

Christian *Separation*: An Exclusive Yoke of Service

2 Corinthians 6

2 Corinthians 6. In ch.5 we had the fact that we are ambassadors for Christ. Then, in ch.6 we have the character of an ambassador. The predominant theme is that ambassadors must have a character that is beyond reproach. This chapter is a beautiful thesis on [servanthood](#), and the characteristics of a good servant. Another has said, Paul gives us his *ministry* in chapter 3, his *exercises* in chapter 4, his *motives* in chapter 5, his *moral character* in chapter 6.

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The Importance of Serving Commendably in Every Circumstance (6:1-10)

CHAPTER 6

¶ *But as fellow-workmen, we also beseech that ye receive not the grace of God in vain: v.1* If ch.5 v.20 is an appeal to the world, then ch.6 v.1 is an appeal to the Corinthians. Paul did not class these beloved saints with the sinners in need of reconciliation, but rather as “*fellow-workmen*” who labored with him, carrying the word of reconciliation out to the world. Some translations insert the words “with Him” in v.1, as if to make the believer a fellow of God. There is insufficient manuscript evidence for this. The true thought in this verse is that we are laborers and co-workers of each other. However, this verse was for their consciences; “*we also beseech that ye receive not the grace of God in vain*”. It was in the same vein as what Paul preached to the lost. These believers were not in danger of losing the grace of God; the scripture is clear that our security is fixed and eternal. But they were in danger of preventing the grace of God from having it’s desired outcome. Part of

God's purpose in our salvation is to make us *servants*. To reject the path of service is to not allow grace to reach its intended end. The conduct of the Corinthians was not fitting of the salvation they had received.

2 (for he says, "I have listened to thee in an accepted time, and I have helped thee in a day of salvation:" [Isaiah 49:8] behold, now is *the* well-accepted time; behold, now *the* day of salvation:) **v.2** Paul quotes from Isa. 49:8 to bring out the true character of the day we live in. The Psalm is prophetic of the Messiah, who was rejected by Israel. He could say; "*I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought*". Nevertheless, Jehovah heard the prayer of His Servant, and answered Him abundantly. Not only would the Messiah "*raise up the tribes of Jacob*" but He would also be given "*for a light of the nations*". The blessing of Israel and the Gentiles is based on God hearing the cry of the suffering Christ! This is precisely the connection Paul makes from the end of ch.5 and the beginning of ch.6. The Messiah's prayer was in "*a time of acceptance*" and in "*a day of salvation*". If we trace through Isa. 49 leading up to that quotation, we see that the salvation in view is the *Messiah's* salvation! The salvation of men is wrapped up in the vindication of Christ. Prophetically, this looks on to the Millennium when salvation will go out to the Gentiles through the gospel of the kingdom. However, Paul sees that the principle of it is fulfilled now! God's heart is currently pouring out to Gentiles and Jews in response to the work of Christ, such that Paul says "this is the well-accepted time" and "now is the day of salvation". It is really a call to service; now is the time of service (see John 4:35).

3 giving no manner of offence in anything, that the ministry be not blamed; **4a** but in everything commending ourselves as God's ministers, **vv.3-4a** There are many ways we can "*give offense*" and bring blame to the service of Christ. Lot had no credibility with his sons-in-law because he had not lived a life of separation from the world (Gen. 19:14). If we are going to be effective in service we need to have a character that is commendable, or consistent with the One we serve; i.e. we are "*servants of God*". We have a tendency to partition our lives into different spheres, and we can be deceived into thinking that those spheres are disconnected. The truth is that our character in one area affects all areas of life. There ought to be consistency in our character regardless of where we are: at home, at work, or in the assembly meetings. In the following verses, Paul explains the various scenarios and circumstances he had passed through *without compromising* His Christian character.

4b in ⁽¹⁾ much endurance, in ⁽²⁾ afflictions, in ⁽³⁾ necessities, in ⁽⁴⁾ straits, **5a** in ⁽⁵⁾ stripes, in ⁽⁶⁾ prisons, in ⁽⁷⁾ riots, **vv.4b-5a Seven Kinds of Suffering from Without.** The first group of circumstances has to do with pressure from without, brought on the servant because of the

adverse environment through which he or she must pass. *“Much endurance”* is mentioned first, because it covers everything else. In a sense, endurance is needed in every circumstance. This refers to severe trials that continue for a long duration. In 2 Cor. 12:12, patience or “endurance” is listed as the first proof of Paul’s apostleship! We wouldn’t naturally think that patience would top the list containing things like signs and wonders. To lose our patience is to be overcome of evil (Rom. 12:21). *“Afflictions”* are also very general. The original word here means “constriction” and is elsewhere translated as “tribulation”. These would be circumstances that put the servant under extreme pressure. *“Necessities”* would be times of great need, whether for money, food, or shelter. *“Straits”* would be situations where there was no apparent way of escape. The word is literally translated “cramped spaces”. These first four circumstances are *general* in nature, with increasing intensity. The next three are *specific* forms of suffering. *“Stripes”* specifically refer to the cuts or welts that resulted from being beaten with a whip or lash. Paul speaks more of this later (2 Cor. 11:24-25), not only as receiving stripes from the hands of the Jews, but suffering under the Roman torture known as the scourge. *“Prisons”* is self explanatory (2 Cor. 11:23); but we have a recorded example of Paul’s character in prison (Acts 16:16-25). He prayed and sang praises until midnight. *“Riots”* refer to the violence of civil unrest that Paul passed through. Although there are other minor examples from Paul’s travels (such as at Iconium and Lystra, Acts 14), the most notable “riot” would be the one in Ephesus that broke out over the effect Paul’s preaching had on idol-makers, which he mentions earlier in this epistle (2 Cor. 1:8; Acts 19:28-34).

5b ⁽¹⁾ in labours, ⁽²⁾ in watchings, ⁽³⁾ in fastings, **vv.4b-5a Three Kinds of Suffering from Within.** The next group of circumstances are things the servant may endure that are the result of spiritual exercise ¹. *“Labors”* refer to the physical, mental, and emotional exertions that the servant puts forth in the work of the Lord. *“Watchings”* refer to sleepless nights spent in prayer (1 Pet. 4:7). *“Fastings”* refer to the periods of time when the servant will voluntarily abstain from food or other natural things to be devoted to the Lord in prayer (Matt. 6:16-18). This is not general hunger and thirst as we have distinguished in 1 Cor. 4:11.

6 ⁽¹⁾ in pureness, ⁽²⁾ in knowledge, ⁽³⁾ in longsuffering, ⁽⁴⁾ in kindness, ⁽⁵⁾ in the Holy Spirit, ⁽⁶⁾ in love unfeigned, **7** ⁽⁷⁾ in the word of truth, ⁽⁸⁾ in the power of God; ⁽⁹⁾ through the arms of righteousness on the right hand and left, **vv.6-7 Nine Qualities that Sustain the Servant.** The next group of things is not so much circumstances, but the qualities that the servant of God must have in the pathway. These are qualities that will *sustain us*, and allow us to be *consistent* in our testimony through all the fluctuating circumstances of life. *“Pureness”* is the personal holiness that must characterize the servant of God. We cannot be pure without

separation from evil and occupation with Christ. It is first quality given. Neglecting pureness has been the downfall of many servants of God. The televangelist scandals of the 1980's and 1990's in America brought this home in a very painful and shameful way. "*Knowledge*" of the things of God is also critical to successful service. Paul could speak first-hand about "*zeal without knowledge*" (Rom. 10:2) because of his previous career (Gal. 1:13-14). We need to understand God's mind in order for our efforts to be directed aright. "*Longsuffering*" is needed because of the interpersonal difficulties a servant may encounter. Losing patience with others can easily result in a spoiled testimony. "*Kindness*" is needed because the suffering may come at the servant from individuals, whether believers or unbelievers. Christ is the perfect example for us; "who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23). "*The Holy Spirit*" is the source of power and guidance in Christian service (John 14:26; Rom. 8:14; 1 Cor. 12:11). A nice example of this is the Spirit's leading of Philip the Evangelist in Acts 8. "*Love unfeigned*" is a constant disposition of favor towards others. It is the proper motive for service (Gal. 5:13). Motives are deeper than the outward actions... only God sees the heart (1 Sam. 16:7). However, if love is not our motive, it is possible that others will discern it, and our hypocrisy will cause the ministry to be blamed. "*The word of truth*" is vital for effective service. The Word of God should not only govern *what* we do, but *how* we do it (1 Cor. 3:10; Psa. 119:105). "*The power of God*" is vital to service because Jesus said "without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). It would seem that the power and Spirit are separated in these verses because the former signifies guidance while the latter signifies strength, although we know that the Spirit is the power of true ministry. Paul did not resort to human wisdom, but to the power of God (1 Cor. 2:4). "*The arms of righteousness on the right hand and left*" refers to consistency in our walk. Practical righteousness will be like armor to us. If we do not walk upright, the enemy will gain a point of attack. Notice that the whole field of battle is covered; "*on the right hand and left*". The right hand is listed first. We still need the armor in the areas where we think we are strong.

8 ⁽¹⁾ through glory and dishonour, ⁽²⁾ through evil report and good report: ⁽³⁾ as deceivers, and true; **9a** ⁽⁴⁾ as unknown, and well known; **vv.8-9a Four Paradoxical Reputations.** The next group of circumstances have to do with the servant's reputation. They are listed in paradoxical pairs; two things that seem self-contradictory, or at least incompatible. The difference between the pairs in vv.8-9a and those in vv.9b-10 is that in the former group of pairs, one element is defamatory. The first pair has to do with *respect*; "*through glory and dishonor*". Paul certainly knew what it was to have the respect of men in some places, but he also knew what it was to be despised. A great example of this is Paul in Lystra (Acts 14). One moment the crowds believed the gods had come down, and were calling Barnabas

Jupiter, and Paul Mercury, ready to do sacrifice in their honor. The next moment they were being stoned and cast out of the city! The second pair has to do with *morality*; “*through evil report and good report*”. In Acts 28:4 Paul was called a murderer, and in v.26 a god by the same barbarians! The third pair has to do with *honesty*; “*as deceivers, and true*”. In Acts 19:26 the Ephesians accused Paul of persuading and leading astray “a great crowd” with a “lie” that “they are no gods which are made with hands.” It was absolutely true! Even among believers, Paul found himself having to defend himself to the Corinthians, because some were accusing Paul of not keeping his word. The fourth pair has to do with *popularity*; “*as unknown, and well known*”. Any true servant of God will not seek a prominent place. Paul did not put himself on a pedestal like some of the false brethren in Corinth. To the “great men” of that day Paul was insignificant. And yet the effect of Paul’s ministry is incalculable! It has been estimated that no individual other than Jesus has had a greater impact on the world than the Apostle Paul. Bruce Conrad drew a helpful comparison to Alexander the Great’s crossing the Hellespont (Dardanelles, part of the continental boundary between Europe and Asia) to invade Persia. It is perhaps one of the most famous events in history, and was accompanied by much fanfare and propaganda. Then, 370 years later, a little boat containing an unknown preacher crossed the same waters unnoticed by the world. That was Paul and his companions crossing into Macedonia, bringing the message that would forever change the West and the world! Truly, Paul and his companions “*turned the world upside down*” (Acts 17:6).

9b ⁽¹⁾ as dying, and behold, we live; ⁽²⁾ as disciplined, and not put to death; **10** ⁽³⁾ as grieved, but always rejoicing; ⁽⁴⁾ as poor, but enriching many; ⁽⁵⁾ as having nothing, and possessing all things. **vv.9b-10 Five Paradoxical Conditions.** The final group has to do with the power and grace of God that enables the servant to endure and overcome difficult circumstances. The first pair has to do with *life and death*; “*as dying, and behold, we live*”. Paul could say in the first chapter that he “despaired even of living” because the danger was so great in Ephesus. It was through the intervention of God that his life on earth continued. The second pair has to do with *persecution*; “*as disciplined, and not put to death*”. He had been beaten, stoned, imprisoned, etc. and yet somehow, he had not yet been executed. The servants of God are not immune to suffering, but they are *immortal* until their work is done. The third pair has to do with *emotion*; “*as grieved, but always rejoicing*”. Who knew sorrow and grief like the apostle Paul, apart from the Lord Himself? What was the source of Paul’s grief? Very often it was the saints, such as those in Corinth. In the next chapter, Paul speaks of being “brought low” in grief, and then “filled with encouragement”. The fourth pair has to do with *wealth*; “*as poor, but enriching many*”. Paul was thoroughly spent for those he served (2 Cor. 12:15). He had given up all earthly gain for the Lord. Strangely, his poverty had brought many great spiritual riches. This is in line with the perfect example of Christ (2

Cor. 8:9) The fifth pair has to do with *possessions*; “as having nothing, and possessing all things”. Paul was a wanderer without a home. All he had was a cloak, some books, and some writing materials (2 Tim. 4:13). The amazing paradox is that he was in possession of “all things”! This refers to *spiritual* possessions (1 Cor. 3:20-21). We have “all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). Furthermore, we receive new relationships “brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children” (Mark 10:30). Contrast this with Laodicea, who claimed “I am rich and increased with goods” but in God’s sight was “poor, blind, and naked”.

Summary. The wide ranging circumstances listed in vv.5-10 are given to show that Paul was consistent through all of them, and maintained a good testimony in spite of them. This should be true of every servant of God. Our motives for service are not drawn from our circumstances; from the reactions of those around us. Our motives ought to be those of ch.5; the *glory* before us, the *approval* of Christ at the judgment seat, and the *love* of Christ.

Openness of Heart vs. Narrowness of Affections (6:11-13)

¶ **11** Our mouth is opened to you, Corinthians, our heart is expanded. **v.11** Paul now gives a deeply personal appeal. There had been, in the earlier Corinthians’ state, a barrier which hindered the expression of Paul’s affections for the Corinthians. But since God had worked in their hearts, and self-judgment had taken place, the barrier was now removed. Hence, Paul’s “mouth” (expression) was “opened”, and his “heart” (affection) was “expanded”. The term “expanded” is a slightly different thought from “enlarged” given in some translations. If something is enlarged, it could be that it was added on to. But if something is expanded, the capacity was always there. Paul’s heart was always for the Corinthians, but now it was able to expand. An expanded heart and an open mouth characterize Paul’s disposition toward the Corinthians in this second epistle. He was saying, in effect, “I love you”. Paul was looking for a reciprocal expression from their hearts toward him (vv.12-13).

12 Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your affections; **13** but for an answering recompense, (I speak as to children,) let “your” heart also expand itself. **vv.12-13** Sadly, the “answering recompense” to Paul’s affections from the Corinthians was lacking. There was plenty of room in Paul’s heart for the Corinthians (2 Cor. 7:3), but there was no room in their hearts for him; “ye are straitened in your affections”. The bottleneck was on

their end. They were not like the Philippians who, in spite of their troubles, had Paul “in their hearts” (Phil. 1:7). He had to speak to them “*as to children*”. In what way? The only recompense he was asking for was affection. That is all children have to give. They have no money, and they aren’t able to do a man’s work. But they can give their hearts. Paul could have expected far more from this assembly, but he did not. What will expand our hearts? Occupation with Christ.

The Danger of Unequal Yokes and Association with Evil (6:14 - 7:1)

¶ **14a** Be not diversely yoked with unbelievers; **v.14a** The Unequal Yoke. Now we come to a deep root of the trouble in Corinth. Paul addresses the issue of worldly wisdom in the first epistle. Here we find the *source* of that worldly wisdom... association with the world. Worldliness was hindering the affections of the believers in Corinth. They were “*unequally yoked with unbelievers*”. What is an unequal yoke? It is *a special bond of association between two parties that are incompatible for service*. It would be like yoking together an ox and a donkey. In the Old Testament, this was not to be done, because one is clean and the other unclean (Deut. 22:10). It is also true that those animals have different neck heights, and different gates. However, the word “unequal” is better rendered “diverse” or “different”. It isn’t so much the size difference as the difference in *nature* between the two animals. A yoke forces two creatures in the *same direction* to labor for the same cause. The whole focus and object of a believer’s life is different from unbelievers. “*Shall two walk together except they be agreed?*” (Amos 3:3). There are many kinds of unequal yokes: social (e.g. friendships, clubs), commercial (e.g. partnerships), ecclesiastical or religious (e.g. joining with Mormons, etc.), matrimonial, political. In fact, if the yoke implied here was restricted to marriage, then v.17 would contradict 1 Cor. 7. It’s not wrong to work and speak with unbelievers (1 Cor. 5:10). Even Jesus ate with publicans and sinners, but it was not for fellowship or a common cause, but rather to bring them to repentance. He ate with them, but remained “*separate from sinners*” (Heb. 7:26). If unbelievers are my best friends, Christ is not the focus of my life. The cross stands between the believer and this world (Gal. 6:14). To form an unequal yoke is to reach around the cross to shake hands with the world. Nor are we doing our yoke-fellow any good service. They need the gospel. It might sound extreme, but consider chatting about the weather to a man on death row. We need to be so careful about unequal yokes. There are those who are good yoke-fellows... they are believers! “And being let go, they went to their own company” (Acts 4:23). The following

verses describe more about what a yoke is: “*participation*”, “*fellowship*” (v.14b), “*consent*”, “*part*” (v.15), and “*agreement*” (v.16).

Separation is always looked at as *from* something and *to* something. We are to be separate unto the Lord first (Num. 6:2), and from the world and defilement (Num. 6:3). The order is important. We can fall into a legal frame of mind if we forget that separation is first positive, then negative. In fact, the negative aspect will follow almost automatically when the heart is right. However, God still does speak extensively about the negative side of separation because our consciences need to be exercised.

Worldliness and its results. Worldliness is the character of being like the world. The world is set in direct opposition to Christ. Even “*the things of the world*” should be shunned by the believer (1 John 2:15). A believer cannot walk with Christ and with the world. “*If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him*” (1 John 2:15). As we survey the Word of God, we find that worldliness is at the root of many troubles that Christians experience. Worldliness leads to the following:

1. Offends the heart of God and Christ (Gal. 6:14; James 4:4; 2 Cor. 6:15; Hos. 3:1).
2. Destroys communion with the Father and Christ (1 John 2:15; 2 Cor. 6:15, 18; Hos. 2:13).
3. Weakens our appetite for spiritual food (Num. 11:5; Hos. 2:5).
4. Loss of moral discernment (Judges 16; Hos. 7:8-11).
5. Leads us into sin (1 Cor. 15:33).
6. Brings emptiness into our soul (Jer. 2:13; Psa. 106:15)
7. Dampens the affections for fellow-believers (2 Cor. 6:14; Amos 3:3; Hos. 4:11).
8. Spoil our effectiveness in service (2 Cor. 6:14; Hag. 1:6; Gen. 19:14).
9. Brings down the government of God on us (Gal. 6:8; Hos. 2:9; 4:17).

14b for ⁽¹⁾ what participation *is there* between righteousness and lawlessness? or ⁽²⁾ what fellowship of light with darkness? **15** and ⁽³⁾ what consent of Christ with Beliar, or ⁽⁴⁾ what part for a believer along with an unbeliever? **16a** and ⁽⁵⁾ what agreement of God’s temple with idols? **vv.14b-16a Five Rhetorical Questions about Fellowship with the World.** The obvious answer to each of these questions is “None”. But these questions bring out the deep incompatibility of the unequal yoke. In such yokes, the unbeliever is not drawn upward to the moral level of the believer. Instead, the believer generally ends up making a compromise. The believer and unbeliever have:

1. Different governing principles. “*What participation is there between righteousness and lawlessness?*”

2. Different powers. *“What fellowship of light with darkness?”*
3. Different masters. *“What consent of Christ with Beliar [Satan]?”*
4. Different followers. *“What part for a believer along with an unbeliever?”*
5. Different worships. *“What agreement of God’s temple with idols?”*

16b for “ye” are *the* living God’s temple; according as God has said, *“I will dwell among them, and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be to me a people.”*

[Lev. 26:12] **17** Wherefore *“come out from the midst of them, and be separated, saith the Lord, and touch not what is unclean, and I will receive you;”* [Isa.

52:11-12] **18** and *“I will be to you for a Father, and ye shall be to me for”* [2 Sam.

7:14] *“sons and daughters”* [Isa. 43:6], saith *the* Lord Almighty. **vv.16b-18 Three Old**

Testament Quotations about Fellowship with God. These three verses draw from the Old Testament to build a solid case for the necessity of holiness in communion with God.

1. *Our fellowship is with the Temple of God (the Church) and with God Himself* (v.16b). The saints of God collectively are the temple of God. The temple of God is an aspect of the house of God, but connected with Christian praise and worship. God Himself dwells among His people. Our behavior and associations must be in keeping with God’s character. This shows that separation from evil is necessary in a collective sense as well as an individual sense (v.18; 7:1).
2. *God insists on separation from evil* (v.17). There is a positive call to “come out” from the wicked associations. Judgment is falling on the wicked, and the believer is called out from them. This very same scripture is applied to the false church in Rev 18:4... how sad! We are to stay far away from the “unclean thing”; i.e. do not even touch it. Association with evil defiles (Hag. 2:11-14; 2 Tim. 2:21; 1 Cor. 15:33; 1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9). Even *“the things of the world”* should be shunned by the believer (1 John 2:15).
3. *God delights to have us in relationship to Himself* (v.18). How can we enjoy our proper relationship with the Father as His sons and daughters (children) if we do not walk in keeping with His nature (1 John 1:5-6)? Ultimately, God is looking for communion with His creature. Adam and Eve “heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Gen. 3:8), but their sins had separated them from God (Isa. 59:2). What better motive could there be to avoid unequal yokes and association with evil than the blessedness of walking in communion with the Father? Separation does not make us sons and daughters, but it is necessary to practically enjoy that place. The title “Lord Almighty” is significant. Almighty God (‘El Shaddai’) is the dispensational name under which God revealed Himself to Abraham (Gen. 17:1). The principle of that name extends who all who are called by

God as Abraham was. The Almighty God is our strength. “Lord” or Jehovah is the dispensational name under which God revealed Himself to the children of Israel (Ex. 3:14; 6:3). Jehovah is God’s name in covenant relationship. But notice that the particular relationship for the Christian is; *“I will be to you a Father”*. “Father” is the name under which God revealed Himself to the Church. It transcends dispensations; it is His Godhead name. But believers will never enjoy their true privilege of sonship if they continue in fellowship with the world.

CHAPTER 7

¶ Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us purify ourselves from every pollution of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in God’s fear. **v.1 The Call to Sanctification.** Now the individual side of separation from evil is brought in, linked with the preceding collective aspect (the temple of God). This is the subject of [practical sanctification](#). What is to motivate our purification is *“these promises”*. What promises? Those given in the previous verses; i.e. the promise of the enjoyment of fellowship with God, of the enjoyment of His presence with us, of public association with His name. Yes, we are to sanctify ourselves *“in God’s fear”* (never losing a sense of God’s holiness and authority over us), but the enjoyment of relationship is what should motivate us. What are we to *“purify ourselves from”*? We are to cleanse ourselves *“from every pollution of flesh and spirit”*. The two classes of “pollution” encapsulate every form of evil. Pollution of *“the flesh”* would be moral evil. Pollution of the *“spirit”* would be doctrinal or spiritual evil. It is possible to be pious in our associations (2 Cor. 6:14-18), and be careless as to personal purity (2 Cor. 7:1). We need both!

Footnotes

1. *“Then we pass on from inflicted to voluntary trials, “in labours, in watchings, in fastings,” which are not the least witness to sustained devotedness. The language so clearly intimates one’s own agency here that it might have seemed needless to say a word more.”* - Kelly, William. *Notes on the Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*. Bible Truth Publishers, 1975.