

Believers Should Not Offend or be Unequally Yoked With Unbelievers

2 Corinthians 6

2 Corinthians 6: We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. 2 For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. 3 We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. 4 But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, 5 in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; 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, 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. 11 O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you; our heart is wide open. 12 You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections. 13 Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open. 14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 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." 17 Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

Background Notes

What did the apostle mean by, we "plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain?" Did he mean that the Corinthians could lose their salvation? Well, he couldn't have meant that, because that would contradict other Scriptures that teach the eternal security of the believer.

Did Paul mean that a some people in the Corinthian church were not true believers, because they had followed the false teaching of the Judaizers who had penetrated the church at Corinth? That's a possibility. But let me suggest to you another interpretation, one that is held by a number of good commentaries on 2 Corinthians.

In this view, verses 1-2 should have been part of chapter 5. Remember, there were no chapter divisions in the original letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians! And verse 1-2 seem to be part of the message of reconciliation that began in chapter 5, verse 20.

The great truth that we have been reconciled to God is presented at the end of chapter 5.

We have forgiveness of our sins, and in addition, we're reconciled to God. We've been brought into a wonderful and harmonious relationship of friendship and fellowship with God! *"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, 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 Corinthians 5:18-19).

Now that we're believers, God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. What is our message of reconciliation? In this view, the message we preach is found in 5:20-21 and in 6:1-2. So 6:1-2 is not saying that the Corinthian *Christians* were in danger of receiving the grace of God in vain. No! In this view, it is part of the message of reconciliation that we preach to unbelievers who need to be reconciled to God: "We don't want you to hear our message of the grace of God in vain. We want you to be saved!"

In verse 2, Paul quoted from Isaiah 49:8. In the context of Isaiah 49, this is a prophecy of the resurrection of the future Messiah who would be rejected by Israel. So, Paul said, that day has come, because Christ has been resurrected - and this is now part of our message of reconciliation. *"Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation."*

I trust that that this is part of the message that we all share with our unsaved friends and colleagues – NOW is the day of salvation.

Doctrinal Points

1. Believers should not offend unbelievers.

In verses 3-10 Paul moved on from the message of reconciliation to the way that message should be communicated. In communicating the wonderful message of reconciliation to this unbelieving world, we are not to bring discredit on the ministry by offending people.

Notice that the subject here is offending those who are **not believers**. (In this passage Paul is not speaking about stumbling younger or weaker believers). For example, if all your colleagues are unbelievers, don't disrupt the office Christmas party by shouting out, "Everyone here is going to hell unless you come to know Christ and the real meaning of Christmas!" Although that is true, it would be highly offensive. How much better it would be to build friendly relationships with these people, and maybe send each one of them just the right Christmas card that contains the gospel!

Now that's an extreme example. Sometimes it's difficult **not** to offend unbelievers, because the world does not want to hear about Christ. Because of this attitude, committed Christians will experience all the reactions and conditions that Paul described here when they seek to communicate the message of reconciliation. There will be afflictions, hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labor, sleeplessness, and hunger (v 4-5). But in all things we must prove ourselves to be genuine ministers of God by being patient - *in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fasting.*

In chapter 11 we'll see that Paul experienced some of these difficulties in his own life. But in spite of all these hardships, we are to continue in purity, patience, knowledge, kindness, and love (v6) so that we do not offend unbelievers, and so that the ministry is not discredited.

And remember what we have going for us! We have the truth. We have the power of God. We have the Holy Spirit. We have spiritual armor and weapons! *"By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left"*(Ephesians 6:7).

Verses 8-10 remind us that there will always be ups and downs in ministry. *"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."* There will be mountaintops and valleys, honor and dishonor, good reports and bad reports, one day labeled as having the truth and the next day being labeled as a deceiver. That's the way it goes in the ministry.

When I was working with teenagers in the Young Life ministry, I was honored by some unbelieving parents - and I was despised and attacked by other unbelieving parents - all in the same day! Put down - but not put out. Sorrowing and rejoicing - at the same time. Not having much in this world - but an heir of Heaven! That's the way it is in the ministry, so expect it to be this way. Don't complain, and don't do anything to discredit the ministry of the gospel. Believers should not offend unbelievers.

2. Believers should not be yoked together with unbelievers.

Verse 14 obviously applies to the unequal "yoking together" of a believer and an unbeliever in marriage. However, this teaching also applies to business partnerships and fraternal organizations – in fact, it applies to **any** close relationships in which you make personal commitments that would require you to compromise in your faith.

Why is this separation so important? The next verses tell us. It is because there are two camps, or realms, or kingdoms. They are opposed to each another, and there is no middle ground! Even though you might think (wrongly) that you can

find some neutral ground, there is no common ground between these two camps. The believer is in Christ's kingdom; the unbeliever is in Satan's kingdom. One kingdom is righteousness and life; the other kingdom is unrighteousness and darkness. You cannot be in Christ's kingdom and be yoked with someone in the kingdom of darkness. It's unthinkable, and unworkable - and wrong.

Paul had already covered the situation of marriage between a believer and an unbeliever in 1 Corinthians 7. Probably in most of the 1 Corinthians cases, salvation took place after the couple was married. Paul taught that there should not be divorce in these "mixed" marriages. However, unmarried believers should **not** marry unbelievers.

In verses 16-18 Paul quoted Old Testament Scriptures, and exhorted all believers to separate from the evil of this world. Notice that he was not teaching *isolation from unbelievers*. It is teaching *separation from the evil* of this world.

These verses should certainly help us to determine what we do and what we see and what we read for entertainment. Believers should not be yoked together with unbelievers.

Practical Application

Let's put the ball in our fellow believer's court!

"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. Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open"(v11-13).

Paul assured the Corinthians that even though he had to rebuke them and exhort them because of their problems, he still loved them – just as he always had! He was like a parent to them, and they were like his children. Just as barriers to happy fellowship between children and good parents generally occur because of the children's behavior, so Paul said that if there were any barriers to their fellowship, it was on their side – not his!

Paul's heart was open to them. He held no grudges. The ball was in their court.

This is a good practice for us to do as well. Let's do everything we can to settle differences we may have with fellow believers. If we make the first move towards reconciliation, it will then be up to the other believer to respond. So - let's put the ball in our fellow believer's court!