



**2 CORINTHIANS 5-6 AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST: AN UNEQUAL YOKE**

In 2 Cor. 5, Paul continues with the theme of the purpose of trials to develop that precious spiritual character God desires so much from us. It is the great goal of the Christian life—to overcome and develop righteous spiritual character of which we will be judged in that future resurrection.

He says: “For we know that *if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed* [our body], *we have a building from God*, a house not made with hands, *eternal in the heavens*. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring *to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven*, if indeed, *having been clothed*, we shall *not be found naked* [or unrewarded]” (2 Cor. 5:1-3).

Here, Paul compares the physical body to a temporary dwelling—like a tent that is provisional and eventually dismantled. *Wiersbe’s Commentary* says, “Paul was a tentmaker (Acts 18:1-3) and here he used *a tent as a picture of our present earthly bodies*. A tent is a weak, temporary structure, without much beauty; but *the glorified body* we shall receive *will be eternal, beautiful, and never show signs of weakness or decay* (see Phil. 3:20-21).

Of course, Paul receiving a spiritual body is *not guaranteed*, for there are some who will *not be glorified* at Christ’s return (1 Cor. 9:27). As John says, “And now...abide in Him, that when *He appears*, we may have confidence and *not be ashamed before Him at His coming*” (1 Jn. 2:28).

Paul continues, “For we who are *in this tent* groan, being burdened, not because we want to be *unclothed* [or die], but *further clothed*, that *mortality may be swallowed up by [eternal] life*. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit *as a guarantee*” (2 Cor. 5:4-5).

Paul longed to be alive when Jesus returned so he wouldn’t experience death, but instantly have his body transformed *from physical to spiritual* (Rom. 8:23; 1 Thes. 4:14-17). We would all like that!

God tells us, if we are faithful, one day we will be transformed in this way. He has given us—as an *initial deposit* of His commitment—a *portion of the Holy Spirit*, which is the “earnest” or *down payment* of later receiving *the full measure* of the Holy Spirit.

It is the great goal to persevere to the end and receive such a supreme reward. Paul says, “So we are always *confident*, knowing that while we are at

home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes,

well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Therefore, we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For *we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, *whether good or bad*” (2 Cor. 5:9-10).

How can we die and then be present with the Lord? That is easy. He knows our thoughts perish after death, (Ps. 146:4), but when Christ returns, we will come back to life and won’t know *how much time had transpired* between our death and the resurrection. It will appear as if it was *an instant*. He explains it in 1 Thes. 4:14, “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so *God will bring with Him those who sleep* [not are awake] *in Jesus*.”

Then, Paul reminds them of not being so sure of their salvation and uses the analogy of a biblical tribunal, where a man’s actions were judged. He desired to please God in everything, for he knew he was being judged, and he longed to hear the words one day: “Well done, good and faithful servant...Enter into the joy of your Lord” (Mt. 25:21). This judgment seat of Christ will evaluate the true worth of our Christian lives and works with impartiality, justice, and grace, according to God’s holy Law (Jam. 2:10-12). Therefore, what one does before God should be done *to please Him*, and not worry about the criticisms—or sometimes the ingratitude—of others. Remember that we receive *both salvation and the reward* from God, not man.

Paul continues to defend himself against the slander from the false teachers of boasting about his ministry. He states: “Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences. For *we do not commend ourselves again to you*, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have *an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart*. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you” (2 Cor. 5:10-12). He continues urging them to remember from whom they received these precious truths, as well as of his sincerity and humility. He employs stern

arguments to rouse and help them recognize the false teachers in their midst who are not what they claim to be and to reject them.

He adds: "For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ *compels us*, because *we judge thus*: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that *those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again*. Therefore, from now on, *we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer*. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is *a new creation*; old things [people and teachings] have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, *who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ*, and has given us *the ministry of reconciliation...that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation*" (2 Cor. 5:13-19).

Apparently, some false teachers were boasting of having personally known Jesus Christ. That may well have been the case, but it guarantees nothing. It doesn't mean Jesus would now approve of *what they were teaching and doing*. What truly matters is whether one is *living and teaching what Christ had said* and not just calling Him "Lord" (Mt. 7:21-23).

Paul adds: "Now then, *we are ambassadors for Christ*, as though God *were pleading through us*: we implore you on Christ's behalf, *be reconciled to God*. For He made *Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him*" (2 Cor. 5:20-21). An ambassador had to represent his country in the best possible way, faithfully convey the messages of his superiors, and live in a manner that exemplified that country. Paul says that He represented God, faithfully conveying His message and living according to the laws of that kingdom. We, too, must strive to do the same.

Next, he speaks to us of *what God did to forgive our sins, for He laid all the sins of humanity upon Jesus* (Is. 53:8-12). That is why Jesus cried out while being crucified, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" It was because, at that moment, He bore *all the sins of humanity*, and God the Father could not save Him and at the same time carry out Their Plan of Salvation. It was a terrible moment for God the Father, who knew how much His Son

needed Him and yet, out of love for us all, He did not intervene to save His Son. *Such is the love that God the Father and the Son have for us!* As Paul said: "He *who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all*, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). Given what They have done, the Christian life—though at times difficult—is well worth *persevering until the end*.

What gave Jesus such strength during those moments when He bore all the sins of humanity? Hebrews 12:1-5 describes the focus Christ had, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, *looking unto Jesus*, the author and finisher of our faith, *who for the joy that was set before Him* [the ability to bring many sons to glory through His sacrifice] *endured the cross, despising the shame*, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, *lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls*. You have not yet *resisted to bloodshed*, striving against sin."

In chapter 6, Paul continues to defend his ministry against the false accusations of deceitful ministers. He reminds the Corinthians again that if they allow themselves to be misled by false teachers, *they could lose their salvation*—something that can happen to us if we do the same and follow false teachers. He warns them: "We then, as *workers together with Him* also plead with you *not to receive the grace of God in vain* [useless way]" (2 Cor. 6:1).

Again, Paul clarifies that grace—*God's unmerited favor and forgiveness*—is not unconditional, for it can be in vain or unfruitful. He knows we only have one opportunity to receive that grace, and must not squander it. As he also says, "Looking carefully lest anyone *fall short of the grace of God*; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many *become defiled*" (Heb. 12:15).

This is why he reminds them that, for them, *now is the time to work out your salvation* (Phil. 2:12). He adds: "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). It should say "a" day of salvation, for there is not just one single stage of salvation. Rather, it depends on *when one is called*. For us, this "is" indeed a day of salvation (1 Pet. 4:17), but not for the vast majority

of the world who are not currently being called. They will experience that “day” of salvation for them when they are offered the opportunity to repent—once “the veil that is spread over all nations...” is removed (Is. 25:7)—and then they will finally know God’s truth and be called.

For this reason, Paul reminds them he has been very careful not to hinder their precious calling. He tells them: “We give *no offense in anything*, that our ministry may not be blamed” (2 Cor. 6:3).

He has to say this because his ministry continues to be unjustly maligned by false brethren among them. He recounts the *nine types of trials* he has endured for their sake. The first three relate to *trials in general*: “But in all things we commend ourselves as *ministers of God*: in much patience *in tribulations, in needs, in distresses*.” The next three are caused *by people*: “*in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults*.” And the last three arise from *the nature of his ministry*: “*in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings*” (2 Cor 6:4-5). The ministry today is not so different; it is fraught with dangers, even if not yet with such intense persecutions happening.

How does Paul *overcome these trials*? He then focuses on the 27 spiritual tools—as we all should: “By purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things. O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted *by your own affections* [lack of love]. Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open” (2 Cor 6:6-13).

Seeing that some still doubt him, Paul is being as frank as possible, for he feels hurt by their lack of support. So, he must show them the dangers they are in by listening to the false teachers and being impressed by them. Instead of criticizing him so much, they should focus on resolving their own problems, such as some baptized believers were marrying non-believers, and others were mingling with unbelievers by partaking in pagan ceremonies.

Paul corrects them, telling them not to mix too much with the world, and uses a biblical analogy. He admonishes them: “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? *For you are the temple of the living God*. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’ 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’” 2 Cor 6:14–7:1).

Before coming into the Church, there were people married to unbelievers and God says they should not separate if the unbeliever consents to live with them in peace. This also serves as an example which sometimes the unbeliever is called by God (1 Peter 3:1-2)

One can certainly work with non-believers and even maintain friendships with them to a certain extent, but not to be “unequally yoked” with the unbeliever in marital or religious partnerships. Paul uses the example of the incompatibility between two different animals, an ox and a donkey, sharing the same yoke to illustrate that the same principle applies to human beings. He quotes the command: “Do not let your livestock *breed* with a different kind” (Lev. 19:19) and, “Do not plow with an ox and a donkey together” (Deut. 22:10).

*The JFB Exegetical Commentary* notes: “An ox and a [donkey], being a different species and with different [traits] cannot associate comfortably, nor unite cheerfully in drawing a plow or a wagon. The [donkey] being much smaller and his step shorter, there would be an unequal and irregular pace. Besides, the [donkey], from feeding on...poisonous weeds, has a fetid breath, which the other seeks to avoid, not only as poisonous and offensive, but producing leanness, or, if long continued, death, and always to hold away its head from the [donkey] and to pull only with one shoulder” (p. 172).

When a believer is united to a non-believer, although not a sin per se, they will have different goals and lifestyles. Over time, living together

almost invariably becomes more difficult, that is why we have this verse to warn us against such a union and avoid it -- if at all possible.