

Text: 2 Corinthians 6:1-2 (Part 2 of a message on 5:20-6:2)

Title: Plea to Receive God's Grace

Truth: We urge you to receive the grace of God *today*.

Date/Location: Sunday March 29, 2026 at FBC

Introduction

We are continuing our study of a section of the text from 5:20-6:2, which is part of a larger section starting at 5:14 about Christ's death, the radical transformation that comes over a person who becomes a Christian, and about reconciliation. In particular, reconciliation has to do with how God does not impute sins to us and how he justifies us with a righteous standing sourced in Himself.

In the most recent verses 5:20-21, Paul urged his readers to be reconciled to God on the only basis of reconciliation that is available: the imputation of His righteousness to us through the death of Christ.

Remember (point I. of last week's message) that Paul sees himself as an official representative of Christ, with all the privilege, responsibility, faithfulness, faith, compassion, character, and urgency that brings with it.

Second (point II from last week), He laid out the groundwork of how reconciliation can happen: precisely because God imputed the sin of humanity to Jesus, so that He could impute the righteousness of God in Him to us. This imputation is the basis of our justification, being declared and then treated as right before God.

This truth is not locked into a time capsule from thousands of years ago. It is directly applicable to us today: the need to be reconciled, the mechanism of reconciliation, and the implied call that Christians join in the ambassadorial task to reach people for the lost. And then God's servant Paul makes his plea again:

III. The Plea for Reconciliation, 6:1

A. We have already seen that we are ambassadors and it is like God is pleading through us to the unsaved. Paul reiterates that here and sees himself as a co-worker with God. On this notion, read for

example 1 Cor. 3:9. Many times Paul speaks of his co-workers in the gospel (Rom. 16:3, 9, 21; 1 Cor. 16:16; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25, 4:3; Col 4:10-11). But here, he is a co-worker directly with God, with God pleading through Him, working as His ambassador. This kind of co-worker is under God, to be sure—not a peer!—and a little bit like an apprentice who can walk alongside of the Lord and serve Him. God can be pleased and “proud of” faithful co-workers because of their good service for Him.

- B. Here is a new thought at the end of verse 1: Do “not receive the grace of God in vain.” Whenever a thing is “in vain” in Scripture it means that it is not accomplishing its intended purpose or end result. It is not that the grace of God itself is empty, but that when it comes, it is not received with effect.
- C. You cannot *genuinely* receive God’s grace with zero effect. So, to “receive in vain” means something like “hear” or “hear and not understand” (Matt. 13:18-23). When you embrace the Lord with a sincere heart, you begin to follow Him, and the change is unmistakable. After all, “if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (5:17). But the message of reconciliation can be conveyed, and you hear it, but you stop short of actually embracing it or allowing it to do its full work in you.
- D. Receiving God’s grace in vain is possible for a **professing Christian**, as is obvious from the context of 2 Corinthians 6. There were true Christians in Corinth, and Paul was writing to them! A person who is or claims to be a Christian can believe in Jesus but persist in the idea that although Christ saves, I have to also work to earn favor or add to my justification. In other words, you could be like the Galatians:

Galatians 3:2-4 This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?—³ Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? ⁴ Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed *it was* in vain?

It is also possible for a professing Christian to receive God's grace in vain in the sense of trying to take some pieces of the faith but not others. Note what Titus says is the work of grace in our lives:

Titus 2:11-15 For the **grace of God** that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.

If God's grace is not causing us to say no to sin, to live rightly, and to watch for the second coming of Christ, then we are receiving God's grace in vain.

- E. Receiving God's grace in vain is also possible for the **unbeliever**, when he or she rejects the truth of God's wonderful gracious provision and insists he or she will "go it alone." The gracious offer of new life is thus rejected, and God's grace becomes of no effect in this case. But the smart money is not there, my friends. That is like saying, "I do not need a lawyer" in a capital case. You do need a lawyer—especially because the prosecutor knows *everything!*
- F. If something is "in vain" it is of no effect. It is misdirected from the goal that was intended. People can worship in vain (Matt. 15:9). People can hear the gospel but not hold fast to it, which means they believed in vain (1 Cor. 15:2). Paul did not receive God's grace in vain (1 Cor. 15:10). And our labor in the Lord is not "in vain" because indeed He did rise from the dead (1 Cor. 15:58). If you set aside the grace of God, then it is in effect as if Christ died needlessly as far as you are concerned (Gal. 2:21). Finally, Paul often expressed concern that his work had been "in vain" if his audience did nothing with the message of God's grace (2 Cor. 9:3; Gal. 2:2, 3:4, 4:11; Phil. 2:16; 1 Thess. 2:1, 3:5).

IV. The Time for Reconciliation, 6:2

A. In verse two, Paul quotes Isaiah 49:8. This is not a super-easy quotation of the Old Testament. But the structure of what Paul is doing *is* easy:

1. Paul quotes an OT text in the first half of verse two.
2. He applies it in the second half of verse two.

B. To learn more about the quotation, let us spend a few moments reading Isaiah 49:1-8 because Paul undoubtedly had the entire section in mind when he quoted the last verse of it.

Yahweh, God the Father, is speaking to the Messiah as representative for the entire nation. In the context first Messiah speaks on behalf of the nation, representing the nation in Himself as the Servant. God says He will be glorified in His Servant, and the Servant will be glorious in the eyes of Yahweh. The Servant's role is to bring the all tribes of Jacob back to God, and to restore the remnant of Israel. But that is not enough. God has assigned His Servant to be "a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth." Indeed, salvation comes from the Jews, from the Israelite nation, *in the person of Jesus the Messiah*.

Remember that the Messiah was a man. Isaiah 49:7 says that people despise this Redeemer. Verse 4 mentions about his coming "in vain" because He would be rejected by His own people (John 1:11). Later, kings will see Him and princes will worship this chosen one of God. In the face of the opposition, He will cry out to the Lord, and Yahweh will hear His cry and will help him. Can you think of any times Jesus prayed to the Father or cried out to Him? I think it undoubtable that Jesus had this in mind along with the promise of help in verse 8, as He faced the cross.

C. It is at *that* time, when Christ provides redemption for the world, that the Father will hear and help Him. That predicted time, future to Isaiah, happened during the first century A.D. and that opened a window in which we still exist today. What Jesus did then is what instituted the present age in which we live, the age of the church, the age of reconciliation, the age of gospel proclamation.

So, Paul can apply Isaiah this way: the time is now, today. This is the era when God opens the door wide for sinners to come to Him. Throughout history that has been the case at various times, and then at other times the door is closed. God closed the door on the Ark and rained on the earth until it was flooded, and all flesh was destroyed in the judgment of the great flood. He let the Canaanite nations have free reign for centuries until He judged them. He let Israel wallow in its “every man did what was right in his own eyes” mode for a while, but then sent other nations to judge them. He finally sent Israel out of her land, accompanied by a terrible price in bloodshed. A future judgment is coming in which God will close the door. That “pattern” is re-enacted in every person’s life. The door is open right now, but God will close your eyes at some point, and with it, the door of grace if you do not receive it before then.

- D. There is another fact here that is powerful. Paul is saying that He is (and we can be) a worker with God, working together on this Old Testament promise for salvation. In other words, we are ambassadors of the Messiah, giving out the message of the despised Saviour that God is calling the tribes of Jacob and the Gentiles of the world to Himself to be reconciled. We are privileged to enter into the plan of salvation promised in millennia past to the Messiah. The ambassador role allows Christians to join in the prophesied work of God in restoring Israel and being a light to the Gentiles and raising up Israel. *That* is amazing.
- G. By the way, God is our help in this task as well. God will preserve His servants to carry His message because they are His ambassadors, *in Christ*. He sees their suffering and puts them into kinship with Christ’s sufferings.

Conclusion

What we saw in last week’s message is this: Christ’s ambassadors urge people to be reconciled to God on the basis of the substitutionary work of Jesus Christ. Imputation of our sin to Christ and God’s righteousness to us is the engine that drives reconciliation and makes reconciliation possible. It is the meaning of the cross. It explains how someone can be reconciled to God.

In this message, we add another urgent plea to receive God's gracious offer of reconciliation because the time is today. We deliver this truth because *now* is the time when salvation is available. What God promised thousands of years ago is *now*. God will hear your penitent prayer and save you (whether you can explain how it all works or not). The time is today. "Today" will close at some point in your future.

I am not into high pressure sales, like "this offer is only available today. When I walk out of this neighborhood, this deal will not be available again." I do not think God is into that either. He is OK with you thinking about it before "buying."

But the fact is that we are in the age today when salvation is globally proclaimed and freely offered. After we die, the offer is closed. Just like a good sale or a deadline for a scholarship or for signing up for a class, or a bill going to collections, there is a day when an offer becomes closed. Who can tell when that will be? Today is the day, dear ones. The "night" of spiritual things is coming, when the day is done, so we need to make such decisions while it is daytime (John 9:4, 12:35).

Wisdom is calling: turn at my rebuke, and I will pour out my spirit on you and make known my words to you (Prov. 1:20, 23).

Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call to Him while He is near. Forsake your evil way and thoughts. Return to the LORD and He will have mercy on you. He will pardon your iniquity (Isa 55:6).

God's Spirit continues to say, "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts..." (Ps 95:7, Heb. 3:7).

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