



## 2 Corinthians - Chapter Six

- I. 2 Corinthians 1:1-7:16 - Paul's Defence of His Legitimacy as an Apostle (continues)
- I.e 2 Corinthians 4:1-6:13 - Paul's encouragement in his ministry (continues/concludes)
- I.e.iii 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:13 - The Ministry of Reconciliation (continues/concludes)
- I.e.iii.1 2 Corinthians 5:11-6:2 - The new covenant ministry of reconciliation (continues/concludes)

### Summary of Chapter Six

Paul begins with what at first sight seems to be an evangelistic call, then defends the paradoxical character of his ministry (vv.3-10), going on to make an urgent appeal for the Corinthian's affection (vv.11-13), and follows this with a command to sever damaging alliances with unbelievers (6:14-7:1).

<sup>1</sup> As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain.

### 2 Corinthians 6:1

The grace of God is the good pleasure of God that inclines him to bestow benefits where they are undeserved. Although God has always been gracious, it comes about solely through the death of Christ, refer back to 5:14-19. Those who turn back from Christ show that their initial, apparent reception of God's grace was not real but in vain.

Paul links back to what he had argued in Chapter Five with a direct appeal, which comes to all believers as much as to the Corinthians: you have accepted the grace of God; do not let it go for nothing! Make the most of it! The new creation is already here. God is saying 'Yes!' to all the prophecies and promises: <<**For in him every one of God's promises is a 'Yes.'** For this reason it is through him that we say the 'Amen', to the glory of God>> (2 Corinthians 1:20), and he is saying it right now. This is the day of salvation (v.2), the right time. Make the most of it!

<sup>2</sup> For he says,

‘At an acceptable time I have listened to you,  
and on a day of salvation I have helped you.’

See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!

### 2 Corinthians 6:2

By quoting Isaiah 49:8 to summarise his own appeal to the Corinthians, Paul identifies his apostolic ministry with Isaiah’s prophetic role of calling Israel to repentance and perseverance in view of the coming day of redemption and judgment, that is the day of salvation.

See, now. Paul declares that this time of salvation has already arrived in Christ! Amazingly, God is already pouring out many of the blessings of the age to come.

Now is the acceptable time. The sense of urgency is unmistakable. As foreseen in the time of Isaiah, Paul now knows that the time of God’s favour has arrived: <<*But as for me, my prayer is to you, O Lord. At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love, answer me*>> (Psalm 69:13a).

### I.e.iii.2 2 Corinthians 6:3-13 - The new covenant support for the legitimacy of Paul’s ministry

For the Corinthians, being reconciled to God involves affirming Paul’s ministry as God’s co-worker, as Paul has argued in 5:18-6:2, and submitting to what Paul tells them (v.13). As he did in 1:3-11, 2:14-17 and 4:7-12, and will do again in 11:23-33 and 12:7-10, Paul defends his ministry as an apostle by once again calling attention to his faithfulness amid the changing circumstances of his apostolic life. Paul’s ministry reflects God’s power in spite of human weakness.

<sup>3</sup> We are putting no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, <sup>4</sup> but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, <sup>5</sup> beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger; <sup>6</sup> by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, <sup>7</sup> truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; <sup>8</sup> in honour and dishonour, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; <sup>9</sup> as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see – we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; <sup>10</sup> as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

### 2 Corinthians 6:3-10

This is the second of three lists of deeds Paul includes in this letter. Like the list in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, it highlights exploits and accomplishments that society would judge to be blameworthy rather than praiseworthy, such as the

beatings, imprisonments and riots. Unlike the previous résumé, it goes beyond the typical missionary afflictions to include such spiritual attributes as purity, understanding, patience and kindness, along with such divine credentials as the Holy Spirit, genuine love, the word of truth and the power of God. The third list is contained in 2 Corinthians 11:23-29.

We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way for this would be directly against the teaching of Jesus: *<<If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea>>* (Matthew 18:6). Paul's statement here suggests that he is identifying himself with the servant of Isaiah 49:8 and equating receiving God's grace with accepting himself and his co-workers. For the Corinthians, then, to reject Paul would be in effect to reject God's grace. This is an audacious move on Paul's part. Yet for God's ambassador (5:20) and co-worker (v.1), it is not unjustifiable.

So that no fault may be found with our ministry. While the Gospel message itself may offend: *<<but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles>>* (1 Corinthians 1:23), the Gospel preacher may not, as Paul indicates elsewhere: *<<Now a bishop must be above reproach>>* (1 Timothy 3:2a), and: *<<For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless>>* (Titus 1:7). So Paul has been careful not to do anything that someone could legitimately take offense at. This is so that his ministry will not be discredited, a term that means to find fault with or to criticise.

We have commended ourselves in every way. Not only through victories and triumphs but also by the way he endures hardship, Paul gives testimony to the truthfulness of his apostolic ministry. The glory of the Gospel shines forth from the Christian's life in the way they respond to suffering and opposition.

Through great endurance. Paul's divinely enabled perseverance through trials is his general testimony to the power of the Spirit in his life and ministry: *<<and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God. Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry of death, chiselled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses' face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory?>>* (2 Corinthians 3:3-8), and: *<<The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works>>* (2 Corinthians 12:12), which is then illustrated by the specific examples that follow this statement.

In Chapter One, endurance was the end result of divine encouragement received during trials. Here it denotes how one should go about handling adversity. Used positively, the term means 'to stand firm' or 'to hold one's ground' in the face of difficulties. This is in contrast to the Stoics, who taught that life's difficulties can and must be overcome.

**Servants of God.** As a minister, Greek *diakonos* of the new covenant: <<*who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life*>> (2 Corinthians 3:6), Paul is also a **servant of God**, Greek *doulos*.

**Imprisonments.** The only instance recorded in Acts prior to this letter being written was in Philippi (Acts 16:16-40), where Paul did receive one of many **beatings**. Yet it is clear that Paul had been arrested on other occasions prior to this letter as well that are not recorded in the NT.

**Riots** appear to have been a regular occurrence in most of the towns Paul visited. With few exceptions, such as the riot by the silversmiths in Ephesus (Acts 19:21-41), these were incited by Jewish antagonists who were envious of Paul's success among the Gentiles, or opposed his claims of Jesus as the Christ.

**Labours** is the Greek *kopos* and literally means a striking or beating. It came to be used of **labour** that is physically exhausting, the kind that causes one to collapse at night from sheer exhaustion. Paul uses the term to describe both his trade as a worker of goats-hair cloth: <<*and we grow weary from the work of our own hands*>> (1 Corinthians 4:12a), and: <<*You remember our labour and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God*>> (1 Thessalonians 2:9); and his missionary **labours**: <<*We do not boast beyond limits, that is, in the labours of others; but our hope is that, as your faith increases, our sphere of action among you may be greatly enlarged*>> (2 Corinthians 10:15), although the two are connected, since he plied a trade so as not to be a financial burden on his churches: <<*and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labour we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you*>> (2 Thessalonians 3:8).

**Sleepless nights** translates the Greek *agrypnia* that denotes sleeplessness or wakefulness. For Paul, this was voluntarily imposed. If 11:28-29 is any indication, it was the result of prayerful concern for his churches.

**Hunger** is the Greek *nesteia*, as opposed to *limos*, which is involuntary hunger, and refers to self-imposed abstinence. Fasting was a common practice among pious Jews and was often done as a means of focusing one's energies on the task of intercession. There may also have been times when Paul went hungry to avoid being a burden on anyone.

**By purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech** are moral attributes deemed essential for those who claim to be God's servants. None is unique to the Gospel ministry. Two, in fact, **patience** and **kindness**, appear among the fruit of the Spirit: <<*By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things*>> (Galatians 5:22-23), and are in the same order. **Knowledge** refers not to head knowledge that Paul's opponents claimed to have but to the type of knowledge that comes from the heart and can only be acquired through **the power of God**.

**Truthful speech** is actually 'the word of truth', *logo aletheias*. This is an important distinction because Paul elsewhere equates 'the word of truth' with the  
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Gospel message: <<*In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit*>> (Ephesians 1:13), and: <<*You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel*>> (Colossians 1:5b). A better translation might be ‘the true message’.

Weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left is best seen as a reference to the spiritual weapons God provides: <<*Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil*>> (Ephesians 6:11), perhaps meaning one for offense, usually a sword on the right: <<*Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*>> (Ephesians 6:17), and one for defence, usually a shield on the left: <<*With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one*>> (Ephesians 6:16). Others understand Paul’s phrase not as limited to two weapons but as a way of saying that he is fully equipped with spiritual power for any situation. Others view this translation as righteous weapons, a subtle but distinct difference.

Paul’s weapons were ones of notable integrity and not like those of his rivals, who utilised domination, exploitation and humiliation: <<*For you put up with it when someone makes slaves of you, or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or gives you a slap in the face*>> (2 Corinthians 11:20).

This passage concludes with two contrasting views in a paradoxical list of statements. There is the one point of view put forward by Paul’s opponents that were clearly intended to undermine his public character and therefore his reputation as a Gospel minister; the second points to the way in which God supports Paul’s ministry and therefore authenticates his apostolic authority.

As poor, yet making many rich is a contrast between Paul’s chosen lifestyle in order to enrich the lives of others through the salvation he proclaims; whereas, as having nothing, and yet possessing everything is the contrast between the same personal physical deprivations compared with his own eternal rewards.

Although the list reads like a catalogue of virtues, Paul must have known that he was pushing his luck, sailing close to the wind. This was exactly the sort of thing many of his readers did not want to hear. But he presses on, trying every trick in his own rhetorical book to break through the crust of indifference and make them see that this is what it means to follow a crucified Christ! This is what it means to be an apostle of the world’s true Lord!

<sup>11</sup> We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. <sup>12</sup> There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. <sup>13</sup> In return – I speak as to children – open wide your hearts also.

## 2 Corinthians 6:11-13

Paul’s original appeal not to receive God’s grace in vain (v.1) takes a personal turn. Having demonstrated the blameless and sacrificial character of his record as a minister of the Gospel, he now makes a personal plea for the church’s affection.

Our heart is wide open to you. Paul calls those Corinthians still in rebellion against him, as his spiritual children: *<<I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel>>* (1 Corinthians 4:14-15), and: *<<Here I am, ready to come to you this third time. And I will not be a burden, because I do not want what is yours but you; for children ought not to lay up for their parents, but parents for their children. I will most gladly spend and be spent for you. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?>>* (2 Corinthians 12:14-15), to respond to him in the way he has responded to them.

There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. Paul clearly feels that the Corinthians are withholding their affections for him. What Paul asks for, by way of a fair exchange, is that the Corinthians open wide their hearts as he has opened wide his own.

Open wide your hearts also. Paul not only wants their affections with this statement but also he wants them to be open about how life really is for them just as he has told them about his own highs and lows of service.

#### I.f 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 - The Temple of the Living God

This section brings Paul's argument in 2:14-7:1 to its culmination by giving the second, concrete application of what it will mean for the Corinthians to 'widen their hearts' toward Paul (v.13) amid the current controversy in Corinth.

One common theory is that this section is a letter fragment that was misplaced within the Corinthian correspondence and inserted in its present position by a later editor of Paul's letters.

This is an easy solution to a complex problem. It is an easy solution because it shifts the blame onto the shoulders of someone other than Paul without really addressing the question 'why here?' Some have been impressed with the non-Pauline character of these verses and think that Paul may be quoting a familiar sermon, a piece of traditional material or even an Essene text that has been reworked to reflect a Christian point of view.

However, while this helps to explain a number of unfamiliar words and expressions, the question 'why here?' still remains. The likeliest explanation seems that Paul is specifying the cause for the Corinthians' constraint toward him: their ongoing partnerships with unbelievers. But there need not be just one explanation. A number of things could have led Paul to tackle the problem at this point and in this fashion.

<sup>14</sup> Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness?

## 2 Corinthians 6:14

**Do not be mismatched with unbelievers.** The Greek grammar implies that Paul is not merely warning the Corinthians about a potential danger but instructing them to stop an action already in progress. A problem for the Corinthians, and indeed the modern church, is peer pressure and the surrounding culture. Paul is calling the church not to give way to external influence. This command, which is Paul's main point in 6:14-7:1, will be restated in different words at the end of the section: *<<Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God>>* (2 Corinthians 7:1).

To be **mismatched** or 'unequally yoked' is to be 'hitched up' or even crossbred with another animal that is not of the same kind, Greek *heterozygeō*; the related adjective is found in: *<<You shall keep my statutes. You shall not let your animals breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall you put on a garment made of two different materials>>* (Leviticus 19:19). It is used in the former sense in: *<<You shall not plough with an ox and a donkey yoked together>>* (Deuteronomy 22:10), although this word does not occur there. It is thus an image for being allied or identified wrongly with unbelievers. In context, it refers especially to those who are still rebelling against Paul within the church, whom Paul now shockingly labels unbelievers, and he clearly thinks it possible that some are: *<<Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realise that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless, indeed, you fail to pass the test!>>* (2 Corinthians 13:5), although he hopes not, but the principle has wider application to other situations where, as with animals yoked together, one person's conduct and direction of life strongly influences or controls the other's.

When Paul uses the term **unbelievers** he generally uses it to differentiate between those who have accepted the Gospel and those who have not. Here, however, it refers to those with whom there is a conflict of interest stemming from incompatible loyalties. Paul is not banning association with unbelievers; it is unequal partnerships believers form with secular society that are of concern, such as those he wrote in depth about in his previous letter, including marriage, sexual immorality, pagan rituals and taking fellow believers before secular courts.

**What fellowship is there between light and darkness?** For Paul those in Christ were in the light, everyone else is in darkness. In the natural world light always dispels darkness, but within the human existence, in their spirit, this is not always the case: *<<What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it>>* (John 1:3b-5), *<<And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God>>* (John 3:19-21).

<sup>15</sup> What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever?

## 2 Corinthians 6:15

**Beliar** is Greek and can be spelled Belial. It comes from a Hebrew term *beliyya`al* meaning ‘worthlessness’, ‘good for nothing’, or possibly ‘destruction’. This name for Satan is not found elsewhere in the OT or NT but was used in the Judaism of Paul’s day. Derived from one of Satan’s characteristics, i.e. that he is ‘worthless’ or ‘treacherous’; see the same word in: <<*As they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, worthless fellows, surrounded the house, beating on the door. And they said to the old man, the master of the house, “Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may know him”>>* (Judges 19:22 ESV), <<*And the two worthless men came in and sat opposite him. And the worthless men brought a charge against Naboth in the presence of the people, saying, “Naboth cursed God and the king.” So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death with stones>>* (1 Kings 21:13 ESV), it was often used in contexts that stress Satan’s activity as an opponent of God, which fits Paul’s concern with his opponents.

It also designates the realm of the powers of chaos and so comes to mean destruction, wickedness and ruin: <<*The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of perdition assailed me; the cords of Sheol entangled me; the snares of death confronted me>>* (Psalm 18:4-5), and: <<*From you one has gone out who plots evil against the Lord, one who counsels wickedness>>* (Nahum 1:11).

<sup>16</sup> What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

‘I will live in them and walk among them,  
and I will be their God,  
and they shall be my people.

<sup>17</sup> Therefore come out from them,  
and be separate from them, says the Lord,  
and touch nothing unclean;

then I will welcome you,  
<sup>18</sup> and I will be your father,  
and you shall be my sons and daughters,  
says the Lord Almighty.’

## 2 Corinthians 6:16-18

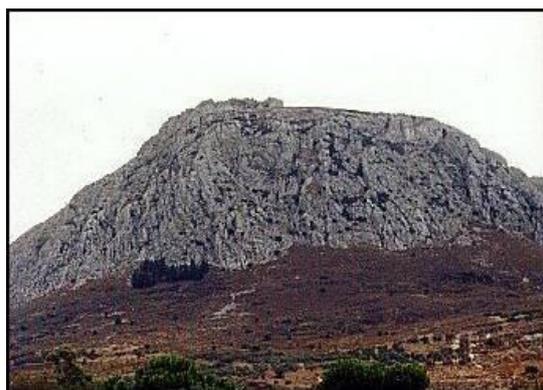
**What agreement has the temple of God with idols?** Idolatry is the fundamental sin. In addition to the images housed in great temples, Roman families commonly kept representations of individual ‘house gods’ in their homes, examples found at Pompeii are particularly striking. Mediterranean and Near Eastern pagan religions worshiped idols in the form of beasts, or in the likeness of mixed beast/human deities such as the ancient gods of Egypt. Modern idols do not look like ancient ones; images served today are often mental rather than metal. But people still

devote their lives to, and trust in, many things other than God, including wealth and status.

Corinth was home to two renowned temples, the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, fertility and beauty, which is situated on the Acrocorinth, an 1,886 foot high fortified mountain; and the sanctuary of Asclepius, god of healing. The pagan temples, which were under the patronage of a particular god or goddess, were a focal point of social activity. Invitations along the lines of 'So and so invites you to dine at the temple of Serapis' were a regular social possibility for those living in a city like Corinth.



The Temple of Aphrodite



The Acrocorinth

We are the temple of the living God. The word for temple or sanctuary, Greek *naos*, is also used to refer to the Most Holy Place, where God's presence was manifested over the Ark of the Covenant, and is not to the more general word for temple complex or building, Greek *hieron*. Since the nation of Israel is never referred to or identified with the temple, this equation of believers with the Most Holy Place, seen also in: <<***Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?***>> (1 Corinthians 3:16), reflects the amazing reality of the new covenant, in which God dwells directly and immediately in the midst of his people, a reality inaugurated by his Spirit: <<***and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts***>> (2 Corinthians 3:3).

To be the temple of the living God is to belong exclusively to God and to forsake all associations that would be incompatible with God's ownership. To drive home this point, Paul cites no fewer than six OT passages that spell out what it means to be God's possession. In each case a text that deals with God's covenantal relationship with Israel is reapplied to the church.

As God said. This one phrase introduces the entire chain of six OT quotations in vv.16c-18, which closes with the parallel expression says the Lord Almighty. Taken together, these OT texts support the commands of v.14 and 7:1. The first quotation is the covenant formula from Leviticus 26:11-12, here adapted to the Corinthians by combining it with the new covenant promise of Ezekiel 37:27, thereby changing the original 'among you' to among them. This adaptation affirms that the Corinthian church is experiencing the fulfilment of the covenant promises first given to Israel.

**Therefore.** Paul draws out the implications of being the new covenant people of God with three commands from Isaiah 52:11: come out; be separate from; touch nothing unclean; and three promises from Ezekiel 20:34, 2 Samuel 7:14, and Isaiah 43:6: I will welcome you; I will be your father; you shall be my sons and daughters. Paul's application to the Corinthians of promises originally given to Israel reflects his conviction that the church is the fulfilment of God's covenant people, being restored under the new covenant. The combination of 2 Samuel 7:14 I will be your father with Isaiah 43:6: sons and daughters indicates that God's promise to become the father of David's 'son', originally intended to mean Solomon but later understood to refer to the Messiah whom God said he would treat like a son to include public chastisement. Here, it is expanded by Paul to include all of God's people who are adopted into his new covenant family: <<*And you established your people Israel for yourself to be your people for ever; and you, O Lord, became their God*>> (2 Samuel 7:24), <<*At that time, says the Lord, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people*>> (Jeremiah 31:1), <<*for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn*>> (Jeremiah 31:9c), <<*And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers!'*>> (Mark 3:33-34), and: <<*Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world*>> (James 1:27).

Ezekiel 37:27 is the great promise of restoration after exile seen in terms of resurrection. Isaiah 52:11 is in the middle of the passage about God's coming Kingdom, rescuing the exiles from Babylon, and leading on to the work of the Servant of the Lord, who would die and rise again to accomplish God's purpose. Verse 18, as well as echoing 2 Samuel 7:14, also carries an echo of Jeremiah 31:9, where God promises once more that he will bring his people back from Babylon, because he is a father to Israel, and that Ephraim, one part of Israel, is his firstborn.

These are not passages taken at random. Together they all say: in Christ, God has fulfilled his many promises, particularly his promises that he would bring his people back from exile. But the real exile was not the exile in Babylon; it was the exile of death itself. And through the Messiah's own death and resurrection this exile has been undone. It is now time for God's people to come home to him, home from the land of sin and death, home to the father who will receive them with open arms. Not for the first time in Paul, we hear in this passage echoes of Jesus' great parable of the Prodigal Son. Refer to Luke 15:11-32.