

Text: 2 Corinthians 6:3-10

Title: Endurance in Ministry...or Evidence of a Legitimate Ministry

Truth: God's servants endure ministry difficulties with purity in order to get the truth to you.

Date/Location: Sunday April 19, 2026 at FBC

Review

We have been away from 2 Corinthians for a few weeks, so let us review where we have been. The apostle Paul is writing to the church about the change in his travel plans, the need to forgive a person who had sinned in the church, and Paul's search for his co-worker Titus.

At this, he shifts gears to speak about the nature of the gospel ministry. It is **transformative** by the Holy Spirit so that Paul does not need recommendation letters to or from the church there because their lives are proof enough of the power of the gospel ministry. The ministry is **glorious** because it is connected to the New Covenant, but it is also **difficult** because its ministers are vessels of clay and the external pressures of persecution and such are exceedingly difficult. Paul is confident of things unseen including future bodily resurrection, so the ministry is forward-looking and **hopeful**. But it is also very **serious** because every Christian faces judgment. The ministry has specific **content**, namely the call to be reconciled on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ and so experience the new creation.

In our two most recent studies, Paul tells us:

1. We are ambassadors for Christ, calling people to be reconciled to God.
2. Reconciliation works because of imputation of righteousness by which the guilt of sin is definitively taken away from us because Christ paid for it, and our standing before God changes to "righteous in His sight." Remember:

God justifies me when He imputes my sin to Christ and imputes Christ's righteousness to me. Then He can truly declare me as righteous and treat me that way. On the basis of this imputation

of the righteousness of Christ, I can know that my justification is complete. It is not a work-in-progress.

3. We plead and urge people to be reconciled...
4. Because the time for reconciliation is *now*, not later! The doors are open in Christ at this moment for you to hand yourself over to Jesus and begin to follow Him in faith.

What does Paul tell us next? Read verses 3-10.

I. Create No Obstacles for the Truth, v. 3

- A. Paul uses two main verbs in these verses: “we give no offense” (followed by a purpose), and then “we commend ourselves” as an alternative to causing offense.
- B. What is offense? It is a misstep, a situation or occasion you cause that leads to someone being offended. We have all committed such actions. We have said truth without love, doctrine without care, or something not true.
- C. It is *extraordinarily difficult* to not **give** offense in anything. It is *impossible* that someone will not **take** offense at something. Saying the truth of God will offend people, not because you are offending, but because they are offended at truth. Keeping that distinction in mind helps us to avoid unnecessary fretting in terms of thinking all the time about whether they have offended someone. It also helps that Christians should “be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation” as our church covenant teaches, in reflection of Scripture’s teaching on long-suffering and love for one another.
- D. Paul works hard at being clear of offense because he does not want his ministry to be blameworthy. He wants no stumbling block or obstacles in the way of the gospel. Its truth is hard enough for the sinner to bear, only to be made worse by a foolish misstep of the ambassador.

II. Give Proof of a Legitimate Ministry, v. 4-10

- A. Everything that Paul does is aimed at commending himself as God’s minister. What “commend” means is to provide evidence of

something. Paul is giving evidence for the claim that he is a good minister of Jesus Christ (see 1 Tim. 4:6), or as he says it here, a “minister of God.”

- B. He gives proof of his honest ministry on behalf of God, sent by God, for people to come to God, by making every effort to handle all the situations he faces with godliness.
- C. Paul then gives an extensive list of the “all things” that he handles with grace. From verses 4 to 11, There are 9 adverse circumstances and 10 godly ways of handling them, followed by 9 ironies—wrong ways others might consider him, each with a contrasting truth that shows the reality of his ministry situation. *This* is the evidence that he is a servant of God not giving offense:

Adverse Situations	Godly Responses	Ironies of Ministry
<p>⁴ in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, ⁵ in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings;</p>	<p>⁴ by much patience,¹ ⁶ by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, ⁷ by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,</p>	<p>⁸ by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; ⁹ as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.</p>

¹ Great endurance.

D. Let us go through these a little bit and think about them. **Adverse Situations.** Paul suffered a lot of things which you can read about in Acts 9–28 as well as 2 Cor. 11:23-29 and 4:17 (light afflictions!). People do not go through these kinds of things for fun. This is proof that Paul genuinely believes what he is preaching, that he cares about the people to whom he is delivering the message, and that he is willing to endure these things for the sake of God and His work. He could just quit or retire, but he does not.

Think about the times Paul was run out of cities, put in the stocks, beaten, put on trial, lacked basic necessities like food and sleep...for Christ.

E. **Godly Responses.** In the midst of this, Paul did not lose his cool or become cynical and angry. He endured patiently, with purity.

1. The first on the list of godly responses is “by much patience.” This introduces the complete list starting in verse 4, emphasizing Paul’s endurance of all the adverse situations and ironies, while he maintained a godly manner in it.
2. He exhibited purity—in his relations with people, in his thought, in his motivations.
3. He showed that he had vast Biblical knowledge (2 Cor. 11:6) if not super-powers of speech.
4. He was kind, led by God’s Spirit, loved his people. He was long-suffering with the trials, and with the people being slow to repent and believe.
5. He continued preaching the word of truth—the Bible—and doing so with much power and assurance (1 Thess 1:5). He, much less we, can rely on our own power, skill, wisdom, rhetoric. All that we have comes from God, and we need to self-consciously acknowledge that.
6. The armor of righteousness can also be translated as “weapons” which means that in our battle against evil, what do we have to use? The opposite of evil—righteousness! We cannot use evil on one hand and holiness on the other. Whatever we do has to be done rightly in God’s sight. This is like 2 Cor. 10:4 – our weapons

are not carnal weapons like swords. They are truth and the demonstration of the power of God. These weapons do not come from the same word as “armor” in Ephesians 6:11 and 13.

7. These responses are not “typical” of how the world works. Think of the global leaders of the world, or politicians, or cut-throat business people...sincere love? Maybe love of money, but not of people. Of course, thankfully, not everyone is as evil as they could be, otherwise the world would be a *very* bad place to live.

F. **Ironies of Ministry.** The third column of the table lists what I call the ironies of Paul’s ministry—and of any Christian ministry. People look at it one way or it seems to be one way, and it can be that way in a short-term sense, but it is in reality the opposite.

1. Paul was honored by some and dishonored by others. He was given a good report by some and an evil report by others. I guess you can spin a story in opposite directions somehow.
2. Non-Christians claimed Paul was a deceiver, an impostor, a false apostle, or that he was an unknown quantity. But he would open his hands to outside inspection to show that he was just what he said he was.
3. As a clay vessel, he was subject to death and punishment all the time, but God kept him alive by His power (4:8-12).
4. There were times of sorrow and distress, and of course the world thought he was a sorry case! But he could rejoice in all things at all times and tell his people to do the same (1 Thess. 5:16, Phil. 4:4).
5. The apostles were not the richest guys around. Sometimes Paul needed the essentials. But like Peter and John, who did not have silver or gold, he had something much better to offer than material wealth (Acts 3:6). He offered *eternal life*!

Conclusion

Paul is a sacrificial, godly, misunderstood minister of God’s gospel, but he endures all that in order to deliver the gospel to people like the ones in Corinth.

A few thoughts grow out of this for us. First, this evidence of ministry integrity is not only useful for the Corinthians, but it is also helpful to us. God has brought the gospel to us through the ministry and writing of the apostle Paul, among others who endured similar experiences. They did this to remove all possible obstacles to our receiving God's grace. And that helps us to become Christians.

Second thought: God is not only concerned with "getting us saved." He has designs to move us beyond baby step #1 and into ministry to serve others so that we too can be good ministers of God. And to do that properly, we need to cultivate the kind of life that Paul had, that was proof that he was legitimate and not a fraud.

Third thought: our church needs to be on our knees in prayer and working hard to make sure that we have this kind of ministry that does not throw obstacles in the way of the gospel. When people see unloving treatment, cliches, division, financial misconduct, inappropriate relationships, etc. it can be an obstacle for the gospel. When they see unity, joy, working together, helping one another, that is a draw toward Christ.

Fourth thought: in all the ironies, as I called them, Paul is wrongly understood by others as a deceiver, unknown, sorrowful, poor, etc. But in reality, he and his ministry are the opposite, and some people see that reality now and others will only realize it in the end. Passers-by looked in Jesus hanging on a cross and saw a weak, helpless criminal, a man forsaken by God and nation. But that was only the temporary appearance. The reality underneath it all was much different and only became evident three days later. Some will not see Him as He is until the end of all things. It is the same if you are a Christian: you will be misunderstood by some, or many, or most. Some of your friends will turn away from you because they think you are weird. Not all, but some. They think of you **as** one thing, but the reality is another. Do not let that discourage you because you are not in Christ for the applause of the world. You believe in Christ because you cherish the approval of God and not of people.

When people do not understand your faith in Christ, my advice is to shrug it off. Do not take it personally. There is a sense in

which they *cannot* understand until they come into your world and see it from God's perspective.

This ministry—so glorious and hopeful and serious and life-changing—deserves the best that its ministers can give it. Anything less is not worthy of the great work of God in Jesus Christ.

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