

SECOND CORINTHIANS

Chapter 6

As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. ² For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

6:1 WORKING TOGETHER WITH HIM – As an apostle and ambassador of Jesus Christ, Paul was in essence God's co-worker (cf. 1:1; 5:19). (TLSB)

to receive God's grace in vain. To live for oneself (see 5:15) is one way to do this. (CSB)

Gk *kenon*, in an "empty fashion," without purpose, treating it lightly. (TLSB)

Paul had just given a summary description of the ministry of reconciliation which had been entrusted to him, and had sent forth a ringing invitation to accept the grace of God. He now makes the application in an admonition to sanctification: We, then, working together with Him, also entreat you not in vain to receive the grace of God. In carrying out the Gospel-ministry, in issuing the Lord's urgent invitation to accept the effected reconciliation, Paul and all ministers of the Gospel are God's assistants, working with Him for the salvation of men's souls. "Therefore God is the true Master within, in the heart, that performs the best work; and we help and serve Him to this end externally with the ministry of preaching." It is necessary, then, to add admonition to Gospel exposition, as the apostle here does, entreating the Corinthians, appealing to them not to hear the message of the grace of God without benefit. "To accept the grace of God in vain can be nothing else than hearing the pure Word of God, in which the grace of God is offered, and yet remaining apathetic and not accepting it, remaining as one was before." The grace of God is offered independently of man's faith and obedience, but if it is not accepted by the hearers, it will, instead of profiting them, result in their everlasting condemnation, chap. 2: 16a. If a person feigns interest in the forgiveness of sins, but will not truly repent of his sins; if he makes a practice of referring to the Redeemer, but himself trusts in his own merits; if he is a member of a congregation and uses the means of grace, but incidentally leads a life by which the mercy of God is disgraced, then he belongs to the class of those whom the warning of the apostle strikes. (Kretzmann)

6:2 Paul applies the words of promise in Is 49:8 to the Corinthian Christians. He impresses on the Corinthians the importance and seriousness of God's offer of grace to them through Jesus Christ. God's favor is being offered now to the Corinthians, and Paul pleads with them not to take this offer lightly. (TLSB)

the time of my favor ... the day of salvation. An affirmation that is true in a general sense of all God's saving acts in the history of his people, but that finds its particular fulfillment in this present age of grace between the two comings of Christ. This

understanding does not exclude from grace and salvation those who lived before Christ's coming, for the believers of the OT period received the promises that in due course were fulfilled in Christ (1:20) and they saw and welcomed their fulfillment from a distance (see Jn 8:56; Heb 11:13). (CSB)

In order to give proper weight to his evangelical admonition, Paul supports it with a passage from the Old Testament: at an accepted time I hearkened to thee, and in a day of salvation I succored thee, Is. 49:8. This word of the prophet was being fulfilled before the eyes of the Corinthians, as it is today, for he speaks of the time of the New Testament as that of the dispensation of grace. What God had promised to His great Servant, the Messiah, that is being given by grace to all those that accept the Christ in true faith. Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation; that is Paul's explanation and comment. Since Christ has been made manifest in the flesh, the propitious time has come, the time of His good pleasure, the time of His good will toward men, in which He intends to reveal His mercy, power, and glory. The present Christian dispensation is the day of salvation, with God freely extending His gracious help to all sinners that will hear His call. The repetition of the word "behold" emphasizes the point that the present time is that in which God so accepts, in which He so dispenses His grace and mercy. Now they have free access to the redemption of Christ, Heb. 4: 16; Rom. 5:2. Now, today, they should make their decision and partake of His bounty, accept the hand of reconciliation extended to them. Mark: If the time of grace is neglected, if its invitation is ignored, it may soon be past forever, to be followed by a time of wrath and condemnation. "Now that God has given us His mercy in such rich measure,... truly it is necessary that we do not set the grace of God at naught and let Him knock in vain. He is standing at the door: well for us if we open to Him. He is saluting us; blessed he that answers. If we overlook His passing, who will bring Him back?" (Kretzmann)

Paul's Hardships

³ We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. ⁴ Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; ⁵ in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; ⁶ in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; ⁷ in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; ⁸ through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; ⁹ known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything. ¹¹ We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. ¹² We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. ¹³ As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also.

6:3 *We put no stumbling block in anyone's path.* Paul is concerned that he live an exemplary life because he does not want the ministry discredited. (CSB)

As a minister of the Gospel, Paul was careful not to get in the way of the message of Jesus. He was the messenger, not the message. (TLSB)

Paul here sets forth his own example, partly in vindication of his own conduct, partly with the intention of stimulating emulation. He conducts himself so that he gives no one an occasion for stumbling, since any deliberate act of that kind would have reacted upon the Gospel. He could not indeed hinder the self-righteous and self-conceited from taking offense at the Word of the Cross and blaspheming both the office and its ministers, 1 Cor. 4, 12. 13. But he made use of the most untiring vigilance in doctrine and life, lest some one should find a reason for censuring him; he took heed to himself in the most scrupulous manner, lest on his account some one should stumble and fall. (Kretzmann)

6:4–10 Cf. 4:8–12. (CSB)

6:4-5 The apostle now speaks of the distinctive characteristics of his apostolic office in detail: But in all things commending ourselves as God's servants do, He acted so conscientiously in all things pertaining to his office and to his whole life that his boast of proving his worth was not too strong. He and his fellow-workers were examples of all that was good in their office as well as in their daily conduct. As it was appropriate for the ministers of God, their whole life was a testimony to the office with which they had been entrusted. This was true, first of all, in the enduring of outward hardships. They did their work in great patience, in determined perseverance, in steadfast calmness, since this was necessary for enduring and conquering the peculiar difficulties which they were obliged to encounter. They worked in afflictions occasioned by the hatred of their enemies; in distresses, in various troubles which fall to the lot of the persecuted; in straits of perplexities, from which there seemed to be no escape, which left them at a loss as to how they might proceed. The enemies of the Gospel also succeeded in making their enmity felt in the person of Paul, in stripes, when he was beaten, Acts 22:24; in imprisonments, Acts 16:24; in tumults, when the people did not wait for the judgment of the authorities, but aroused the rabble in a demonstration against the person and work of the Christian teachers, Acts 13:50; 14:5-19; 16:22; 17:5; 18:12. He was troubled also in hard labors, both in preaching the Gospel and in supporting himself while so doing, making his body weary and sapping his strength, 1 Cor. 15:10; Acts 20:26; in watchings, many a sleepless night being credited to his account, since he was active day and night, Acts 20: 7- 31, in behalf of the souls entrusted to him; in fastings, which he undertook voluntarily, partly as a fine outward training, Acts 14:23, partly to keep his body in subjection, 1 Cor. 9:27, partly also to strengthen his body for the endurance of hardships, chap. 11:27. What an example for all ministers of all times! And how earnestly does this account rebuke the superficiality and externalism of many modern Christians! (Kretzmann)

6:4 *as servants of God we commend ourselves.* Paul commends himself again inasmuch as the gospel he preached in Corinth is at stake; but, in contrast to the false apostles who were no better than self-servers, he does so as God's servant. His life, with all its trials and afflictions, could not have been more starkly different from that of these intruders whose concern was for their own comfort and prestige. (CSB)

Here, Paul adds that his conduct in suffering and persecution has been worthy of his calling as a minister of God to the Corinthians (cf 4:7–12). (TLSB)

6:5 Cf Ac 14:19; 18:12 for examples. (TLSB)

6:6–7 Paul's ministry has been a demonstration of God's power for others. God Himself effects the kind of self-sacrificial character and motivation Paul needs to serve others as God in Christ served him (cf Rm 5:1–5). (TLSB)

6:6 The apostle next shows his behavior as a true minister of Christ in inward gifts and qualities: in integrity of mind and life, in the moral purity which cleanses itself from all contamination of flesh and spirit; in knowledge, which is essentially the right understanding of the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God, the ability to form the proper judgment regarding the various conditions and circumstances of men in the light of God's Word; in long-suffering, an attribute of especial value in a missionary, since it enables him to bear the weaknesses of those deficient in knowledge and to hold back his righteous indignation on account of insults; in kindness, according to which the apostle showed his benignant gentleness in seeking and promoting the welfare of his neighbor, whether friend or enemy. All these qualities are not natural abilities of the apostle, but they are gifts of the Holy Ghost, who also works love unfeigned, true, genuine love, which knows nothing of hypocrisy and dissimulation, 1 Cor. 13: Col. 3:12. And as a possessor of these gifts and qualities, Paul does his work in the Word of Truth, in his activity as a messenger of the Lord, for he preached only the pure, unadulterated, divine doctrine, chap. 4:2; in the power of God which enables him to do the work of his ministry, which causes him to take all his own reason and ability captive under the obedience of Christ, chap. 10:5; Rom. 1:16. (Kretzmann)

6:7 *weapons of righteousness.* The tools that God graciously provides His people to wage His battle, to execute His mission and ministry—namely, God's Word and Sacraments (Mt 28:18–20), prayer, sacrificial service (cf 10:3–5; Rm 6:13; 13:12). (TLSB)

A further feature of the apostle's work was this, that he commended himself as a minister of God through the weapons of righteousness on the right and on the left, carrying on the warfare of the Lord not with carnal instruments, but with those means that are appropriate for the justice of the Lord's cause, using them for offense as well as for defense. In doing this, he was undaunted, no matter whether the way of his ministry led through honor or dishonor, through evil reports or good reports; exposed as he was to slanderous, malicious tongues, he accepted it in the spirit which characterized his Lord, as a testimony for the fact that he was doing his work as a servant of God and not of men, Gal. 1:10; John 15:18. (Kretzmann)

6:8–10 Throughout these verses, one is confronted by the contrasts involved in Paul’s ministry, the tensions of people’s reaction to him, his own personal struggles, and even the paradox of what it means to be an earthen vessel with the treasures of Christ. But through it all, Paul claims that none of these circumstances affected his faithful sharing of the ministry of God’s reconciliation with others (3:3–4). (TLSB)

6:8 Thus Paul proved his character to be diametrically opposite to that which was ascribed to him by his enemies. He was defamed as a deceiver, just as his Master was before him. John 7:12, as one that was trying to defraud the people by false doctrines, by teaching new gods, Acts 17:18; and yet he was true, in the eyes of God as well as in those of men that were won by the Word of Truth. (Kretzmann)

6:9 He was unknown, misjudged, misunderstood, represented as an obscure person without proper credentials, as the teacher of a sect which was everywhere spoken against, Acts 28:22; 24, 14; and yet he was well known before Him who had inscribed his name in heaven, Luke 12: 20, as well as to them that had felt the power of the Gospel in their hearts, Gal. 4, 15. He was dying, surrounded on all sides by enemies that sought his life, and may often have been reported dead, and he himself often gave up all hope of life, Acts 27:21; 2 Cor. 1:8: and yet, behold, by a miracle of God he was living, he had till now triumphed over death. He carried on his work as chastened, stricken with the consequences of sin in his body, as his adversaries were sure to sneer of him, 2 Cor. 12:7, and yet the chastening of the Lord did not kill him, Ps. 118:18, its intention rather being to purify him in life and work, to make him more valuable for the ministry which was entrusted to him. (Kretzmann)

6:10 *making many rich.* In Christ. True wealth does not consist in worldly possessions but in being “rich toward God” (Lk 12:15, 21). The believer, even if he has nothing of this world’s goods, nevertheless has everything in him who is Lord of all (cf. 1Co 1:4–5; 3:21–23; Eph 2:7; 3:8; Php 4:19; Col 2:3). (CSB)

Sorrowful indeed he was; for the enmity of men, the evil reports, the distresses and perplexities, the chastenings of the Lord caused him sorrow according to the flesh; and yet he was always rejoicing, for all the troubles of this present life could not rob him of his joy in the Lord and his blessed hope of salvation, Phil. 4:4. Poor he was in this world’s goods, a pauper so far as the money of this life was concerned, yet he made many rich, beyond the dreams of avarice, in spiritual blessings, in the treasures of heaven. Yea, he was one of those that had nothing which is counted in the eyes of this world, neither wealth nor social position; and yet he possessed all things, 1 Cor. 3:22, having the riches of the grace of God in Christ Jesus as a treasure which no man could take from him. Note: What Paul here says of himself and of his fellow-ministers is true of all messengers of the Gospel at all times, and, in a degree, of all true believers. It therefore behooves them to pass through the dangers and persecutions, through the trials and distresses of the world, with their eyes fixed upon the heavenly glory which is promised them as a reward of mercy, in their Redeemer, Jesus Christ. It is worth while to notice also in this section how the enthusiasm of the apostle carries him forward on a wave of eloquence: “When Paul’s heart was all ablaze with passion, as in Second

Corinthians, he did pile up participles like boulders on a mountainside, a sort of volcanic eruption.... But there is always a path through these participles. Paul would not let himself be caught in a net of mere grammatical niceties. If necessary, he broke the rule and went on. But Moulton is right in saying that all this is 'more a matter of style than of grammar.' It is rhetoric." (Kretzmann)

6:11–13† Paul has always been completely open and sincere in his relations with the Christians in Corinth (cf. 1:12–14; 4:2), but the false apostles among them have been trying to persuade them that Paul does not really love them. Now the apostle tenderly appeals to these Corinthians, who are the beneficiaries of his love for them. (CSB)

6:11-13 The enthusiasm of the inspired writer has carried him forward to a wonderful height of eloquence in picturing true faithfulness in the ministry of the Gospel. Before making the application of the appeal of v.1 to the various relations of life, therefore, the apostle here pours forth some of the affectionate feeling which he cannot hide from them: Our mouth is open to you, O Corinthians; our heart is enlarged. He feels constrained to speak openly and without reserve to them; for it is his love which causes him to speak with such plain candor and frankness, which will not suffer him to remain silent, but urges him to show such confidence toward them. A similar thought is contained in the thought of the enlargement of his heart in their behalf, for the expression indicates the widening of his sympathy for them. In speaking to them so frankly, Paul had really become aware of the depth and extent of his affection for them. (Kretzmann)

6:11 *our heart is wide open.* Paul's work with them was motivated by great love (cf 11:2; Php 1:7; 1Th 2:5–9), unlike the false apostles who cared more for themselves (11:11–14). (TLSB)

6:12 Paul was unrestrained in his love for the Corinthians. If there was any distance between them, it was due to their hearts being restricted toward him. (TLSB)

6:13 *as to children.* Paul's appeal to them is as a loving father (1Co 4:15). (TLSB)

widen your hearts. Paul, in appealing to their hearts, is not simply calling them back to himself. He is calling them back to Christ, who can make His light shine in their hearts (4:6). Restored to Jesus, their hearts could again be wide open to Paul. (TLSB)

5:11–6:13 Christ's love compels Paul to persevere through all hardships to make God's offer of forgiveness and reconciliation plain to the people at Corinth. Too often we mute the Gospel's power because of our pride, our carelessness, or our lack of concern for others. No greater honor can be given us than to be His ambassadors, His spokespeople. He not only saves us but also works through us. • What an honor to be Your ambassador, dear Lord! Continue to deepen our understanding of Your great reconciliation of the world in Christ so we might heartily revel in it with others. Amen. (TLSB)

Do Not Be Yoked With Unbelievers

¹⁴ Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with

darkness? ¹⁵ What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.” ¹⁷ “Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.” ¹⁸ “I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”

6:14–7:1 Paul refocuses the Corinthian congregation on God’s gracious reconciliation in Christ. He entreats them not only to see the greatness of the ministry of forgiveness but also to see the blessing of his apostolic, servant ministry to them in Christ’s name. Now is the time for them to stand firm in this alone. To stand in Christ is to reject the false teachers. (TLSB)

6:14 *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers.* Doubtless Paul has in mind the OT prohibition of “mixtures” as in Dt 22:10. For the Corinthian believers to cooperate with false teachers, who are in reality servants of Satan, notwithstanding their charming and persuasive ways (see notes on 11:13–14), is to become unequally yoked, destroying the harmony and fellowship that unite them in Christ. (CSB)

In a mismatched pair, as when a donkey and an ox are used together for plowing (Dt 22:10), the larger animal walks at a different pace than the smaller one. As a result, the driving is erratic and dangerous. (TLSB)

righteousness with lawlessness. These have no partnership or fellowship Paul warns the Corinthians of the danger of being intimately connected to the false teaching of the counterfeit apostles, which can only destroy their relationship to Jesus and to one another. “Under the title and excuse of outward adiaphora, things are proposed that are in principle contrary to God’s Word, although painted another color. These ceremonies are not to be regarded as adiaphora, in which one is free to do as he wants. They must be avoided as things prohibited by God” (FC SD X 5). (TLSB)

6:15–16a Paul’s nuances contrast the things of God with those things outside of Christ. To treat the message of Jesus as merely another hopeful human message is to receive it in vain (v 1). (TLSB)

accord. Common ground, harmony. (TLSB)

6:15 *Belial.* A term (from Hebrew) used to designate Satan (see note on Dt 13:13). (CSB)

Hbr for “wicked” or “worthless”; a title for Satan. (TLSB)

6:16 *agreement ... between the temple of God and idols.* There can be no reversion to or compromise with the idolatry they have forsaken for the gospel (cf. 1Th 1:9). (CSB)

temple of the living God. Built of “living stones,” namely, Christian believers (1Pe 2:5); therefore it is all the more important that they form no defiling and unholy alliances (cf. 1Co 6:19–20). (CSB)

temple. Gk *naos*, the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, where God dwelled among His people (cf Lk 1:21–22; Rv 11:19). Jesus became the clearest expression of God’s redeeming presence as He made His tabernacle among us (cf Jn 1:14, 18). (TLSB)

the living God. Alive and life-giving. The idols are dead things; to be connected to them is to be disconnected from the life that only God can give (cf Jn 14:6; Ac 17:28). (TLSB)

6:16b–18 Paul applies OT themes to the Corinthians, namely, that God is graciously present among His people for their salvation (cf Ex 19:4–5; 33:13–19) and that His people are to be separated unto Him not only for themselves but as witnesses to those who do not believe (cf Gn 12:1–3; Lv 20:24–26; 1Pt 2:9). (TLSB)