

2 Corinthians 6

6:1 As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. 2 For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

In verse 1, Paul that tells the Corinthian church that they are fellow workers with Paul and his team. Too often as members of a church or as a denomination we forget that serving Christ is not a competition. We should all be working to produce fruit.

Paul urges them not to take God's grace in vain. If we are living for ourselves then we are minimizing the grace that God has given us. We are to love God because He first loved us. His portion of the love is grace, unmerited favor, given freely to us. Our love for God is obedience, trusting in Him and serving Him in our daily walk.

"To support his appeal, Paul referred to Isaiah 49:8. This prophecy focused on the restoration of God's people after the exile. God promised that he would respond to the cries of the exile, in the time of his favor and in the day of salvation. Paul focused attention on Isaiah's emphasis that in God's timing salvation from the judgment of exile would come. As a result, Paul pressed the significance of this prophecy on the Corinthian situation. The days in which they lived, the days of the New Testament, were not to be ignored or taken for granted." (Holman New Testament Commentary - 1 & 2 Corinthians)

Today, just as it was in those days, is a time of God's favor and the day of salvation. God sent His only son to take on the sins of the world. He sent His son to redeem us and restore us back to Himself. It is not something to take lightly or "*receive in vain.*" We are living in the Church age. When this age ends, salvation ends and all people will face God's judgment. The only thing that will save us is our faith in Jesus as the Christ. We are living in a time of salvation but are we living with a great sense of urgency. Consider that Jesus and His disciples died to share the Gospel message.

Just as it is today in America, many claim to be believers but don't live as they should be living. Paul was not convinced that everyone in the Corinthian church was a true believer. As Paul said in the previous chapter, it is what is in our hearts that will be judged. Appearances do not account for anything. Paul believed that if you were a true believer, then you cannot lose your salvation. Eph. 4:30 says, "*And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*" Being sealed, we will always belong to God. Philippians 1:6 says, "*being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*" The good work was started and will continue until Jesus returns.

3 We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. 4 Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great

endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; 5 in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; 6 in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; 7 in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; 8 through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; 9 known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; 10 sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Paul has said numerous times in his letters to the Corinthian church that the Gospel that he preached was accurate and from God. Because it was the true Gospel from God, Paul did not add or remove anything from it. It was not a watered down version of the Gospel. If he had altered the Gospel that he received from Jesus, then he could have been discredited.

As we studied the Book of Acts, we read of the things endured by Paul and his companions. In verse 4, Paul says that they could commend themselves because everything they did, they did for the glory of God. They weren't commending themselves in an arrogant or self-pleasing way. He had been faithful in his calling or in serving God.

In the next several verses Paul explains what he meant when he said "*we could commend ourselves in every way.*" He starts with "*in great endurance.*" Throughout his letters to the churches, he always told them to "stand firm". So it is appropriate that he starts here.

Next he says "*in troubles, hardships and distresses*". These are all broad terms but in 2 Corinthians 11:23-25, he gives a more exact list of the things that he endured in his ministry.

Included in his list of what Paul endured (2 Corinthians 11:23-25) included beatings and imprisonments. In Acts 19:23-41, Paul was encouraged not to speak during a riot he had caused in Ephesus. Most people would have said, "That's it!" but Paul continued to share the Gospel, working for God.

In the second part of verse 5 Paul lists "*hard work, sleepless nights and hunger*". Compared to the first things that Paul listed these things are self-inflicted. Paul worked hard because he chose to do so. Hunger would have also included fasting which is also by choice.

"Paul knew he needed endurance, and he knew many things in his life drew him to seek that endurance. Some of them were the general trials of life, some were sufferings directly brought by others, and some were self-inflicted. Not every trial was the same, but they all made him need endurance." (Guzik)

The next part of the list are problems that Paul faced or endured. He faced "*troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots.*"

The next part of the list are attributes that Paul possessed or resources that he could draw on when facing the things he faced for God. When it came to some of these characteristics, Paul had a greater measure than most men.

Paul wrote to Ephesian Church regarding the full armor of God in Ephesians 6:10-18. When defending ourselves from Satan, we are to put on these attributes of Jesus. They are attributes that will help us stand firm in the face of temptations and trials. Several of these attributes are covered here in Paul’s list. Match the piece of armor with the attribute listed in verses 6 and 7.

- a. Belt of truth - in truthful speech
- b. Breastplate of righteousness - with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left;
- c. Shield of faith - in the power of God
- d. Sword of the spirit - in the Holy Spirit

The attributes of *“purity, understanding, patience and kindness; and sincere love”* were commonly listed by Paul. In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul gives us the fruits of the spirit which contain these same attributes. *“22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”*

In concluding his list of things to be commended for, Paul adds a list what the world versus what God thought of him.

	The World’s view of Paul	God’s view of Paul
e.	Dishonor	Glory
f.	Bad report	Good report
g.	Impostors	Genuine
h.	Unknown	Known
i.	Dying	We live on
j.	Beaten	Not killed
k.	Sorrowful	Always rejoicing
l.	Poor	Making many rich
m.	Having nothing	Possessing everything

11 We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. 12 We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. 13 As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also.

In these verses, Paul takes a moment to talk about his relationship with the Corinthians. Have you ever had a friend that you weren't sure if they were really a true friend? That is what Paul is talking about. He counted the Corinthians as his friends. He withheld nothing and wanted them to be the best Christians they could be. But he wasn't sure that he stood with them.

There is nothing like a true friend. First, you want to make sure that they will be with you throughout all eternity. Paul did that. He taught them about what Jesus did for them and how to get to heaven. Next, a true friend is straight with you. They don't talk behind your back. There should be nothing that you aren't willing to share (within reason). Finally, you hold them in your heart. When they laugh, you laugh. When they cry, you cry.

Finally, he says stop keeping me at arm's length or let me in. Open up your hearts and truly love one another and me.

¹⁴ Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? ¹⁵ What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

“I will live with them
and walk among them,
and I will be their God,
and they will be my people.”

¹⁷ Therefore,

“Come out from them
and be separate,
says the Lord.
Touch no unclean thing,
and I will receive you.”

¹⁸ And,

“I will be a Father to you,
and you will be my sons and daughters,
says the Lord Almighty.”

In these verses, Paul is talking about your true friends. He does not recommend that your true friends be non-believers. He is talking about marriage and deep friendships.

Paul uses the term ‘equally yoked’. In Paul's day oxen were used to work the fields, usually in pairs. If one was stronger than the other, the plowed rows would not be straight. The rows would be curved in the direction of the weaker oxen. If you marry someone that doesn't know God, then they are the weaker spouse and your rows will lean in their directions. Consider, if the believer

wants to talk about salvation through Christ then the nonbelieving spouse will resist. Most of your conversations will be about the world and not God.

I grew up that way. I was sent to church with my siblings. Mom wanted to go to church but felt obligated to stay home with Dad. After he passed, Mom took us to church. The row curved in favor of the weaker oxen, the believer (Mom) did what the nonbeliever (Dad) wanted. We weren't forbidden to go to church but we weren't a Christian family either.

Another example, I taught Juniors in Sunday School. One boy said to me, "How old do I need to be before I don't have to come to church?" His dad and grandfather did not go to church, so he was skewed in the direction of the weaker oxen.

This also applied to best friends. Your friendships are based on what you have in common. A believers' friendship is lifelong because you always have a love for Christ in common. A friendship based on the world or worldly things will pass away. I have had friends that school was what we had in common. When we graduated the friendships disappeared.

In verse 15, Paul says, "*What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?*" Poole says that the word 'Belial' is a Greek word for 'worthlessness' but it is used here to mean Satan. Paul also says "*Or what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?*"

A friendship based on worldly things can not only lead you away from God but they can lead you into sin. In our study of Corinthians, we learned that we are a new creation in Christ. If we had bad habits before we accepted Christ, then we can be influenced to return to our old bad habits.

Paul applies this idea to idols and the Temple in verse 16. If someone is worshiping idols they would be a bad influence to a new Christian that has just turned away from idols. If you keep an idol worshiper as your friend, then you run the risk of turning back to idols. What are idols? Anything that leads for focus away from God.

Paul says, "*For we are the temple of the living God.*" Paul said this same thing in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. Just as you treat temples with respect, you should treat your body with respect. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Paul said the same thing but both of the 1 Corinthian scriptures referred to an individual's body. Here in his 2nd letter he is referring to the church as a whole.

"Because temples are holy places and should be protected against things that might defile the holy place, we should protect our hearts and minds as holy places before the Lord." (Guzik)

At the end of verse 16 and verses 17, 18, Paul uses Scripture to backup that we are the temple of the living God. He starts with Ezekiel 37:26-27. It tells that God is living in the midst of the Temple. As believers, we have the Holy Spirit living inside us, which is God, the Father. Then

Paul uses Isaiah 52:11 to show that God is holy and we should be sanctified (set apart) and stay unclean because we should do our best to be fit for Him to live within us.

Finally in this chapter, Paul quotes Jeremiah 31:9. God makes a promise of a more intimate relationship with us. He will be our Father and we will be the children of God. This is achieved by a personal relationship.

Read the following chapters and see what the Bible says about the Children of God.

- a. Matthew 5:9, NIV – “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”
- b. Romans 8:14, NLT – “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.
- c. Romans 8:28, NASB – “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.
- d. Galatians 4:6-7, NLT – “And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.” Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.”
- e. Romans 8:17-19, NIV – “Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

“Says the LORD Almighty: The title Almighty uses the ancient Greek word *pantokrater*, which means, “the one who has his hand on everything.” In the whole New Testament, the word is used only here and in the book of Revelation. Paul wants us to understand that it is the sovereign God of heaven who offers us adoption as His children as we separate unto Him.” (Guzik)