

2 Corinthians 6:1-10

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[0 : 00] So, 2 Corinthians, chapter 6, verses 1-10. I think this is the most simple passage in the letter. It is straightforward. It is really straightforward and yet it is profound. Now, let's try and remember where we are. We'll try and catch up with the whole drift and thrust of the letter.

At this point, Paul is reminding you and reminding the Corinthians that there are true servants of Christ and there are false servants of Christ. Can you tell which is which? There are true elders, there are false elders. There are false ministers of the gospel, there are false ministers of the gospel. Can you tell which is which? And that is the problem in Corinth.

There are true servants of Christ. Paul is one of them. And there are false servants of Christ. And these super apostles that have come to Corinth, they were false. And there wouldn't have been any confusion at all in the church of Corinth if the church could have told which from which.

So, Paul has been spelling out to you what does a true servant of Christ look like. And the true servant of Christ always remembers when he looks men and women and boys and girls in the eye that we're all going to judgment. And we are all going to the judgment seat of Christ where he will preside.

And so Paul can't meet anyone without thinking where we're all going to judgment. He looks people in the eyes and he doesn't judge them as the world evaluates them. He sees how lost they are.

[1 : 30] And so he takes his commission to preach the gospel very, very seriously. And because men and women and boys and girls are guilty and condemned and they are going very quickly to the judgment seat of Christ, he pleads with them.

He pleads with them, be reconciled to God. It's not God has moved away from them. It is they have moved away from God. And so he pleads with them to come back.

And they can come back, can't they? Look at verse 21 of the previous chapter of chapter 5. We can come back to God because for our sake, the people of God, the church of God, he made him to be sin only who knows sin.

So that in him we might become the righteousness of God. The saviour who was punished for sinners. He took the place of sinners. That sinners might take his place and have the righteousness of God put to their account.

So on the basis of the cross, he pleads with them, come back to God. And now he's continuing on the same day. What does a true servant of Christ look like?

[2 : 35] And it's a very, very useful passage for you and for me. I am not an apostle and you are not an apostle. There aren't any apostles today. But this passage will help us sort this out. Whether you are a true witness for Christ instead of a false one. It helps you to know what to expect as you witness for Christ.

And it has four key words in it. So can you look at the passage? We're going to do a bit of the Bible training course. And can you look at the passage that's on your sheet? Alright. So just look there. And we're going to look for common words. So from verses 1 to 3, there's a word that comes up a number of times.

This is the most difficult one. But you should be aware. What is the word that comes up, that kind of dominates that and those verses?

Shout it out. If you get it wrong, you'll just be embarrassed. Alright? No, that's okay. What's the word? What was that, Leslie? I heard it. Bye. No, sorry. Ah, that's good. It's a good effort, but no cigar. This is the most difficult one.

Day of salvation. Day of salvation. That concept comes up twice. Doesn't it? But it's not that. You. Again, a good effort. I'll leave it. Alright.

[3 : 54] It's very obvious. As I said, it's the most simple part. Let me give it to you. It's we. Can you see that? Sound of verse 6? We. We then. And then sound of verse 3. We. And then, and the middle of verse 4. We.

Now, this is what it is. Now, what's the key word? So our first point is we. Alright? Second point is from the middle of verse 4 to the end of verse 5. What's the word that keeps coming up? In.

In. That's the second point. In. So, and then from verse 6 on to the middle of verse 7. What's the word that keeps coming up?

By. By. And then from the middle of verse 8. What's the word that keeps coming up? As. That's it. That's right. I'm not a great fan of the New King James normally.

But actually on this, it's really helpful. Because it spells it out in a way that the ESV doesn't. And the NIV really doesn't. So the four points tonight are we, in, by, as.

[4 : 58] Alright? It's really simple. So verse 1. We give, no, we then, as workers together with him, also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

God is at work in the world, says Paul. But God's work in the world is done through men and women and boys and girls. God's work in the world is done through us, Church of God.

And we can't do anything for God without God. So we are actually working together with God. When you speak to your colleague about Christ, your words have no power.

They are just words coming from your mouth, aren't they? But God is pleased to use such words to bring about his work in the human heart. And God works in the heart of the unconverted person by the words which we speak.

We do nothing without God. But God does not do his work without us. So we are workers together with him.

[6 : 10] But we are pleading, says Paul. And he's already told us, isn't he? He is Christ's ambassador. What does an ambassador do? An ambassador speaks on behalf of the government or the president or the prime minister.

And so we are speaking. He is Christ's ambassador. He speaks in the name of God. We are not just people who say, here's the message. Like it or lump it, I couldn't care.

Now, I've given you the message. You either take it on board or you throw it in the seat. It's no sting off my nose. Oh no, says Paul. Look at it. We plead. We plead.

We plead with you Christians. We plead with you, especially the members, the church members in Corinth, that you are about to go off to another Jesus. There you are.

You're about to follow another gospel that is really no gospel at all. There's only one gospel. And it is the gospel that is based on Christ and his cross. And you're about to follow another one. And there's only one gospel.

[7 : 10] It's the gospel of Christ's cross. And the weakness of God at Calvary. So I plead with you, be reconciled to God. You are chasing after other things. It soon looks like you're going to give proof that you were never true believers at all.

So I'm pleading with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. The message that I have, he says, is a message of God's kindness for sinners. Don't throw it all away.

And so the gospel is never dispassionate. The gospel of Jesus Christ must never be spoken of in a detached and cold and emotionless manner.

We are not like that. No. We, says the Apostle Paul, we plead with you. And you can detect kind of the urgency in his voice. Now Paul knows that you are not always receptive to the things of God.

Do you know that? You're not always receptive to the things of God. Think of it. Maybe you're here tonight and you're not a believer. And there are times when you come to the service.

[8 : 13] And it seems to really touch you. It seems to prick you. It seems to light something in your heart. You are affected. And sometimes you hear the gospel and it thrills you.

And sometimes you hear the gospel and it humbles you. Sometimes it hurts you. And you know that you've been receptive to the truth. But you already know this.

There are times when you come and it does nothing to you at all. And you're completely unaffected. And your thoughts wander in a thousand different places. And they're certainly not listening to God's word being explained.

No, you're just dopey. And it just goes over you. Washes over you. And that is why Paul says, when you hear the gospel message, when you hear the message, be reconciled to God, you've got to call on God now.

But the only time God guarantees to meet with you is now. Tomorrow you might not be receptive to the word of God. This may be the day when you reject the gospel and God says, enough is enough. [9 : 17] Enough is enough. I won't come your way again. I will not speak to your conscience again. You will never be affected by the message of the gospel again.

You will come and you will come and you will sit in church, but it will all just gloss over you. But today isn't like that. So therefore, the apostle quotes from Isaiah 49.

He says, this is the acceptable time. This is the time when it is convenient. This is the time when God accepts people. Today. Now. This is the day of salvation.

We know, don't we, that tomorrow we might be dead. Or, you know, that tomorrow you might not even make it to bed. Aren't you? But that isn't really Paul's point. Paul's point is your heart may never, ever be affected by the truth again.

And therefore, it is urgent that you come to Christ now. That you be reconciled to God. So for many of my peers, he said, what is the message of the gospel?

[10 : 27] What is the message of Christmas? It is this. Christ came into the world of the Spirit of Sinus, so sign up on a Christian to explore the course. Or Christ came into this world of the Spirit of Sinus, so sign up on something like Alpha.

But that isn't actually the message of the gospel. The message of the gospel is this. It is be reconciled to God now. It is the day of salvation.

Therefore, it is urgent, isn't it? It is urgent that you come to Christ tonight. Do you believe that? Do you believe that right now, right here, before you leave this room, before you walk out those doors, you can be right with God through Christ.

Be reconciled to God. And then he talks about a message that is more than words, isn't it? You know this, don't you? If a man or a woman, or somebody in school, they speak to you about Christ, and they speak to you about the transformation and the difference that Christ can make, but they themselves are crooked and dishonest, and disrespectful, you're not going to listen to that message.

And you know that that will just be hypocrisy. For somebody to talk to you about a transforming message, when they've been transformed themselves. You know that it would be hypocrisy for someone to say to you, be reconciled to God, if there's no sense of calling their lives at all.

[11 : 51] Therefore, says Paul, verses 3 and 4, we take special care. To do two things. Number one, to not be offended. Many people will be offended by the message.

But they are not to be offended by the life and integrity or lack of it in a person. And to verse 4, to live in such a way that we recommend the gospel to the people we're speaking to.

Do you see how different Paul is from the super apostles? They came in, didn't they? With plenty of talk and plenty of miracles and plenty of charisma. They were wisdom speakers. They had plenty of proud, attractive techniques.

Paul didn't have any of that. He said we came in dependence upon God. With tears in his eyes. And in a pure life.

So we now come to the words in. We. And in. And that comes halfway through verses 4 and 5. That is what we are, says Paul.

[12 : 57] But we are always that. Verse 4. That is what we are, but we are always that. In much patience. In tribulations. In needs. In distresses. In stripes. In imprisonments. In tumults.

In labours. In sleeplessness. In fastings. That is what we are. In all those things. There are all sorts of things happening in our lives. Paul says.

Which are enough to break anybody. But we keep on enduring. We keep living this pure life. Speaking these compassionate words.

We plead with people. Circumstances don't change us. That is the point. In tribulations. We are apostles. We are Jesus Christ's personal representatives.

But that doesn't exclude us from troubles. Does it? We are apostles. But we are full of trouble. We have all sorts of problems. Evident physical problems. But they don't change us. In needs.

[13 : 52] Sometimes we are short of things. We are materially short of things. But it doesn't change us. In distresses. We have.

In ourselves. In ourselves. The apostle Paul says. This kind of. This emotional torture. And Paul has talked about this. Before. He'll talk about it again.

In his epistle. The apostles. And Christians. In general. You are not exempt. From emotional trouble. He's already talked about. His own depression.

Of sadness. He will mention that again. About his own particular sadness. Christians can be devastated. Emotionally. But it doesn't stop us living.

Pure lives. With tears in our eyes. We look the unconverted person. In the face. And we plead with them. To be reconciled to God. It doesn't affect the standard.

[14 : 48] Of our Christian living. In stripes. There's many times. When Paul was beaten with rods. With imprisonments. In Philippi. In Caesarea. Twice in Rome. In two months.

There were times. When there was a whole city. That was in revolt. Against Paul. Paul had to flee many times. Didn't he. For his life. In labours.

Paul says. I was up very. Very early. And we work hard all day. In verse 5. In sleeplessness. Sometimes we make tents. Late into the night.

He says. So that we can pay our way. And not be a charge. To other people. And there's no letter. No holidays. In fastings. And I don't think Paul is talking there.

About deliberate fasting. Fastings. You know when people tell you. I can't eat that. I'm fasting. Have you ever heard that?

[15 : 43] That's not what he's talking about there. He's talking about sometimes. You make hungry for gospel sake. But it doesn't change. Our essential character. He says. We'll see why. Before this passage is finished.

That is the sort of people we are. And we always are. In those circumstances. By. By. Verses 6 and 7 and 8. By. Our third word.

You see. Paul says. We don't just seek. Not to offend people. We don't seek. Not just to cause people to stumble. We actually seek to commend them. Commend the gospel to them.

By our lives. We actually try to make the gospel look attractive. But not by using salesman techniques. Like those clever super apostles.

They do it by this. Or they do it by that. But we do it. Verse 6. By purity. By knowledge. By long suffering. By kindness.

[16 : 41] By the Holy Spirit. By sincere love. By the word of truth. By the power of God. By the armour of righteousness. On the right hand and the left. By honour and dishonour. By good report and bad report. Let's.

Let me take you through them very briefly. Look at our lives. Says the apostles. Verse 6. Our lives are pure. We know what we're talking about. We put up with awkward people.

They're kind to everybody. There's a spiritual atmosphere about us. We. We. We. We genuinely love. We genuinely love people. We speak. God's truth.

And as we speak God's truth. The power of God accompanies that truth. When people will attack us. Our only defence is. When you look at us. From the right or the left. All you will see is righteousness.

And this is true in honour. And in dishonour. And even in dishonour. When people. Keep insults upon us. Actually. It's something like. The negative.

[17 : 36] Which only shows the photo. In it. In it's clearer light. As it is with evil report. And with good report. We are winning the world.

By a pure message. And by godly living. We don't rely on anything else at all. We.

In. By. And then this very profound ending. Look at verse 8. As. As. As.

What does he mean. When he says. As deceivers. And yet true. Well there were no super apostles in the church.

Weren't they? And they said. Paul has already answered many of their criticism. He's leading you up the garden path. Paul is. And that's the reputation. He says. We have. We're portrayed.

[18 : 36] As deceivers. But we're true. And what he's saying. He says. You don't judge a man. By what other people say. You judge him. By what he is. What does he mean.

When he says. As. As a known. And yet. Well known. Well. If you ask the average person. In the early world. Who Paul was.

They wouldn't have known. But if you ask the Christian. Who Paul was. They would all know. If you went to many of the pagan cities. And said. Have you heard of Paul. They would say no.

If you went to Ephesian. Ephesus. Or Corinth. Or Athens. Or Rome. They would say yes. His reputation was little. In the world's eyes. Caesar didn't know very much about it.

He had to have a written report. When Paul finally arrived there. To be judged. And yet. There wasn't a man. Or woman. In the Christian church. There wasn't a true convert to Christ. Who was ignorant of who Paul was.

[19 : 36] What does he mean? As dying. And behold. We live. Well of course. It's already going back to what he said.

Isn't he? His life is a life of suffering. It's a life of aging. It's a life of premature aging. It's a life of worry. And yet he's very much alive. It is a life of distress.

And suffering. It is a life of weakness. And illness. But he is very much alive. There is something supernatural about Paul. Although he sounds weak. And ordinary.

And poor. And yet there is something majestic. And convincing. And puts him in a category. Very different from the vast majority of people. Very much alive.

Says Paul. And is chastened. And yet not killed. There are all sorts of things. Bearing down upon us. But you can't stamp. Very chastened.

[20 : 32] By what these. False apostles. Have said about him. Very very wounded. Is another way of putting it. Paul wasn't nursing. Self pity. And saying I'm hurt. Poor old me.

No he's saying he's wounded. Deeply wounded. But what the apostles have been saying. About a true gospel message. They cannot finish them off. Because there is something.

Dividing about his life. What does he mean verse 10? Here's verse 10. Sorrowful yet always rejoicing. Well isn't this such a helpful verse?

That is the mystery of the Christian. Of the Christian's emotional life. Isn't it? It's this view isn't it?

That if you've got one emotion. You can't have another.

That if you feel one emotion. You can't have another emotion. It excludes the other. But you know that. That is not true. Is it? The soul is.

[21 : 32] Is more wonderful than that. The soul is capable. Of having lots of emotions. At the same time. Even contradictory emotions. At the same time. Let me give you an example.

A child is very. Very disobedient. Deliberately disobedient. The parent. At that point. Detests the child. In a very real sense.

And yet loves the child. Profoundly at exactly the same time. So the hand that smacks. Is at the same time. A child to embrace.

Isn't it? It's very very different emotions. Paul is very sorrowful. Of course he is. Of course he's sorrowful. He sees men and women going to hell.

He sees a church being led astray by false teachers. He sees sin in his own life. Romans 7. He sees compromise everywhere. Of course he's sorrowful. He doesn't have the strength that he used to have.

[22 : 31] He hasn't got the abilities that he had as a young man. He's sorrowful. He can't help but remember the days when he was a Pharisee.

And a persecutor. And a murderer. He can't help being sorrowful. About his unconverted and unbelieving years. And nor can we. He thinks of his own people.

The Jews. He tells us in Romans 9. His heart is heavy. That the people who've had the glory of God. The Shekinah glory. They've had it twice. They had the glory of God.

The Shekinah glory. In the Old Testament. And then they had the glory of God. Come in the Lord Jesus Christ. When he came as a Jew. And they rejected it. And Paul's heart is broken. And he's in continual sorrow.

And yet he's always rejoicing. And of course he's rejoicing. Christ met him on the Damascus road. And forgave him. He is a chosen child of God. He's going to change life.

[23 : 28] He has a sense of God in his life. He knows that after death. Is the resurrection. And in between those two. Is communion. And fellowship. And being with Christ.

And he's aware. That at the judgment day. He will be acquitted. He talks about heaven. And his emotions are roused. And he thinks of all the privileges. Which are his.

And he looks at the Corinthians. Many of whom are true Christians. And there are churches. Where there weren't any churches. And there are men and women. And boys and girls. Who were pagans.

And yet now they worship the true and the living God. And they turn from their idols. And now they wait for the Lord. Who will be revealed from heaven. And if there is anything we can enter into.

Surely it's got to be verse 10. Is it? As sorrowfully and always rejoicing. That is the Christian life.

Don't you?

[24 : 26] You wake up in the morning. And you are heavy about your sin. It starts when you worry about the church. And the eve of the hour. And yet you wake up as a Christian.

Relieved and thrilled. That you are at peace with God. Through Jesus Christ. That this day is God's gift to you. And he will be with you. And he is the shepherd of your soul.

And we always have those two emotions. Let's not pretend it is otherwise. What does he mean? As poor yet making many rich.

He may be referring to his financial position. That seems to be what he is referring to in the next phrase. Isn't it? But Paul is a poor fellow. Those super apostles.

They are great orators. Great speakers. Paul is. They have tremendously winsome personalities. Paul doesn't. They bounce in with a smile on their face.

[25 : 25] They get on with everybody. But he can't. They have extraordinary health. He can hardly see. He still suffers from those terrible imprisonments. And beatings. And shipwrecks that he has had.

He can't shake that out of his memory. He is a very poor fellow. He is very, very weak. They are making many rich. But as he opens his mouth. And he speaks of Christ.

The power of God is on him. He speaks about that in 1 Corinthians chapter 2. People talk about miracles. But he can give them a miracle. People are converging. Aren't they? By the simple words that he speaks.

People are looking for wisdom. And he can give them wisdom. They are converted through the simple words he speaks. And they are brought into all the riches of Christ. As having nothing. And yet possessing all things.

He's hardly got enough to first speak in case. He travels light. He leaves books behind. He leaves coats behind. Like many of you do. And he tells us in different epistles.

[26 : 24] He's hardly got anything to call his own. He doesn't have a house or a home or a family or an address. The only means of support he's got is the gifts that I'll ever give him. Or it is the tents that he makes.

He's as poor as a church mouse. And yet he possesses all things. Because Christ rules over all. Doesn't he? We are Christ's. Says Paul. And Christ is God's. Life is mine and ours. Death is mine and ours.

All things are ours. And everything is working together for our good. There's nothing anywhere that doesn't profit us. That is the sort of people we are. What sort of picture do we have?

We have discredited. Supernaturally upheld. Humble. Blunt. Loving servant of Christ. Paul.

[27 : 26] What was your secret? What was your secret? I should have printed these next lists. So if you turn to 11 to 13. It should have been on your passage.

I forgot that. What is your secret? My secret is this. I live as if there are only two people in the world. God and me.

He says I don't believe in second causes. There are second causes. But I don't care to look at them. So I receive my imprisonment. I call myself Christ's prisoner.

And if I receive suffering. I know that Christ has given it to me. If I receive suffering. I know that Christ has given it to me. If I have to face poverty. I believe that is the path that he's asked me to go on.

If I have to abound for a while. Well I believe he's given it to me. And anything that happens to me. And everything that happens to me. I don't say the Romans did it.

[28 : 28] Or the Jews did it. Or the church did it. I say that Christ did it. God in Christ did it. I live as if there was nobody else in the world. Except me and God. Therefore we make it our aim.

Whether present. Or absent. To be well pleasing to him. Pleasing to him.

Is what he wrote. And because I live. And now it seems like a contradiction. As if there was only God and me in the world. When I look others in the face. I have to love them. Because God loved me in Christ.

How can I do anything else. But love people. And I have to warn them. That God saved me. From a damnable destruction. And surely I've got to do the same.

And I must work for their good. Even though there is nothing in it. For me. There are true servants. Of Christ. And there are false ones.

[29 : 31] And I wonder whether you can tell the difference. Let's pray.