

AFTER ALL I'VE DONE FOR YOU 2 CORINTHIANS 6:3-7:1

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This section of 2 Corinthians teaches that Christians should remember that even the difficult requirements of Scripture arise from Christ's love for us.

PAUL'S CREDIBILITY (6:3-10)

In defense of his ministry, the apostle presented a list of hardships he had suffered which no one who knew the facts could dispute. His suffering testified to his credibility.

A Ministry Beyond Discrediting (6:3-4a)

6:3. Paul straightforwardly introduced his main idea. He and his company had **put no stumbling block in anyone's path**. The NIV translation **stumbling block** is unfortunate because it seems to contradict Paul's insistence that the preaching of Christ's death is "a stumbling block (*skandalon*) to the Jews" (1 Cor. 1:23). The Greek expression of this verse (*proskope*) and may be better translated "cause for offense" (NASB). In fact, the grammatical structure of this passage is quite emphatic. Paul gave no offense **in anyone's path** or "in anything" (NASB). He had been very careful to allow no one the right to be offended by his ministry.

The purpose (**so that**) of Paul's great care was that his **ministry might not be discredited**. Paul wisely knew that many would distrust the truth, even the truth of the gospel, when a minister's life does not conform to that truth. Christian ministry is not merely a matter of speaking the truth, but also of living the truth. Paul was careful not to live hypocritically.

6:4a. Humbly but boldly, Paul asserted that his life was an open book. He and his company spoke **as servants of God**; their successes were mere services to God. They did not commend themselves self-confidently or arrogantly, yet they could categorically **commend** their actions **in every way**. Paul knew that he had not been perfect. Perfection does not come to believers in this life (Phil. 1:6; 3:12-14; 1 John 1:8-10). Yet, in general or broad terms, no major faults appeared in Paul's ministry on Christ's behalf. He had been faithful to his calling (Phil. 3:15-17; 1 Thess. 1:5-7; 2 Tim. 4:7).

Paul's Exemplary Ministry (6:4b-10)

Paul explained that he did not hesitate to commend his ministry because he and his

company had faithfully ministered at great cost in many different ways. Paul reminded the Corinthians of his faithfulness in a lengthy list of twenty-eight items. Different commentators have attempted to identify intricate arrangements for these materials, but we will merely suggest that this list divides into three sections: difficulties faced (6:4b-5), faithful responses (6:6-7), and contrasting results (6:8-10).

6:4b. Paul and his company did not have an easy ministry. At every turn they faced difficulties of great proportions. Paul described these difficulties with ten phrases. He began with a general description of his ministry as one of **great endurance**. The Greek word for “endurance” here is *hypomone*, which is often translated “perseverance.” It generally refers to facing and overcoming hardship successfully (compare Luke 8:15; 21:19; Rom. 5:3-4; 2 Thess. 1:4; 3:5; Heb. 12:1; Jas. 1:3-4; 5:11; 1 Pet. 1:6; Rev. 2:2-3,19). In short, Paul did not give up in the struggles of his ministry.

What were these struggles? Three broad terms head the list: **troubles** (“afflictions” NASB, NRSV); **hardships**; and **distresses** (“calamities” NRSV). It is difficult to know if Paul had specific experiences in mind for each of these terms — the terms are as general in Greek as they are in English. Paul’s point, however, was clear: he had faced all kinds of difficulties in his ministry. **Troubles** (*thlipsis*) is the same word Paul used to describe his **hardships ... in the province of Asia** (1:8), as well as the **distress** in writing his sorrowful letter to the Corinthians (2:4). He also used this word to summarize the **troubles** that caused him outwardly to waste away (4:16-17). The word translated **hardships** (*anagke*) frequently means “compulsion” or “necessity.” Here, he may have intended to highlight difficulties that compelled certain courses of action. For example, he used it to speak of the **present crisis** in 1 Corinthians 7:26, probably a famine, that compelled a moratorium on weddings. In 2 Corinthians 12:10, however, it seems to suggest a circumstance in which personal weakness is manifested. **Distresses** (*stenochoria*) appears only four times in the New Testament, and in general contexts, ranging from God’s judgment against sinners (Rom. 2:9) to personal weakness (2 Cor. 12:10). These general descriptions characterize the lives of many ministers of the gospel, who must remain faithful as their lives are filled with trouble, hardship and distress.

6:5. Next, Paul spoke more specifically of troubles he had faced as a minister of the gospel. He had endured **beatings** (*plege*), as in Philippi (Acts 16:23) and on many other occasions (2 Cor. 11:23-25). Through *plege* and many synonymous terms, the Bible records that Paul, other apostles, and their companies underwent beatings on many occasions (Acts 5:40; 18:17; 21:32; 22:19), just as Jesus said would happen (Mark 13:9). Physical punishment marked their ministries, just as it had marked Christ’s ministry.

Paul also endured **imprisonments** (*phulake*). Luke records that Paul was imprisoned twice because of his gospel ministry (Acts 16:23-36; 21:30—28:31), the second time for many years.

Riots (*akatastasia*) probably refers to outbreaks of crowds against Paul. A number of such uprisings took place as he traveled (Acts 16:22; 17:5; 19:23-40; 21:35). Unbelieving Jews frequently instigated the public outbursts that threatened the safety of the apostle and his company (Acts 9:23; 13:50; 14:2-6,19; 17:5,13; 18:14-17; 20:3; 21:27-31; 23:12; 2 Cor. 11:24,26).

Paul endured **hard work** (“labors” NASB, NRSV) too. It is difficult to know if this terminology describes his ministry *per se*, or the work he often did to support himself. The apostle not only preached and taught, but also worked as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3; compare 1 Cor. 4:12; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8).

Paul also spoke of **sleepless nights**. We do not know of specific times when Paul did not sleep, though he probably did not sleep during his “night and a day” on the open sea (he was apparently adrift in the water; 2 Cor. 11:25). It is also possible that he did not sleep when he was fleeing at night (Acts 9:25; 17:10), or when he was cold and hungry (2 Cor. 11:27). Much of his work as a tentmaker may also have been done at night (1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8).

Finally, Paul asserted that he went through times of **hunger**. On a number of occasions, Paul spoke of lacking food (1 Cor 4:11; 2 Cor. 11:27; Phil. 4:12). This was not due to lack of faith or to failure to seek God’s kingdom first (Matt. 6:33). Rather, Paul and others suffered in the course of seeking and serving the kingdom (2 Cor. 1:5; 1 Pet. 4:13), just as Jesus said would happen to his servants (Matt. 23:34; Luke 21:12; John 15:19-21).

6:6-7a. Paul did not merely put up with the troubles God brought his way. He responded with positive faithfulness, which he described in nine categories. The first eight (6:6-7a) are introduced by the preposition “in” (*en*) to indicate accompanying conditions within which he faced difficulties. The final set (6:7b) is introduced by the preposition **with** (*dia*), which often denotes the means through which something is accomplished.

Paul first said that he faced trouble **in purity**. Related forms of this term appear only ten other times in the New Testament (2 Cor. 7:11; 11:2,3; Phil. 1:17; 4:8; 1 Tim. 5:22; Tit. 2:5; Jam. 3:17; 1 Pet. 3:2; 1 John 3:3). These terms describes purity of many sorts, including fidelity to Christ, sexual chastity, innocence from guilt, and honesty. Despite his hardships, Paul did not fall prey to these types of moral impurity.

He also faced difficulties in his ministry with **understanding**. This term (*gnosis*) does not refer to being sympathetic or understanding toward others. The expression is usually translated “knowledge” (NASB, NRSV, NKJV; compare 1 Cor. 1:5; 8:1,10,11; 12:8; 13:2,8; 14:6; 2 Cor. 2:14; 4:6; 8:7; 10:5; 11:6 in the NIV). Here Paul has in mind that he never forsook the knowledge of Christ and the gospel during his ministry. In fact, Paul’s knowledge of Christ allowed him to understand his afflictions as an honorable service to Christ (2 Cor. 1:5-7; Phil. 1:29-30; 2:17; 3:8-10; Col. 1:24; 2 Tim.

1:8,12; 2:3,8-9).

Patience also characterized Paul's ministry. He was patient in circumstances (2 Tim. 3:10) and with the people to whom he ministered (Acts 20:31; 2 Cor. 1:23). Patience is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) that causes us to refrain from inappropriately hasty retaliations for wrongs done against us (2 Tim. 2:24). Jesus himself demonstrated patience with his apostles (John 14:8-11; 20:24-27) as well as his enemies (Matt. 26:48-50; Luke 23:34).

Paul frequently exercised much **kindness** as he spread the gospel of Christ. This term is closely associated with other concepts that suggest a pleasing, tender and compassionate demeanor (Rom. 2:4; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 2:7; Col. 3:12; Tit. 3:4). To be sure, there were times when Paul knew that kindness required harsh insistence (1 Cor. 11:17-34; 15:33-34), but even at these times his motivations were to demonstrate kindness.

Paul also insisted that his ministry was **in the Holy Spirit**. Because other elements in this list focus on attitudes and emotional dimensions of Paul's life, some interpreters understand Paul to mean "with a holy spirit," that is, his own spirit has been holy ("holiness of spirit" NRSV). Some have suggested that the lack of the definite article ("the") in Greek supports this reading. In point of fact, however, Paul usually left out the definite article when referring to the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5; 9:1; 14:17; 15:13,16; 1 Cor. 6:19; 12:3; 2 Cor. 6:6; 1 Thess. 1:5,6; 2 Tim. 1:14; Tit. 3:5; contrast 2 Cor. 13:13; Eph. 1:13; 4:30; 1 Thess. 4:8). Whatever the case, we know that any holiness Paul experienced in his own spirit was the work of the Holy Spirit. So the distinction is largely moot. If Paul referred to the Holy Spirit (NIV, NASB), then he may have in mind the various manifestations of the Spirit that appeared in his life.

Paul added that he also served in difficulties with a motivation of **sincere love** (6:6). The apostle considered love to be the greatest gift of the Spirit (1 Cor. 13:13). He not only defined it earlier for the Corinthians (1 Cor. 13:4-7), but here asserted that loving affection characterized his own ministry. Even so, Paul knew that it was easy to pretend to love others. So, he added that his love was **sincere**. His love was not a cover for other detrimental motivations (Rom. 12:19; 1 Tim. 1:5; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 John 2:5; 3:18).

Truthful speech (6:6) also characterized Paul's ministry. In this epistle, Paul frequently distinguished his preaching from others as truthful (4:2; 7:14; 12:6; 13:8). It seems best to understand his purpose here in much the same way. He did not teach falsehoods, as tempting as they may have been at times. He taught only truth, even in difficult circumstances.

Paul's reference to his preaching the truth brought to his mind the accompanying **power of God** (6:6). Elsewhere Paul insisted that he preached not with mere human strength, but enhanced by displays of God's power (1 Cor. 2:4). The Holy Spirit accompanied Paul's preaching, regenerating hearts, gifting believers, and performing

miracles. The confirmation of divine power showed that Paul's teaching was derived from God himself.

6:7b. Paul closed his list of his positive reactions to the trials of ministry with a final qualifying remark. All that he had done was **with weapons of righteousness** (6:7b). The allusion to weaponry recalls the well-known passages where Paul describes the Christian life as a spiritual battle (Rom. 13:12; 2 Cor. 10:4; Eph. 6:13-18; 1 Thess. 5:8). The expression "**of righteousness**" may be purposefully ambiguous to allow for two connotations: 1) weapons that produce righteousness; and 2) weapons that derive from righteous living. Spiritual weapons are explained in more detail in Ephesians 6:13-18. Here they are merely spoken of as **in the right hand and in the left**, probably indicating shield (defensive) and sword (offensive). In all events, Paul closed this section with a military metaphor to indicate the strength of his determination and the power by which he overcame the troubles of his ministry. He went into ministry as a soldier into battle, but not in his own strength. He moved forward as a soldier of righteousness in the army equipped and empowered by God himself.

6:8-9a. Until this point Paul was so positive about his reaction to ministry that we might expect him to continue in this vein. Yet, Paul closed this section Paul by merging the themes of his list of difficulties (6:4b-5) with his list of positive responses (6:6-7), assessing his work realistically (6:8-10). Because his ministry was a mixture of difficulties and positive responses, he described it in a series of paired contrasts.

Paul began with four closely related sets of contrasts. Some translations render these verses as ironic statements (NEB, REB). These translations differ only in form; the same ideas are conveyed as in the NIV. Paul's ministry was one of **glory and dishonor**, that is, **bad report and good report**. Paul's experience was similar to every person of notoriety. Some people honored him for his work while others despised him. At this point he was concerned especially with his treatment by the Corinthians. Some in the church greatly appreciated his ministry (1 Cor. 1:12,13; 3:4; 16:15-18), but others slandered and challenged him (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4; 4:3-5,10-13,18-19; 9:1-12; 2 Cor. 10:10; 11:7). Of course, in the end Paul would receive much honor from God for his ministry, but in this life his experience was mixed.

The apostle continued to focus on how others dishonored him by saying that he and his company were **genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known yet regarded as unknown**. In this and a number of other passages, Paul defended the sincerity of his motivations (1 Cor. 2:1-5; 4:5,14; 15:32; 2 Cor. 1:6; 2:4; 11:2-3,10-13; 12:14-15). Contrary to the accusations, he was genuinely concerned for the Corinthian church. He should not have had to defend himself in this way because he was **known** by them (1 Cor. 9:1). Yet, despite their first-hand familiarity with the apostle, they treated him with suspicion normally reserved for a stranger.

6:9b. Paul turned next to several descriptions of his ministry from a broader perspective, moving away from things the Corinthians themselves were bringing to his

life. First, he spoke of **dying and yet** living on. The record of Acts tells us that Paul came near to death many times in his service to Christ (Acts 14:19; 16:22-24; 21:31). Undoubtedly, similar events happened to the apostle and his company beyond those recorded. Yet, despite the constant experience of dying, Paul affirmed that they **live[d] on**. By God's grace they received the blessing of continuing to live despite the difficulties they faced.

Second, they were **beaten, and yet not killed**. At least two points of view may be taken toward these words. On the one hand, it is possible that the apostle alluded to Psalm 118:18. If so, **beaten** ("punished" NASB, NRSV) would refer to God's discipline in Paul's life (Prov. 13:24; Heb. 12:5-11). On the other hand, in light of the immediate context it seems more likely that Paul referred to the physical beatings he received at the hands of crowds and officials as he proclaimed the gospel (Acts 14:19; 16:22-23; 2 Cor. 11:23-27). Needless to say, the apostle may also have thought of divine discipline and physical beatings as one and the same. Whatever the case, Paul reminded the Corinthians of these difficulties in his life, and of how he faithfully endured them so that he was **not killed**.

6:10. Paul's final descriptions of the mixed results of his ministry stand above the others in their paradoxical nature. He pairs experiences that seem impossible to hold together. He was **sorrowful, yet always rejoicing**. Paul did not hesitate to admit that his life was full of sorrow (Acts 20:19,23,29-31; Rom. 9:2; 2 Cor. 1:4-8; 2:4; Phil. 3:18). At the same time, however, Paul did not utterly despair as he endured his sorrows. His hope in Christ caused him to be **always rejoicing** (Phil. 2:17; Col. 1:24). Paul encouraged the same attitude in others as well (Rom. 5:3-5; Phil. 2:18; 3:1; 4:4; 1 Thess. 5:16). These and similar statements did not suggest that faithful believers should be in a constant state of rejoicing (Rom. 12:15). Such a condition did not hold even for Jesus (Luke 19:41; John 11:35). Yet, the lives of faithful followers of Christ will be characterized by times of joy as they not only experience God's blessing but remember his eternal goodness even in times of sorrow.

6:10b. Moreover, Paul declared that though he was **poor** he was **making many rich**. His apostolic ministry had deprived him of many economic advantages. As he traveled in the service of Christ, he depended on gifts and his avocation as a tent-maker (Acts 18:3, 20:34-35; 1 Cor. 4:11; 9:11-15; 2 Cor. 11:8-9; Phil. 4:16; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 3:8). This economic deprivation, however, had a positive side to it. Paul did not suffer poverty for poverty's sake. Through his deprivation, Paul was making others rich in the blessings of Christ. Paul spoke similarly of Christ himself in 8:9. The poverty of Christ and his apostles made it possible for the riches of the New Heavens and New Earth to belong to everyone who followed Christ (1 Cor. 1:5; 3:21-23; Gal. 3:29; Jam. 2:5).

6:10c. Finally, Paul reflected in broad terms on the paradoxical character of his entire life, saying that he was **having nothing, and yet possessing everything**. From the preceding context, his meaning is plain. In terms of this world, Paul had practically nothing. He had lost his home, family, friends, religious standing, livelihood, etc. Those

things of this world that he had possessed were of little importance to him (Acts 20:33-35; Gal. 1:13-14; Phil. 3:5-8; 4:11-12). Even so, Paul had his eyes set on the wondrous future promised to every believer (Matt. 6:20-21; Luke 12:33-34; Rom. 5:17; 8:18; 1 Cor. 4:8; Eph. 1:13-14; 2 Tim. 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:3-4; Rev. 5:10; 22:5). In this expression, Paul applied to himself what he had already said about other believers. He was a co-heir with Christ as well (Rom. 8:17).

AN APPEAL FROM THE HEART (6:11-13)

6:11-13. Paul explained why he had described his difficult but exemplary ministry. He was appealing to their hearts, their affections for him and his company. The tenderness of this section appears in the way the apostle addressed his readers, first by name (**you, Corinthians**) and second as “**my children.**” He hoped that the reminder of his sacrificial ministry would draw out the Corinthians’ affection for him.

Paul appealed to his readers to consider a **fair exchange**. On the one hand, he and his company had just **spoken freely** without self-protection, had **opened wide** their **hearts** in full exposure of the positives and negatives of their ministry, and had not withheld their **affection** toward the Corinthians. In other words, Paul had been more than honest; he had entrusted the Corinthians with a precious gift: an honest and frank assessment of the good and bad of his life.

On the other hand, Paul felt that the Corinthians were **withholding** their affections from him and his company. They had not admitted their weaknesses as he had; they had not displayed their lives for examination as he had. So, he appealed to them to **open wide** their **hearts also**.

Paul followed this strategy with the Corinthians because he was about to write concerning matters that were difficult for them to accept. Instead of demanding conformity to righteousness with threats and intimidation, he openly displayed the positive and negative aspects of his life to encourage them to do the same. Many instructions in righteousness can be received only in the context of trust and affection. Paul knew this was true for the Corinthians in the matters he was about to address.

SEPARATION FROM UNBELIEVERS (6:14-7:1)

For what teaching did Paul so carefully prepare the Corinthians? He challenged them to separate themselves from the influences of the unbelieving world. In their culture followers of Christ were a small minority, so separation from the world was very inconvenient, if not nearly impossible. Yet, Paul warned of the dangers of associating too closely with the unbelieving world, and insisted that the Corinthians should reexamine their relationships with the world.

Admonition To Separation (6:14a)

6:14a. Paul's difficult instruction was that believers should **not be yoked together with unbelievers**. The NIV translation obscures the meaning of the original language. As the NRSV and NKJV suggest, Paul insisted that believers should not be "unequally yoked" (NKJV) or "mismatched" (NRSV). Paul probably alluded to Deuteronomy 22:10 (compare Lev. 19:19), which prohibited the yoking together of oxen and donkeys. Like many other Mosaic laws which may seem odd to us today, this prohibition taught Israel through symbolism that they were to remain pure by separating themselves from the surrounding Gentile nations. Paul used this law in much the same way here.

It is common for Christians to apply Paul's instruction here to marriages and close business associations between believers and unbelievers. No doubt, Paul taught against marrying outside the Faith (1 Cor. 7:39; 9:5), and wisdom should be exercised in all business relationships. Yet, in this passage Paul focused on all associations with unbelievers that led to infidelity to Christ, particularly by involvement with pagan rituals and idol worship. Paul wanted the Corinthian believers to separate themselves from these practices.

Justification For Separation (6:14b-18)

Next, Paul supported (**for**) his admonition to separate by asking five rhetorical questions to which he expected the response, "nothing."

6:14b. The first question raised the issue of what **righteousness and wickedness have in common**. Paul did not speak here of righteous and wicked people, but of **righteousness** and **wickedness** as abstract principles. He did this to make the answer to his question as obvious as possible. In abstraction, righteousness and wickedness have nothing in common.

We must be careful not to over-read Paul's words here. Although Paul spoke of believers as the "righteousness of God" because of Christ's substitutionary death (5:21), he knew that believers did not perfectly demonstrate this righteousness in their lives.

6:14c. Paul's second question focused on **fellowship** between **light** and **darkness**. In Paul's writings "**fellowship**" (*koinonia*) frequently describes believers' spiritual union with Christ, and the consequent union believers share with each other in Christ. It is clear from this expression that Paul had in mind religious and spiritual connections between believers and unbelievers, not natural or social connections.

The New Testament frequently speaks of believers in association with the light of Christ (Matt. 5:14-16; Luke 16:8; John 1:4-9; 3:19-21; 5:35; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35-36,46; Acts 26:18,23; Rom. 13:12; 2 Cor. 4:4,6; Eph. 5:8,9,13; Col. 1:12; 1 Thess. 5:5; 2 Tim. 1:10; 1 John 1:5-7; 2:8-10). By contrast, unbelievers remain in the darkness of sin (Luke 22:53; John 3:19; 8:12; 12:35,46; Acts 26:18; Rom. 2:19; 13:12; Eph. 5:8,11; 6:12; Col.

1:13; 1 Pet. 2:9; 1 John 1:5,6; 2:8-11). Here Paul argues from an analogy in nature that just as **light** and **darkness** are opposites, so Christians and non-Christians are spiritual opposites.

6:15a. The apostle's third question concerned the absence of **harmony ... between Christ and Belial**. As the English translation "harmony" suggests, Paul used a musical metaphor (*symphonesis*). He expected the Corinthians to remember that only cacophony occurred between believers and unbelievers in religious matters. The term "**Belial**" (*Beliar*) appears in a number of Intertestamental writings as a personification of Satan, the chief of evil spirits. Here Paul spoke of Christ and Satan as metonymies of believers and unbelievers. In principle believers and unbelievers should have no more in common than Christ and Satan themselves.

6:15b. Before this point Paul had spoken abstractly, metaphorically, and indirectly, but here he spoke openly about **a believer** and an **unbeliever**, saying that they have no part with each other ("what does a believer share with an unbeliever?" NRSV; "what part has a believer with an unbeliever?" NKJV). Again, the context makes it plain that Paul had in mind the religious and spiritual incompatibility of believers and unbelievers, not normal social contacts.

6:16. Paul turned to speak of believers and unbelievers as **the temple of God** and **the temple of ... idols**. This manner of speaking summed up Paul's outlooks so well that he elaborated on it for the next two verses (6:17-18). His lengthy attention to this matter suggests strongly that his chief concern throughout this passage was the Corinthians' involvement in pagan idolatry.

Paul first clarified (**for**) that believers **are the temple of the living God**. The Old Testament commonly speaks of the God of Israel as **the living God** because he is active and responsive to his people. In this way, God differs dramatically from the dead idols of paganism that can do nothing (Josh. 3:10; Ps. 42:1-5; Jer. 10:10; Dan. 6:20,26; Acts 14:15; Rom. 9:26; 2 Cor. 3:3; 1 Tim. 4:10; Heb. 10:31). The fact that believers are the temples of **the living God** as opposed to that of idols demonstrates plainly why believers must remain separate from the practices of idolatry (compare Acts 15:20,29; 21:25; 1 Cor. 8:3-13; 10:7-10,14-21).

To fill out his assertion, Paul strung together several Old Testament passages illustrating the intimate involvement between the living God and his people. He first alluded to Exodus 25:8 and 29:45 where God said, "**I will live with them.**" The living God does not remain distant from his people. He is personally present among them, thus making the people themselves the temple of God.

Final Exhortation To Holiness (7:1)

7:1. In light of the **promises** given to the church as the temple of God, followers of Christ have a responsibility, which Paul cast in terms of temple cleansing rituals. Paul insisted that the Corinthian believers **cleanse themselves from everything that**

contaminates. The tabernacle instructions of Exodus 30:20-21 are evidently in view here. In the Old Testament, ritual washings symbolized the repentance and re-commitment of worshippers. Paul applied this principle to the Christian life. Although the ritual washings themselves were not to be observed in the New Testament, the inward reality that they symbolized was to be observed.

Note that Paul mentioned **everything**. No defilement is acceptable in the Christian life, however small it may be. In fact, Paul had in mind both **body and spirit** (compare 1 Thess. 5:23). In all likelihood, Paul mentioned the body in light of his discussion of the temptation to religious prostitution (see 1 Cor. 6:16). Corinth was full of opportunities for fleshly defilement that led to the defilement of the inner person. Behavior is not merely external; it corrupts the spirit of a person as well. Therefore, believers may overlook neither the behavior of the body nor the condition of the spirit.

And what is the goal of this cleansing through repentance and renewal? It is to perfect **holiness**. Holiness or separation from the sinful world is a condition given to true believers when they place their faith in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2; 3:17; 6:11; 1 Pet. 2:5,9). Yet, it is also a daily goal of Christian living (2 Tim. 2:21; Heb. 12:14). Paul had the latter sense of holiness in mind here. He stressed the holiness of daily life because the Corinthians continued to turn from faithful living in many ways.

The motivation behind the pursuit of holiness is **reverence for God**. Here Paul reflected the Old Testament teaching that the fear of God is essential to proper living (Exod. 20:20; 2 Chr. 19:7; Neh. 5:9,15; Pss. 19:9; 36:1; 111:10; Prov. 1:7,29; 2:5-6; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:26; 15:16,27,33; 19:23; 22:4; 23:17; 31:30; Eccl. 3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12-13; 12:13). The term “fear” (*phobos, phobeo/phobeomai*), like its Old Testament Hebrew counterpart, may have connotations of dread and repulsion, but it may also have the more positive connotations of proper respect and reverence. The latter sense is in view here. The manifold sins of the Corinthian church made it clear that they did not recognize the danger in which they placed themselves. They needed to reconsider how the God of Scriptures is not to be ignored. They still faced the danger of proving themselves never to have been regenerated and thus headed toward the judgment of God.

DIGGING DEEPER

A. Holy Spirit (6:6)

Interpretation would be much easier had Paul and other New Testament writers distinguished between “the Holy Spirit” and “a holy spirit” or “a spirit of holiness” by using the definite article (“the”) with the former and omitting it with the latter — but this is not what they did.

When referring to the “Holy Spirit,” Paul usually left out the definite article (Rom. 5:5; 9:1; 14:17; 15:13,16; 1 Cor. 6:19; 12:3; 2 Cor. 6:6; 1 Thess. 1:5,6; 2 Tim. 1:14; Tit.

3:5), though he did sometimes include it (2 Cor. 13:13; Eph. 1:13; 4:30; 1 Thess. 4:8). Also, when referring to the Holy Spirit, he sometimes called him merely the “Spirit.” In these cases as well the article is usually absent (1 Cor. 12:3; Eph. 3:5; and perhaps Eph. 6:18 [this latter may not refer to the Holy Spirit; compare 1 Cor. 14:(2,)14,15,16]) rather than present (Rom. 8:27).

Moreover, the entire New Testament reflects this trend with regard to the Greek phrase used in this verse: the dative case of *pneuma hagia* (as opposed to other phrases using the same words but in different order, or in combination with other words). Of the forty-five occurrences in the New Testament in which this phrase (in various cases) refers to the Holy Spirit, not one includes the definite article.

B. Belial (6:15)

“Belial” (“Beliar” NRSV) transliterates the Greek word *beliar*, which in turn transliterates the Hebrew *beliya’al*. *Beliar* appears only this once in the New Testament, and only a few times in some texts of the Septuagint. In the Hebrew Old Testament, the term appears frequently in the construct “son(s)/daughter of Belial” (Deut. 13:14; Judg. 19:22; 20:13; 1 Sam. 1:16; 2:12; 10:27; 25:17; 1 Kgs. 21:10,13; 2 Chr. 13:7;), and many other times apart from this construct (Deut. 15:9; 1 Sam. 25:25; 30:22; 2 Sam. 16:17; 20:1; 22:5; 23:6; Job 34:18; Ps. 18:5; 41:9; 101:3; Prov. 6:12; 16:27; 19:28; Nah. 1:11; 2:1). The Septuagint regularly interprets “son(s)/daughter of Belial” as identifying a scoundrel, rogue or wicked person, perhaps on the assumption that *beliya’al* is wickedness personified. Similarly, it often interprets *beliya’al* apart from this construction as wickedness itself, or as a wicked person.

In the apocryphal *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, however, it seems to be the proper name of the devil. At least portions of the *Testaments* may have been written before A.D. 135. Paul’s use of *beliar* seems to accord best with the occurrences in the *Testaments*, because he contrasts *beliar* with Christ. In the other contrasts (2 Cor. 6:14b-16a), the pairs are diametrically opposed and roughly equivalent: righteousness vs. wickedness; light vs. darkness; believer vs. unbeliever; temple of God vs. idols. This seems to indicate that, since Christ is a person, *beliar* is also a person (though neither human nor divine), namely the devil.

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does this passage flow from Paul’s prior exhortation not to receive God’s grace in vain (6:1)?
2. How is Paul’s defense of his ministry similar to unrighteous boasting? How is it dissimilar?
3. How many of the kinds of hardships Paul suffered have you also suffered? How is the suffering of Christians around the world today similar to Paul’s hardships? Why

should/shouldn't Christians take an interest in easing the suffering of other Christians?

4. What benefits are there to suffering? What attitudes should Christians maintain toward suffering and in the midst of suffering?
5. Describe your own life realistically, weighing your hardships against the blessings you receive. How positive is your outlook relative to the difficulties you face? How does your outlook compare to Paul's?
6. What does it mean to be yoked together with unbelievers? Why can this be dangerous? In what ways are you yoked together with unbelievers? How do these relationships tempt you to forsake Christ?
7. What does it mean to separate from unbelievers? How radical must this separation be? What negative results might come from such separation?
8. What does it mean to you that God walks among you, and that you are his people? How important is this idea to you in your daily life? Describe some ways in which knowing this does or should influence your behavior.