

AF A9 BIBLE STUDY: II Corinthians 6

Scripture of Lesson: II Corinthians 6: 1-18

In this chapter the apostle Paul guidelines and encouragements for the ministry of Christ and for Christians in continuation to the “ministry of reconciliation,” mentioned in the previous chapter.

1. Paul’s testimony on the ministry of the gospel of Christ: 1-10

To the apostle Paul the ministry of the gospel of Christ was a very serious responsibility. The Lord had selected the twelve disciples and sent them out on a short-term mission during His earthly ministry [Matt 10, Luke 9]. Later he sent out 70 evangelists similarly. Each time He gave guidelines on how to carry out the mission. After His resurrection, the Lord gave the Great Commission to His disciples to take the gospel to the ends of the world [Matt 28:19-20, Mark 16:15-16]. Paul was not a Christian and, therefore, was not present in any of these training and commissioning events. In today’s military expression, Paul did not attend the Lord’s ministerial academy of three years and was not commissioned as a pro-forma disciple. However, the Lord selected Saul of Tarsus as a special servant and had him go through a special training period to be taught of God’s instructions necessary for the responsibility as the evangelist for the Gentiles. We looked into the early years of Paul before he started in the ministry work in I Corinthians 15, so we will not repeat it here.

In chapters 4, 5 and 6 Paul writes about the ministry of the gospel of Christ of which he is a part. His statements form his testimony as a partaker of this ministry. In verse 4:1, he says “we have this ministry, as we have received mercy.” Formerly, he was an enemy of God, but now he has the privilege as a servant of God. And this came about because of God’s mercy towards him. So in verse 4:11, he bears in his body “the dying of the Lord Jesus so that the life of Jesus might be made manifest in his body.” In verse 5:19 he writes “God committed unto us the word of reconciliation,” which he calls the ‘ministry of reconciliation.’

It is very striking that in verse 6:1, Paul writes, “We are workers together with Him...” In other words, he considers himself as a “coworker of God.” He claims he works together with God because he is “yoked with Christ.” In Matt 11: 29-30, Jesus taught His disciples, “*Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.*” Paul took upon the yoke of Christ over his shoulders so that each step he takes is in step with the step of Christ, as guided by the Holy Spirit. As he learns to walk with God, he finds the yoke not too difficult to bear because he is conscious of the One who walks besides him.

In verse 6:2, he quotes the prophecy of Isaiah on the ministry of Christ as follows:

*Indeed He says,
‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,
And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’” [Isiah 49:6]*

*Thus says the Lord: “In an acceptable time I have heard You,
And in the day of salvation I have helped You;
I will preserve You and give You
As a covenant to the people,
To restore the earth,
To cause them to inherit the desolate heritages [Isaiah 49:8]*

When Paul quoted Isaiah 49:8, he was also aware of Isaiah 49:6, which speaks of the Messiah's mission to be "a light to the Gentiles and God's salvation to the ends of the earth." Paul was acutely aware that this mission of the Messiah Jesus was assigned to him. And that is why he is a co-worker with Christ. Verse 49:8 speaks of the evangelical mission to declare "the covenant of God to the people, to restore the whole world and to take possession as inheritance the depraved, desolate world as heritages" so that the work of restoration could be performed on them. Paul considered it a great privilege to be a partaker in this great work of God. He used to be an enemy of God who persecuted Jesus. But this mission was given to him in God's great mercy towards him. And it was only right for him to give his whole self so that this glorious gospel message is proclaimed and the work of reconciliation and restoration might be achieved by God, and that this depraved, desolate world might be restored as acceptable heritages of God.

Now, in verses 6: 3-10, Paul declares his clear testimony as a minister of this glorious gospel of Christ with the prime motto to "not allow any offence in anything lest the ministry be blamed, but rather strive to be approved as ministers of God," under any circumstances including "much patience, tribulations, needs, distresses, stripes, imprisonments, labors, sleeplessness, and fasting."

Paul cites the following guidelines for achieving this worthy goal:

- Keeping his conduct and life pure and clean morally before God and men,
- Maintain longsuffering despite frequent tribulations,
- Showing the kindness of Christ in his spirit and manners,
- Being under the guidance and control of the Holy Spirit,
- Possessing and demonstrating sincere love as Christ did,
- Being diligent in seeking and speaking the word of truth,
- Trusting on the power of God instead of his own strength and wisdom,
- Seeking to be protected with the armor of God's righteousness from attacks of all directions,
- Appreciating honor from God and enduring dishonor from unbelieving world,
- Not being moved by evil reports and being thankful for good reports,
- Being true to God though wrongfully criticized as deceivers at times,
- Not seeking fame or honor for the gospel's sake, knowing he is well known in heaven,
- Seeking to die in self and yet fully alive before God always,
- Being thankful that his life is spared despite tribulations which seem God's chastening to some,
- Rejoicing always for the great honor of working for and with God in spite of earthly sorrows,
- Being poor materially and yet counting it joy to make many believers rich spiritually,
- Having no earthly possessions and yet enjoying heaven's richness.

What noble goals Paul testifies! Why did Paul feel that he needed to live as he testifies in this chapter? How was the former Saul, who was a haughty, belligerent persecutor of the church, transformed so much to testify of his humble, gladly suffering but true and dedicated workers for Christ? The Lord Jesus taught him and persuaded him that these gentle, humble, dedicated way of evangelism was the only way of shattering the hard callousness of sinners' hearts to draw them to a place of repentance and eventually to the loving arms of God. Though this way of the gospel might be viewed as foolishness to the perishing world, to Paul it is

the power of God that shatters the hardness of sinners' hearts to reach into their core so that God could work miracles in their lives and transform them to be subject to God's control as happened to himself.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. [1 Cor 1:18]

Every Christian minister should examine himself to see how closely he is practicing these guidelines of Paul. Much of the criticisms on Christian churches in today's world arise because the "ministers of God" have forsaken these guidelines and have pursued personal honors, riches and ambitions instead of living only for the sake of the gospel and for Christ Jesus.

2. Holiness for the saints: v. 11-18

In verse 6:13, Paul exhorts the Christians to open their mind towards the ministers because the hearts of the ministers are open towards the believers. Perhaps some of the believers felt their life was being constricted due to their beliefs [v. 12]. It is unfortunate if any Christian thinks his/her life is being restricted and the scope of their life is being narrowed for their profession's sake. Their complaint perhaps came from the church's strong stance against idol worship and restriction of close association with the idol worshippers. Paul exhorts by quoting from the Book of Isaiah;

*Depart! Depart! Go out from there,
Touch no unclean thing;
Go out from the midst of her,
Be clean [Isaiah 52:11]*

God gave the Mosaic Law to the people of Israel so that they would become a holy people unto Him so that the Gentiles could honor and glorify God because of their holiness. When Christians compromise and lose their holiness, it is like a block of salt losing its saltiness and becomes a useless thing [Matt 5:13]. The first of the Ten Commandments is to not make idols nor worship any such idols. The Greek culture in the first century was full of idol worship -- worship of multiple gods of Greek mythology such as Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Artemis, etc. They had built and dedicated temples to these gods and worshipped them almost daily. For the Christians in Greece keeping themselves away from such idol worship and not associating with the idol worshippers was a challenge. So they must have felt their lives were being restricted by the Christian ordinance against idol worship.

In verse 6:14, Paul exhorts the Christians "not to be yoked with unbelievers." While he was yoked with Christ in his work of the ministry of the gospel, Paul is teaching the saints not to be yoked with unbelievers. What does he mean by "being yoked with unbelievers"? And how does this injunction apply to the Christian life in the modern world? Being yoked together with someone implies close personal/ business ties of the following nature:

1) Having a common set of goals in life and pursuits so that one's life is integrally tied with an unbeliever so that the values of the Christian come in conflict with those of the unbeliever on a daily basis, thus robbing peace of God from him;

2) The impurities of the unbeliever's life gradually permeate and affect the spiritual and natural life of the Christian so that the Christian is drawn away from God and gradually lose the joy of salvation.

Paul is concerned about such effects and thus exhorts them to keep themselves apart from the unbelievers, particularly the idol worship culture. We cannot live apart from this world but we must put a safe distance from unbelieving colleagues, relatives, friends and neighbors so as to keep us holy before God.

Discussion topics:

- 1. If you are in a church ministry, which of Paul's guidelines apply to you and how well are you keeping it?*
- 2. How does Paul's exhortation about yoke with unbelievers apply to Christian lives today? Have you had situations where this advice could have been applied?*