, you just can't count on tomorrow, you have this moment guaranteed, but I can't guarantee another one. It's an awfully big roll of the dice to put off eternal life for another day. God wants your heart today, now is the acceptable time, today is the day of salvation.* Remember Joshua told the children of Israel, "If it seems evil to you to serve the Lord then you've got a choice to make, if you want something else to be your priority in life that's up to you, but don't procrastinate, don't straddle the fence, choose *this day* (right here, right now) whom you will serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

## Vs3

Which is basically another way of saying, “We make sure and lead our lives in such a way as to never be a scapegoat for someone else, so that they won’t be able to *rightfully accuse* us or say that they won’t surrender to or serve the Lord because of the hypocrisy they *see* in us.” and The reason I say, “Rightfully accuse” is because people are going to say all kinds of things, Paul accused of being a liar, a deceiver, dishonorable and all the rest, but not because it was true. It was because other people had an agenda in coming against him. You’re not going to be able to prevent people from saying things hurtful about you, or spiteful against you, all you can do is make sure it isn’t true. and When Paul says, “We give no offense,” that word offense doesn’t mean, “We never hurt anyone’s feelings.” Because that’s another human impossibility, you shake someone’s hand you interrupt them, you don’t shake their hand you’re too good for them, you don’t look at someone you’re trying to avoid the, you walk up to them and you’re nosing in their business. There will always be people whom you’re going to offend. But what this means is that, “We make sure that the things we do don’t entice someone else to stumble and sin.” There are all kinds of liberties in Christ, but just because we have certain liberties doesn’t mean we have to push that envelope to the extreme. There are some grey areas; Paul is saying, “We avoid questionable things that might be a stumbling block to others because we don’t want those things to hinder our witness or reflection of Jesus Christ” It’s a reference to blamelessness, if it even *appears* questionable, as believers we’re to avoid it. Because it’s not worth the risk of ruining another person’s walk with Christ. (and Here in these next few Vs Paul shares by way of example as to some of the things that are apart of his life whereby he is able to show himself as a minister of God, what it costs, what he’s willing to endure if it makes for the blessing and/or eternal benefit of another.)

## Vs4-10

That’s quite a résumé isn’t it? and Of course we could spend an extended amount of time looking into each one of the things he mentions here, but I think the overall idea is that if you want to follow Jesus Christ to the full, these are some of the things you need expect and some of the things you can expect to need.

and Did you catch the very 1<sup>st</sup> one on the list of how it is that he shows/commends himself as a minister of God? “In much patience.” Now this isn’t the kind of patience whereby we lose our cool when someone is in such a hurry to get out in front of us and then drives 15 mph under the speed limit. That word is mentioned in Vs 6 with regard to “longsuffering,” this is a word that speaks of bearing up under trials, refusing to give in or give up but presses on. In this world you will experience tribulation; all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But as believers (by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit) we press on, we patiently endure, not giving in or giving up. Patience in the believer’s life isn’t a passive resignation whereby we fold our hands and let a torrent of troubles simply sweep over us. But rather it’s an active endurance, a patient continuance in seeking and serving the Lord, having a resolve that refuses to quit considering the present sufferings of this world aren’t worthy to be compared to the glory that’s to be revealed in us. There are tribulations, hardships and distresses that enter into the equation of your life as a believer, but you show yourself a servant of God in that you don’t cease to serve God because of those things.

He's worthy of all that we are, regardless of our circumstances. God never said He demonstrated His love for us in that He makes our circumstances in life all peachy all the time. No, God will utilize suffering at times in incredible ways (we've spoken of that recently so we won't again today) but God demonstrated His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Rom 5:8). So there will be times when life will deliver devastating blows; we persevere in pursuing Christ.

There may be other times when trials come in the form of other people literally inflicting them upon you. (Vs 5) In stripes, imprisonments, tumults (which is another word for a riot). Paul was beat because of his ministry, imprisoned because he loved the Lord, was practically torn limb from limb, stoned and left for dead due to riots breaking out when he was just sharing the truth of who God is. But he endured, kept going because he wanted to show people, and share *with* people who Jesus is. and The thrust here is, "This is how we show ourselves as ministers of God." Not by inviting trials and persecution, but how we conduct ourselves in the midst of them. If you're true intention wasn't to reflect Jesus, you'd be pulling the plug about the time the rocks came out and people began to pummel you with the intention of killing you. But Paul didn't back down, or retire because of all the problems/pressures and persecution, he kept going.

His life was marked by hard work, sleepless nights, and going with out (fasting), you just don't do these kinds of things if you're some sort of charlatan, in it to serve yourself, these things showed him, commended him as a minister of God. By what else was he commended as a minister of God?

#### Vs6-7

The servant of God commends himself/herself *as* a minister of God by leading a life that's morally pure. Impurity has devastated the ministry on multiple levels, Paul says that the minister of God commends themselves by purity (in what we do, what we place before our eyes and take into our minds, the whole bit) "by knowledge," not just of the word of God but by knowing and staying relevant to the day and age, the culture in which you minister, we're to understand the times and minister accordingly. **Not compromising God's Word but staying relevant to the day and age God has called us.** "By longsuffering," now we're talking about being patient with people around us, swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath knowing that the wrath of man doesn't produce the righteousness of God. "By the Holy Spirit, by sincere love." As a servant of God you should have the power of the Holy Spirit at rest upon your life. **Genuine in your display of the love of Christ.**

Studying, employing and effectively wielding the word of truth, having put on the whole armor of God, (Eph 6) which includes the shield of faith on the left hand, the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God on the right.

Now Vs 8-10 are a paradox of sorts, both equally true simply depending on your perspective. Often times the man of God from the worlds perspective is labeled with dishonor, evil report, as a deceiver, as irrelevant (or unknown), sad (or sorrowful), poor and having nothing.

But from God's point of view you're honored, of good report, true, as well known (completely relevant), living, rejoicing, making many rich, and possessing all things. The question is whose perspective concerns you? Which estimation is most important to you, do you want the praise that comes from man? Or the praise that comes from God? This is like that which Peter said when he wrote, "*If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.*" 1 Peter 4:14

### Vs11-13

As you well know there was some shaky ground between Paul and the Corinthians, even though they came to Christ through him they'd began to buy the lies about him from those who were against him. and Here he's saying, "Hey our hearts are open to you, the problem is that isn't reciprocated, you've given your heart to these guys who are exactly what they're accusing me of. Liars, deceivers, dishonorable and no good for you."

But man what application there is here. In our walk and relationship with the Lord how often we think the Lord will hold us back, or restrict us in some way. Our restrictions don't come from the Lord, but by our own affections, we set our hearts on things that hinder and impair our relationship with Him. "The lust of the eye, the lust of the world, the pride of life." But he's not the One holding back on us, we're the one's who hold out on Him setting our affections where they ought not be. His heart is open wide toward us, now in return for the same we also need to be have hearts open wide toward Him.

### Vs14-16

No doubt another area that extended time could be spent in. But the basic premise here is that as a child of God, God dwells in you, He walks *with* you, He's your God, and you're His son, His daughter. and The bottom line is that we aren't to be setting our affections on that which is ungodly, as a child of God you can't yoke up with a child of this world. The yoke speaking of a joining together. In the law God had said that an ox and a donkey weren't to plow together. They weren't even of the same nature, one was clean, the other unclean. and The point for you and me is that the clean and unclean can't pull and plow through life together. You'll have 2 different sets of convictions, of goals, of standards. and It's only a matter of time before you're placed in a position of compromise. Now we're to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world, you can place a ship in the water, that's where it belongs, but if water starts leaking into the ship you've got a problem, and that's the idea here.

and The idea of being unequally yoked though it applies to marriage isn't limited to marriage. It applies to business endeavors as well, as a believer you don't want to start a business with a non-believer. Not because an unbeliever has cooties, or any weird thing like that. But you have an entirely different outlook on life and the ethics of the business and it'll just lead to trouble if you try to join up that way. It's like trying to mingle light with darkness, Christ isn't going to hook up in any way with Satan, so to with the believer and unbeliever, it's simply not wise. You are the temple of the living God, God dwells in you, you're not your own you've been bought at the purchase price of Jesus Christ

## Vs 17-18

In the world, but not *of* the world, setting your heart, your mind, your affection on things above not on the things of the earth. God's not simply telling you to empty yourself of worldly desire, you can't, but you can open your heart wide to the fullness of the love of God, and God's grace having God's way in you, teaching you, training you in righteousness. You see it's about being so full of who He is, that there's just no room left for who I am.

How do you show yourself as a minister of God? Not by a legalistic regimen of "do's" and "don'ts" but by a life of genuine persistent and consistent holiness, leading your life with a pursuing passion for Jesus. You see as you lead a sanctified life unto the Lord, set apart from this world, God promises to honor your commitment to Him by granting you a relationship of greater intimacy with Him. Today is the day, now is the acceptable time, come out from among them and be separate says the Lord, don't touch (don't clean to and join with) what is unclean and He will receive you, be a Father to you, and you shall be His son, His daughter, says the LORD ALMIGHTY.

### Prayer Points:

Father we ask You to show us, reveal to us those areas that we've set our affections on that are restricting our relationship with You, the fullness of what You want to do in and through us. May we set our affection whole heartedly on You. In the world but not of the world, being a light in the darkness, that others might see You, and be drawn to You through us. May we not be recipients of Your grace in vain, but that Your will, would be done Your way, in our lives.

and If you don't know Jesus Christ I want you to know that as far as God's concerned now is the acceptable time, today is the day of salvation, you can cry out to Him and He'll hear you, He'll help you, He'll save you. It's not God's desire that you should delay, that you should put off for another day what you can take care of right now. Jesus said if anyone thirsts let him come to Me a drink. The waters of this world will only leave you thirsting for more, only Christ can truly satisfy the thirst of your soul. If Jesus is knocking on the door of your heart, I want to encourage you to open your heart, and invite Him in. Ask Him for forgiveness, turn *from* your sin *unto* Him and you'll never be the same. God will write your name in His book of life.