

“Come Out From Among Them And Be Separate”

2 Corinthians Chapter Six

In 2 Corinthians chapter six Paul instructs the Corinthians in the proper conduct of God’s people while living in the world. The lesson that he teaches is a difficult one for many to accept. Therefore, as we will find in the chapter, Paul takes steps to help us open our hearts to what he has to say. The lesson to be learned here is an essential one for Christian living; one that we cannot afford to neglect.

Open Your Hearts

In 2 Cor. 6:1, 2, Paul pleads with the Corinthians to “*not receive the grace of God in vain.*” God’s grace is the offer of salvation which is delivered to us through the gospel. Paul has preached the gospel of salvation to the Corinthians, but because of their conduct, they were in danger of losing any benefit of that grace toward the salvation of their souls. This is the very thing that Paul seeks to prevent in giving the instructions in our text (vs. 17). If we do not want to lose our salvation, and thus receive God’s grace in vain, then we will give heed to the instructions in this chapter.

In 2 Cor. 6:3-10, before Paul gives his instructions for avoiding the undesirable outcome, he prepares the hearts of the Corinthians. He begins by reacquainting them with his conduct and manner of life while preaching among them. He endured many things, suffered many losses, and spared no sacrifice to proclaim God’s word to them, all the while ensuring that his own conduct was in purity and beyond reproach.

In 2 Cor. 6:11-13, with his own conduct as evidence, Paul tells the Corinthians that his heart was opened wide to them. Not only does he have great love for them, but he showed that love through his many sacrifices which were required of him to preach the gospel among them. And yet, in spite of his openness, they are constrained in their love for him—limited, reserved, held back. But before he continues his instructions, he desires that they see his love and, in turn, open their hearts to him. Thus, Paul entreats them to hear what he has to say as a loving child would be open to the instruction of a loving father.

Having prepared the hearts of the Corinthians to hear his instructions, Paul continues in 2 Cor. 6:14 the warning which he began in 6:1, “*not to receive the grace of God in vain.*” What would cause God’s grace to be received in vain (useless, of no effect)? In the context Paul shows us that it is the joining of righteousness with unrighteousness; the participation of God’s people in that which is contrary to God.

To help the Corinthians understand the essential nature of this lesson Paul gives several illustrations. “*For what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness?*” (vs. 14). Fellowship is partnership or participation; it is the sharing in something. Paul’s rhetorical question is meant to emphasize in our minds the impossibility of the joining or participation of righteousness with anything that is unrighteous. They are exact opposites, in every way contrary to one another. Similarly, light cannot mix with darkness. There can be no communion or joining together of the two, for where light and dark are brought together one will invariably overtake the other. Where there is no light source darkness will consume all, but where light is present darkness cannot be. Paul

makes a further application saying, “*What accord has Christ with Belial (Satan)?*” Can Christ, whose mission it is to destroy the works of Satan (1 John 3:8), have a partnership with Satan? Of course not!

Having cited these three impossible partnerships, Paul now personalizes the application of this to the Christian, saying, “*Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?*” As the Christian is of Christ and the unbeliever is of Satan, can there be agreement with the works of the two? No! If a Christian shows agreement with the sinful works of an unbeliever by participating in those works with him, the Christian is no longer serving Christ. Paul is making the same point here that James makes in James 4:4, “*Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*”

Paul gives one final illustration of this, saying, “*And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?*” The temple is God’s dwelling place on earth; it is where He makes His presence known; it is where He is served and given honor by men. What if, in God’s temple, men give honor to idols? Is God still honored in that place? Can God’s presence still be there when idols are given glory and honor instead of Him? Never! Christians are God’s temple today! God dwells in us, and through us His presence is made known. Therefore the Lord says, “*I will dwell in them And walk among them.*” What if the temple of God (Christians) is given to serving unrighteousness? Then we are no longer acting as God’s temple and God is no longer in us. Thus, any Christian who turns from Christ to participate in works of unrighteousness has received God’s grace in vain, because the grace which they once had will no longer save them from their sins (Heb. 10:26ff).

How can we avoid this? How do we keep from having fellowship with unrighteousness? Paul presents his solution in 2 Cor. 6:17-18, “*Therefore, ‘Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.’ ‘I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty.’*” This is the lesson that we must learn if we are to “*not receive the grace of God in vain.*” But how do we do this? How do we “*come out from among them*” when we have to live in the world? How do we “*separate*” ourselves from unbelievers when we are called to go to them to teach the gospel?

Though we dwell in the same field as unbelievers, Paul’s point is that we not “*become unequally yoked with them.*” That is to say, that we do not become joined to them or participate with in their works.

Jesus showed us what this means in Matt. 9:9-13 where He interacted and even sat at the table with “*sinners and tax collectors.*” Notice that Jesus interacted with sinners, but He did not share in their sins. He ate with them, but He did not have fellowship with them in their sinful deeds. Rather, as Jesus pointed out, He was there to bring them out of their sins, “*For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.*” “He was with unbelievers, but didn’t sin with them. He associated with them, but was never unequally yoked with them. It is not all association with unbelievers that is forbidden in 2 Cor. 6:17. It is association (fellowship, partnership) that attempts to combine righteousness and lawlessness; that seeks to put things together that do not belong – ‘the temple of God with idols’” (Warren E. Berkley, www.bible.ca).

Making the Application

Having examined the context and the lessons presented in 2 Corinthians six, let us now make some practical applications to the lives of Christians today. We must first understand that God is not commanding us to sever all communication with our friends or acquaintances who are still unbelievers. Rather, God teaches how to live in the world without being of the world.

All Christians must come to understand their relationship to God. When we obey the gospel it is not just a matter of washing our sins away, we are in fact making God our God. He becomes our

Father for we are adopted into His family. Thus, He says, "*I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters.*" Not only do we become His children, but we become His temple. God dwells in us and we make His presence known on the earth. Paul comments on this in his first letter to the Corinthians, saying, "*Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's*" (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

If we are to continue in this relationship then we must flee every work that is not of God. Though we are to interact with unbelievers, we must do so with the mind of glorifying God (Matt. 5:13-16). This is something that unbelievers cannot do because their works are contrary to God. As is common of every person, including you and me before we came to Christ, those who are without Christ are enemies of God (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21). If we join with unbelievers in their "*unfruitful works of darkness*" we too make ourselves enemies of God once again. That is why James referred to the recipients of his letter as "*adulterers and adulteresses*" (James 4:4). Because by joining ourselves to those who are in the world we give honor to whatever they serve—namely sin—and take the honor away from God. Thus, "*friendship with the world is enmity with God.*"

What kind of works are we talking about? In the context of 2 Cor. 6, Paul refers to idolatry. In Corinth some actually ate with idol worshipers in meals that were prepared in honor of false gods. It was concerning those types of things that they were commanded to be separate. But Paul elaborates further in 1 Cor. 7:1, saying, "*Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*" Thus, we must avoid joining ourselves in any practice that is contrary to the will of God.

Gambling, drinking, sexual immorality, idolatry, gossip, stealing, lying, backbiting, are just a few of the sinful works mentioned in the New Testament that we must flee. If we join ourselves in doing any of these things, whether in private or in public, we are no longer living as the temple of God, we no longer act as God's children, and God's grace unto salvation can no longer help us unless we repent and flee those things.

Conclusion

Dear brethren, we have such great and precious promises through Jesus Christ. Let us therefore strive to attain those promises by glorifying God in His temple and honoring Him as His children. If we are to have any hope of succeeding in this, though we live in the world, we must learn to "*come out from among them and be separate*" in our conduct and manner of life.

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