

Introduction

One of the things that our family used to do was work puzzles. When I worked on a puzzle I would go through the box of pieces and pull out all the border pieces. These were easy to find because they had at least one straight edge. Then, I would turn every piece picture-side up. After completing the border, I liked to work on one section at a time, so I would search for some common colors and shapes and pull these out. Then, I would work on that section. Many times, I would need a couple pieces that were not in the pile that I set aside so I would have to go through the box again to look for them. When I worked a section, I liked to put that section in the part of the puzzle that it belonged in. In order to do that I had to look at the picture on the box cover to see where this section went. We are going through the book of 2 Corinthians, and we are working one section at a time. In fact, some of these sections are so large that we are working on a part of a section at a time. The larger section we are working on is our lives in earthly tents.

The big picture of 2 Corinthians is Paul's defense of his apostleship and ministry. He was accused of not being a man of his word because he did not come like they expected him to. Paul took time to clarify what he had told them about his travel plans, and that these were only intentions, subject to the Lord's will. Then, he told them why his travel plans had changed. The accusations against Paul grieved Paul and he wrote a letter of grief and sorrow. He also tested the Corinthians with some church discipline. They were obedient and the punishment inflicted by the majority was sufficient, and the man repented. Therefore, Paul told them Corinthians to forgive and comfort him.

Then Paul began to defend his ministry. He talked about the characteristics of his ministry. He was strategic, and at the same time, he was Spirit-led. He had a caring ministry, and his concern for the welfare of the Corinthians was proof of that. He had a confident ministry, and was assured that the Lord always led him in triumph. He had a fragrant ministry, and had the aroma of Christ on him. To those who were being saved, this aroma was a fragrance of life. However, for those who rejected the gospel, it was an aroma of death. We also saw that Paul had a grateful ministry, and was always giving thanks to God and to people. Last, we saw that Paul had a sincere ministry. He was not peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, he spoke in the sight of God. Paul had no secret ambitions or motives. This message defended his ministry, and had to make the Corinthians question the motives of those who were bringing charges against him.

Next Paul introduced his ministry. Some of the accusers had asked for letters of commendation, and Paul said that they were his letter, written in his heart, known and read by all me. Paul talked about his adequacy coming from God. Third, he spoke about the exceeding glory of the new covenant. Finally, he spoke about his ministry work, helping people to be spiritually transformed.

Then, Paul started a new section about living a life in earthly tents, which is where we have been the past few weeks. Paul is defending his life and ministry, so he is using his own life as an example. Paul focused on eternal things, not temporal things. Even though his earthly tent was being torn down, and his outer man decaying, his inner man was being renewed. Even though he groaned in this earthly dwelling that was being torn down, he longed to be clothed with his dwelling from heaven. While he is defending his own ministry, the clear application for us is that we need to focus on eternal things, not on the temporal things of this world. We need to walk by faith, not by sight.

Paul was keenly aware that all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ and be recompensed for our deeds in the body. Therefore, his ambition was to be pleasing to Him. The application for us is the same. Since we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ, we need to have as our ambition to be pleasing to the Lord. When we stand before Christ, we would much rather have Him tell us, “Well done, thy good and faithful servant.”

In Part 2 of this section on living our lives in these earthly tents, Paul said that he knew the fear of the Lord, and therefore, he tried to persuade men. Paul is defending the way he lived his life, and at the same time, he is giving us principles and applications for our lives. Since we know that everyone will stand before God, and we know the fear of the Lord, we should try to persuade men. One of the best ways to persuade people is with our own lives. Paul said that they lived for Christ and the love of Christ controlled them. If we live for Christ and are full of God’s love, we will be better persuaders.

The fourth point that Paul made is that he had been given the ministry of reconciliation. He was an ambassador for Christ. He exhorted the Corinthians to be reconciled to Christ. Again, the application for us is that we have also been given the ministry of reconciliation, and we are also ambassadors for Christ. We are His kingdom representatives on earth, and we are to share with people how God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them. That is good news that we have to share.

In Part 3 of this section on our lives in earthly tents, Paul urges the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God in vain. This is a follow-up to his exhortation to them to be reconciled to God. He urges them not to give cause for offense in anything so that this ministry of reconciliation will not be discredited. Paul uses his own example how he has not caused an offense in his own life, even though he has gone through many hardships and afflictions. It is good to keep in mind that he is still defending his ministry, and is using his life as an example. Next, Paul spoke about the types of partnerships we need to foster. He has been open and loving to the Corinthians, and he encourages them to reciprocate. He admonishes them not to be bound together with unbelievers.

Our Lives in Earthly Tents – Part 3

1. Do not receive the grace of God in vain (2 Cor 6:1-10)
2. Be open and unrestrained in your affection (2 Cor 6:11-13)
3. Do not be bound together with unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14-7:1)

(2 Co 6:1–10) “And working together *with Him*, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain— {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 acceptable time,” behold, now is “the day of salvation”— {3} giving no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited, {4} but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, {5} in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, {6} in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, {7} in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, {8} by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; *regarded* as deceivers and yet true; {9} as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death, {10} as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.”

(2 Cor 6:11-13) “Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide. {12} You are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections. {13} Now in a like exchange—I speak as to children—open wide *to us* also.”

(2 Cor 6:14-7:1) “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? {15} Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? {16} Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; 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. {17} “Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,” says the Lord. “And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. {18} “And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,” says the Lord Almighty. {7:1} Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

1. **Do not receive the grace of God in vain** (2 Cor 6:1-10)

Paul has just begged the Corinthians to be reconciled to God. One might think that the Corinthians were believers and had already been reconciled to God, and that is true. The Greek word for reconcile is *katalasso* (Strong’s G2644), and it is made up of two root words. *Kata* (Strong’s G2596) means down in time or place, and *allasso* (Strong’s G236) means to change. In the Complete Word Study of the New Testament, they say that *katalasso* speaks “of the change that God makes in man through conversion so that he may be reconciled to the holy God.¹ Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to live like new creatures, where the old things passed away and new things have come. He is now encouraging them not to receive the grace of God in vain. *Vain* (Kenos, Strong’s G2756) means empty, marked by futility, having no value, useless, or worthless. When we come to Christ, our lives should be transformed. Paul is begging and urging the Corinthians to be reconciled to God and not to receive the grace of God in vain.

(2 Co 5:17–20) “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.... {20} Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

(2 Co 6:1) “And working together *with Him*, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain—”

Paul quotes Isaiah 49:8, where God says that He listened to us and on the day of salvation He helped us. Paul said that now is the acceptable time. Christ has come and brought salvation to us, and now is the acceptable time. Paul is not just begging them to be reconciled, he is urging, prodding, and exhorting them to be reconciled to God.

(2 Cor 6:2) “for He says, “At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you.” Behold, now is “the acceptable time,” behold, now is “the day of salvation”

¹ Spiros Zodhiates, [*The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*](#) (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

My father often exhorted me. I used to say that he lived by the “NOW” theory. He did not like to put things off until later; he wanted things done now. In my golfing days, he wanted me to play well and win now, not later. All through life, he was an example to me. He was not a procrastinator; he put his mind to whatever he was doing, and got it done. I believe that my father was like Paul, and Paul wanted the Corinthians to be reconciled NOW. Now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation.

This verse is often used in gospel presentations, urging people to receive Christ into their life now. Since Christ has come and died for our sins, now is the day of salvation; now is the acceptable time. I urge people to receive Christ, but I do not like to pressure people to make a decision for Christ. One day I was flying back to Atlanta on Delta, and I was seated next to a boy who was probably ten or eleven. I had the opportunity to share the gospel with him, and he said he was not ready to do that. A little later in the flight, something went wrong with the jet and it began nose-diving. I have never experienced anything like that on a flight before. The boy next to me grabbed my right arm and said, “Mister, can we say that prayer now?” I led him in the sinner’s prayer, and he received Christ. Immediately after that, the jet leveled out and the captain came on the intercom and apologized for what had happened. He did not tell us why the aircraft nose-dived, but he did apologize. We should try to persuade and encourage people to receive Christ. Now is the day of salvation and an acceptable time, but they must believe in their heart in order to receive Christ. We do our part by praying and sharing, and we must allow the Holy Spirit to convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

In the ministry of reconciliation, it is extremely important to live an exemplary life. An ambassador to a country needs to properly represent his country to the foreign nation. It is important that an ambassador gives no cause for offense in anything. So, Paul tells the Corinthians to give no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited. He does not want them to receive the grace of God in vain. He does not want it to be for naught; he wants their ministry of reconciliation to be worthwhile, useful, and profitable so that they will be credited for it.

(2 Cor 6:3) “giving no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited,”

Paul now gives his own example of how he has given no cause for offense in anything. In everything he and his team commended themselves as servants of God. They had dedicated their lives to pleasing the Lord and to accomplishing God’s plans and purposes. He and his team were working together with Him. The “with Him” in verse one is in italics, meaning that it is implied. The Greek word for working together is *synergeo* (Strong’s G4903), which is a compound word. *Sun* (Strong’s G4862) means to join together and *ergon* (Strong’s G2041) means to work. Paul and his team were joined together with God to work; they had commended themselves as servants of God.

(2 Co 6:1a) “And **working together with Him**....”

(2 Cor 6:4) “but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses,”

When Paul said in everything, that was an understatement. As servants of God they endured much. The word for endurance is *hypomone* (Strong’s G5281), which means to remain under. A form of this word is used forty-five times in the New Testament, thirty times as a noun, as in our

text, and fifteen times in the verb form. In addition to the Biblical usage, it was used frequently in classical Greek, referring to bearing under the difficulty of hard labor, usually against the person's will, or of some other hardship like battle. It describes someone who was willing to die without giving up. In the New Testament it often indicates that a person is willing to endure with faith, hope, and joy in anticipation of the coming glory.²

Paul and his team were willing to endure many different things. They endured in afflictions, hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, sleeplessness, and hunger. These are all negative things that they endured without giving offense. These were things they endured so that the ministry would not be discredited. These were things that they were willing to do as God's workmen so that the faith of the Corinthians and other believers were not in vain. These were things they were willing to do in order to advance the kingdom and see people reconciled to Christ.

(2 Cor 6:4-5) "but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, {5} in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger,"

I don't think that this list of things that Paul endured can be found on any job description that is looking to hire workers. Most people are looking for a good salary, good working conditions, and good benefits. If you told them they would be beat up, imprisoned, and afflicted and distressed in many ways, they would not even consider that opportunity. The benefits for Paul and all of us are not in this earthly life; our rewards will be given to us when we stand before the Lord and give account. Paul was willing to endure these things because he had faith, hope, and love. Paul was willing to lay his life down to see people come to Christ, and to be reconciled to God.

Paul then shared about their attitude while enduring these afflictions and hardships. They endured with purity. They did not sin or seek vengeance; they endured with purity. They endured with knowledge. If you are going to suffer and endure, you certainly want to have knowledge about it. In Psalm 119:71, we find that it is good to be afflicted so that we can learn God's statutes. Afflictions and difficulties create a hunger and thirst for knowledge. When I have struggled with things, I have memorized Scriptures that deal with that area, and my struggles have helped me become more knowledgeable and to endure with knowledge.

(2 Cor 6:6-7) "in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love,"

(Ps 119:71) "It is good for me that I was afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes."

Paul endured patiently and with kindness, in the Holy Spirit, and in genuine love. When being mistreated, imprisoned, and beaten, it would be difficult to endure with kindness. When Paul was beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, there was a great earthquake around midnight. The foundations of the prison house were shaken and all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. This was not an ordinary earthquake; this was a Holy Spirit earthquake that came as a result of praying and singing hymns. Having been beaten and imprisoned, Paul endured with kindness. When the earthquake took place and all the doors were opened and the chains were unfastened, the jailer was about to take his own life. If a prisoner escaped, the jailer

² <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/47-42/honor-and-dishonortheparadox-of-ministry-part-3>

would be put to death, and he would rather have died his own way rather than be tortured to death. Paul stopped the jailer by crying out with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!” Paul endured with kindness, in the Holy Spirit, and in genuine love.

(Ac 16:22–30) “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. {23} When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; {24} and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. {25} But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; {26} and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were unfastened. {27} When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. {28} But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!” {29} And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, {30} and after he brought them out, he said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

Paul also endured powerfully. He endured in the word of truth, in the power of God, and by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left. Even in beatings and afflictions, Paul endured powerfully. It was not physical power and physical weapons, but it was spiritual power. Soldiers typically held a shield in one hand and a sword in the other hand. The word of God is a two-edged sword, and the shield is the shield of faith. Paul had his spiritual armor on and he endured as a faithful soldier in battle.

(2 Cor 6:7) “in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left,”

Paul endured in every situation without causing offense in anything. Whether he was in glory or dishonor, or evil report or good report, it did not matter; his eyes were on the eternal, not the things of earth. The circumstances that he found himself in were not going to change his attitude and response. I have often told people that other people cannot make you sin. We choose to sin. When someone does something bad to us, we have a choice to make about how we respond, and when we respond improperly, it was not the other person that made us do it; our sin was our responsibility. Circumstances were not going to cause Paul to give offense, whether good or bad circumstances. Paul is responding to the Corinthians about some bad reports given to them by someone in Corinth. He is defending himself, but he is not giving offense in anything. Paul endured being regarded as a deceiver, even though he was not a deceiver. When we are dishonored, and evil reports are given about us, we are regarded as deceivers, it is difficult to maintain a pure heart and to respond with love, patience, and kindness. Yet that is how Paul responded.

(2 Cor 6:8) “by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; *regarded* as deceivers and yet true;”

Paul endured when he was unknown, yet well-known. Sometimes people know about you, but they don’t really know you. Many people knew about Paul and his ministry, but not all of them knew Paul like the Corinthians. He had spent nearly two years with them, teaching them and caring for them. Even though Paul is well-known, he is being treated like an unknown. They

asked him about a letter of commendation, which is something you would need if you are unknown. Paul is defending himself, but not giving a cause for offense.

(2 Cor 6:9-10) “as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death, {10} as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.”

Paul endured, as dying, yet alive. He was stoned and left for dead. He knew his own mortality, and that this life on earth was temporary. He also knew that his real home was with the Lord, and he longed to be clothed with that heavenly dwelling. Paul endured being punished, yet not put to death. He endured sorrow, and yet he was full of joy. Paul endured being poor yet made many rich. Paul did not have a home and some of the luxuries we had. He had nothing, yet he knew that in Christ he possessed all things. Paul did not have his eyes on the things of the world, but on eternal things. His eternal perspective helped him endure all things without giving offense.

2. **Be open and unrestrained in your affection** (2 Cor 6:11-13)

God wants us to be reconciled to Him, and to be reconciled to one another. He wants us to love Him and to love one another. In true reconciliation, there is a sharing of hearts with one another; there is openness. Without openness and a sharing of deeper things, relationships will be shallow. Paul has shared his heart with the Corinthians. He has shared his desires, goals, ambitions, and his affection. Paul preached the gospel to the Corinthians and spent eighteen months investing in them. He had poured himself into them, and he is wanting that relationship to continue. He does not want them restrained.

(2 Cor 6:11-13) “Our mouth has spoken freely to you, O Corinthians, our heart is opened wide. {12} You are not restrained by us, but you are restrained in your own affections. {13} Now in a like exchange—I speak as to children—open wide *to us* also.”

Paul declared that he and his team had spoken freely to the Corinthians. Their hearts had been opened wide towards the Corinthians. Paul did not think that his love and affection had been reciprocated. He told them that they were restrained in their affections. They were not restrained by Paul, but they were restrained. The Greek word for restrained is *stenochoreo* (Strong’s G4729), which is a compound word. *Stenos* (Strong’s G4728) means narrow, and *chora* (Strong’s G5561) means a territory or space. The word means to be a narrow space or to be hemmed in closely, or restrained. When I saw the definition, it made me think of someone playing a serious game of cards. They will hold their cards in close to them so that nobody has an opportunity to see what is in their hand. The Corinthians were holding their cards closely, and were not allowing Paul and his team to see any of their affection. Paul exhorted them to open wide to them in like exchange.

I have found that when someone has restrained affection and communication, there is usually an offense that needs to be resolved. In Hebrews we are told to see to it that no root of bitterness springs up, causing many to be defiled. That root of bitterness starts with an unresolved offense. One of the earlier signs that there is a problem is a restraint in affection. Paul told the Corinthians that he was not restrained, and he was not restraining them, but they are restrained, and he wants them to open up to him in a like exchange. Paul valued and worked at strong relationships.

(Heb 12:15) “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;”

Many churches today have small groups and in these small groups, people get to know one another. They get comfortable with one another and begin to share their personal experiences and their feelings with one another. As they develop trust in the others in the group, they began to open wide in like exchange. The early church experienced great fellowship, and they were devoted to fellowship. The word for fellowship is *koinonia* (Strong's G2842), which comes from *koinos* (Strong's G2839), which means common. The early church shared things with one another, and had all things together in common. In Acts 2:42 we see that the church was devoted to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. The early church met in homes and this facilitated their objectives very well, particularly the fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. In a large auditorium, especially with good sound equipment, it is easy to get teaching. But in large assemblies, the other three things are often sacrificed. In larger churches, small group ministry is imperative so that people can develop strong and open relationships with one another.

(Ac 2:42–46) “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. {43} Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. {44} And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; {45} and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. {46} Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,”

3. **Do not be bound together with unbelievers** (2 Cor 6:14-7:1)

In our lives in these earthly tents, God wants us to be reconciled to Him, and not to receive the grace of God in vain. He wants our lives to be transformed. He does not want our ministry of reconciliation to be discredited or hindered, so we are not to give offense in anything. He wants us to have open relationships with one another, and not to be restrained in our affections. He also to protect us from wrong relationships. Therefore, God instructs us not to be bound together with unbelievers. Paul wrote, “Do not be bound together with unbelievers.”

(2 Cor 6:14a) “Do not be bound together with unbelievers...”

Then Paul asked five rhetorical questions. The first is “What partnership have righteousness and lawlessness?” They have different goals and ways of accomplishing the goals. The second question is, “What fellowship has light with darkness?” The affection and openness that Paul has been speaking to the Corinthians about is not there with unbelievers. There is no fellowship between light and darkness.

(2 Cor 6:14) “Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?”

The third question is, “What harmony has Christ with Belial?” Belial (Strong's G955) or Beliar is of uncertain origin, but it means lord of the forest. The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament says it might mean the god of the underworld. It is one of the names for Satan. In any case, there is no harmony with Christ and the devil. The devil is sometimes referred to as our adversary (1 Peter 5:8), and there is no harmony with the devil.

(2 Cor 6:15) “Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?”

The fourth question is, “What has a believer in common with an unbeliever?” There are some things in common, such as God created all men, but the things that are precious to a believer are of no value to unbelievers. We treasure our Lord and the kingdom of God, and unbelievers do not treasure the Lord. Believers have confessed Jesus as their Lord, and unbelievers serve the god of this world.

The fifth question is, “What agreement has the temple of God with idols?” There is a kingdom of darkness and kingdom of light and there is a temple that worships God and there are temples of idols. There is nothing in common and nothing in agreement. Believers are the temple of Holy Spirit, of the living God. God dwells within us and walks among us. Paul quotes several Old Testament scriptures that speak about God dwelling with us, and we being His people (Ex 29:45, Lev 26:12, Jer 31:1, Ezek 37:27). We belong to God and we are his people, and we are His temple. There is no agreement, and nothing in common.

(2 Cor 6:16) “Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; 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.”

Paul concludes that believers are to come out from their midst and be separate. Believers are not to be bound with unbelievers. This applies to every area of our lives. We are not to be unequally yoked in businesses. We are not to be unequally yoked in marriage, which is the most common application of this verse. God wants us to come out from the world and be separate. We are not to touch what is unclean. God wants us to be a holy people, a holy temple. He wants to be a father to us, and for us to be His children.

(2 Cor 6:17-18) “Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,” says the Lord. “And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. {18} “And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,” says the Lord Almighty.”

John wrote that we are not to love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life is not from the Father, but is from the world.” We cannot love the world and the things of the world. God wants us to come out and be separate.

(1 Jn 2:15–16) “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. {16} For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.”

Paul wrote that Christians should come out and be separate. This is an important statement to put into context. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul wrote about bringing correction to an immoral man in the church. In an earlier letter that he had written, he had instructed them not to associate with immoral people, and he clarified that statement. He said that they were not to associate with so-called brothers that are immoral, or covetous, or idolatrous, or revilers, or drunkards, or swindlers. Paul did not mean the immoral people of this world, or they would have to go out of the world. We are to preach the gospel to the lost, and we should not avoid contact with the lost. In fact, we should look for opportunities to reach out to the lost. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians to come out and be separate, he is referring to unequal yoking. Believers are not to be joined to unbelievers in business or marriage. Believers should reach out to them and share the gospel, but they should not be yoked to them.

(1 Cor 5:9–11) “I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; {10} I *did* not at all *mean* with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. {11} But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one.”

Jesus was criticized by the Pharisees and scribes for associating with tax collectors and sinners. They said, “Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus intentionally reached out to sinners; He did not avoid them. Notice how Jesus responded, “It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” Our goal and mission should line up with Jesus; it should be call sinners to repentance. We should look for opportunities to be friends to the world and to preach the gospel to them. While doing so, we have to be very careful that we do not become unequally yoked, and that we are not being conformed to the world. Our behavior needs to be different. Our behavior needs to reflect the kingdom of God, because we are ambassadors for the kingdom of heaven.

(Lk 5:29–32) “And Levi gave a big reception for Him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and other *people* who were reclining *at the table* with them. {30} The Pharisees and their scribes *began* grumbling at His disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?” {31} And Jesus answered and said to them, “*It is* not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. {32} “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.””

Paul wraps up this section by saying, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” God wants fellowship with us. He wants us to be His people, a holy people. He wants relationship with us. We are to be a holy people, living in the fear of God, and are to cleanse ourself from all defilement. We are to be in the world, but not of the world.

(2 Cor 7:1) “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

Conclusion and Applications

God is a holy God, and He has called us to be holy people. In Leviticus 19:2, He told Moses to speak to all the congregation and tell them, “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” In the New Testament, Peter quotes Moses and said, “Because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”

(Lev 19:2) “Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.’”

(1 Pet 1:16) “because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

We are in the process of becoming holy, and that process is called sanctification. Our lives are being transformed. Though our outer man is perishing or decaying, our inner man is being renewed. We are with unveiled faces beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.

(2 Co 3:18) “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”

God is encouraging all of us not to receive the grace of God in vain. We are ambassadors of Christ, and we are to conduct our lives in a manner that is worthy of the gospel. We are to be reconciled to God and are to reconcile others to God. We are to live in such a way that we do not cause offense in anything, no matter how difficult the situation is.

We are to be open and transparent with one another. God wants us to have fellowship with Him, and also with one another. The Corinthians were restrained in their affection for Paul and his team. We are to make sure that there is nothing restraining us in our love and affections for one another.

Our relationships with unbelievers are also important. We are to reach out to those that do not know Christ and share the gospel with them. At the same time, we are not to be bound together with unbelievers, whether in business or in marriage.

Someone once said that Christians are to be thermostats, not thermometers. A thermometer tells you the temperature of the room, but a thermostat sets the temperature. Christians are to be in the world, setting the atmosphere of the actions, words, and attitudes. We are not to do what the world does, being conformed to them. We are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and we are to be ambassadors while away from our permanent home in heaven.

Closing Prayer

Father God, thank You for Paul’s letters to the Corinthians. They are rich with wisdom for living our lives while here on earth. Lord, we accept our roles as ambassadors. We accept the ministry of reconciliation. Help us to be in the world, but not of the world. Help us to be lights set on a hill. Help us to be the salt of the earth. May all men know that we are Your disciples because of our love for one another. Help us to be affectionate and caring of one another. May we work through things, and be forgiving of one another, so that we are not restrained in our affections. Give us opportunities and open doors to share with people. At the same time, help us to be set apart from the world. Help us to be very careful with partnerships and agreements that we make with people so that we are not bound together with unbelievers. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Our Lives in Earthly Tents – Part 3

Introduction (2 Co 6:1–7:1)

1. **Do not receive the grace of God in vain** (2 Co 5:17–20, 6:1-10, Ps 119:71, Acts 16:22-30)
2. **Be open and unrestrained in your affection** (2 Cor 6:11-13, Heb 12:15, Ac 2:42–46)
3. **Do not be bound together with unbelievers** (2 Cor 6:14-7:1, 1 Jn 2:15–16, Cor 1 5:9–11, Lk 5:29–32)

Conclusion and Applications (Lev 19:2, 1 Pet 1:16, 2 Cor 3:18)