

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

A1344 – November 2, 2013 – 2 Corinthians 6:1-10
Living By Grace

If you will turn with me to 2 Corinthians 5:15 we will continue Paul's exposition of the ministry. This is the central passage on the ministry in the entire NT and if anyone can tell us what it was like to minister to a difficult bunch of folks it was Paul. As far as the NT churches Paul planted, the Corinthians were second only to the Galatians. To the Galatians he has no word of commendation. To the Corinthians he has only a few words of commendation. By the time of 2 Corinthians a large majority had repented and so there was cause for joy. That's why Paul originally began this excursus on the triumphs of the ministry. He held out that the gospel had taken firm root in these believers' lives and that progress would be made. He's still trying to tie up some loose ends at Corinth at this time and we'll see more of that today. But to get there lets pick up where we left off last time. Do you see the gospel at the end of 5:15? Christ who died and rose again on our behalf? That's the gospel; the gospel includes the Person and the work of Christ. Christ, who is the Son of God, died for our sins and rose for our justification. That's the good news and so when we present the gospel we want to present His Person and His work in the larger context of the Scriptural story so people understand. In light of the gospel, in verse 16, Paul no longer recognized those who think according to the flesh, even though in the past Paul had thought about Christ from the standpoint of the flesh, he no longer thought that way. His interpretation of Christ had been that He was the accursed of God because He had been hung on a tree and the law taught that he who dies on a tree was the accursed of God. So Paul had thought about Christ according to the flesh before he was a believer, but now as a believer he thought about Christ from the standpoint of the Spirit, as the Son of God who was not dying for His sins but for ours. In verse 17, what happens when we believe the gospel? We are placed in Christ. If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation of God, the old things have gone, behold new

things have come. We are essentially new people when we believe in Christ, we are changed essentially so that we are no longer who we once were but are new people in Christ. Paul concludes, behold, new things (plural) have come. We mentioned thirty-three new things L.S. Chafer said have come, what he referred to as the riches of divine grace. He mentioned that we have been foreknown, predestined, called, justified, glorified, redeemed, reconciled, propitiated to God, forgiven of all trespasses, free from the law, children of God, adopted, acceptable to God through Christ, delivered from the power of darkness, citizens of the coming kingdom, etc..., etc..., etc... These are all riches of divine grace, we didn't merit any one of these things, these things were each graciously bestowed upon us freely at the moment we trusted in Christ and we were placed in union with Him. So radical is the change that occurs at that moment that it is described by the creative work of God and it goes farther than simply bringing us back to Adam's original condition. As one author said, "When a person is born again, God does much more than reinstate him into Adam's original condition; he becomes a new creation, with a divine nature (2 Cor. 5:17)."ⁱ Do you know who you are, O Christian? You are a new creation of God. Not for one moment are you that old person dead in transgressions and sins and under the just condemnation of God. You are a new person set free from the bondage of sin, given a new nature with new desires to please Him, indwelt by the Holy Spirit who is able to give you victory. Essentially you are a new person all of His grace and created anew to live by His grace. All of this is made possible by the death of His Son. Verse 18 says that all that is all sourced in God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. Due to the fact that we have been reconciled to God we now have a ministry, a mission. That mission is the ministry of reconciliation described in verse 19, the proclamation that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them. Our message to the world is that when Christ was on the cross He was making God the friend of the world by taking our sins upon Himself and dying for them to satisfy the perfect justice of God. Now God is the friend of the world and all that remains is for the world to become the friend of God through faith in His Son. Since we have now become the friends of God we carry this reconciliation message on his behalf while He is absent and seated at the right hand of the Father. Therefore, verse 20, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were urging unbelievers strongly through the message we proclaim. The message, to be specific is, "be reconciled to God." God has already been reconciled to

them by Christ's work on the cross, but that they need to be reconciled to God by receiving Christ's work on their behalf, that is, by believing in Him. Verse 21, and here we see clearly what God has done through Christ and why. He made Christ who knew no sin, sin in our stead. He knew no sin but God made Him sin, that is, He imputed our sin to Him. He legally transferred our sin to Him. And why? So that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. He looks at the end goal in the resurrection when we are actually righteous. Through faith in Him today you are legally declared righteous but in that legal declaration is the assurance that you will actually become righteous in the resurrection, not in and of ourselves, but in Him, in Christ. This is all of God's grace.

Today we come to chapter 6 and the emphasis in verse 1 and on down through the passage is **the grace of God**. Paul and his co-workers were **working together *with Him***, that is, with God (1 Cor 3:9), in proclaiming **the grace of God**, not only as the means by which the world is reconciled to God at salvation (2 Cor 5:16-21), but also as the means by which believers are reconciled to one another in sanctification (2 Cor 6:1-13). Some of the Corinthian's were receiving **the grace of God in vain**, that is, to no effect in their Christian lives. They were hostile toward Paul. We've mentioned the two remaining groups at Corinth; in 1 Corinthians there were four groups, those who followed Paul, those who followed Peter, those who followed Apollos and those who followed Christ. Now there were just two groups, the majority who were reconciled to Paul and a minority who still opposed Paul. Their opposition to Paul was causing, in verse 3, the discrediting the gospel ministry. The animosity was seen by the world and therefore gave the world justified cause to reject the reconciling message of the grace of God. As Tom Constable says, "In the context, conflict between some of the Corinthians and Paul resulting in the discrediting of the gospel ministry seems to be in view (v. 3)."ⁱⁱ

The Corinthian's needed to urgently receive **the grace of God** as the means of living the Christian life so they could be reconciled to Paul and the ministry could be effective. The key is grace. The Christian life is entered into by grace and it is lived by grace so we want to take a moment to do two things. First, carefully define grace and second, describe what it means to live by grace. To do so I want to first discredit the notion that grace is a license to sin. Grace is not a license to sin. Grace is what prevents you from sinning as

we depend upon Him. Here's the true and full definition of grace. It's a quote from one of the great authors on grace. This man is not well-known but Dr. L. S. Chafer's admitted that this man taught him many precious things about grace. This was written back in the 1930's by J. F. Strombeck. He defines grace as follows; "Grace is the unmerited, abounding provision of the unrestrained operation of God's infinite love, through Jesus Christ, on behalf of man, especially those who depend upon Him." Now that definition is packed with many things that all hinge on the cross work of Christ. All of God's grace comes through the cross of Christ. That's what enables God's infinite love to be expressed to man in an "unmerited" and "unrestrained" manner. If it hadn't been for the cross work of Christ God's justice would not have been met and God would not be free to express His infinite love to sinful humans. But since His justice was satisfied His grace can flow freely, first, to all men in the offer of salvation and second, to all believers "who depend upon Him." So grace is available to all men at salvation and available especially to believers who depend upon Him in sanctification. Dependence is the condition for believers to enjoy the grace of God as a means of living the Christian life. Another way to describe dependence is to live by faith since faith is putting your confidence in Him and His provisions. So to live by faith is to depend upon Him. This is the only proper way of living. Strombeck says, "The only proper attitude of the creature toward his Creator is one of absolute dependence upon Him in all things." "...dependence upon God includes an understanding of His provision and an attitude of confidence and trust...It must be a willing subjection of self to God, in recognition of His infinite resources and love." In other words, we must voluntarily depend upon Him, trusting in His infinite provision to help us overcome sin. So we must discipline ourselves to depend upon Him. One pastor friend of mine put it this way in the context of John 15, the vine and the branches, *voluntary dependence, passive production*. I think that sums up very nicely the believer's responsibility and what Christ does when we meet this responsibility. Our responsibility is to voluntarily depend upon Him; His work when we do so is to produce fruit through us. So we do not produce fruit; we bear fruit but He is the one who produces the fruit. That's why in Galatians it's called the fruit of the Spirit. So the key to the Christian life is voluntary dependence, passive production. As we voluntarily depend upon Him He produces fruit through us so that He gets the glory.

Now it's quite clear from the letter that the Corinthian's had availed themselves of God's grace in salvation but as you can see from verse 1 they were not availing themselves of God's grace in sanctification by depending upon Him. They were not living by faith and therefore they were not bearing fruit. They had received the grace of God in vain. Paul therefore urges them in verse 1 to stop depending on themselves and start depending upon God.

For, verse 2, He says, "AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU." Behold, now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, now is "THE DAY OF SALVATION"—In other words, grace is available right now, if you will only avail yourselves of it. Notice the emphasis is NOW. Verse 2 is a quote from the OT. If you have a study Bible, look in your margin. Where is Paul quoting from? Isaiah 49:8. The context of Isa 49 is that God's Messiah would come to the nation Israel and offer Himself to them freely but they would reject Him. What were they rejecting when they rejected Messiah? They were rejecting God's gracious provision. Rather than depend upon God's gracious provision for them they decided to depend upon themselves. And yet the passage goes on to say that in due time the nation Israel will accept their Messiah. And when they do they will have turned from depending upon themselves and be depending upon God's gracious provision for them in the Messiah. Paul picks up this passage and applies it to the Corinthian's saying **now is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, now is "THE DAY OF SALVATION"**—right now is the time to turn from self-dependence to dependence upon Him; right now, not tomorrow, not next week, not next year, not when you get around to it. Right **now** is the time. The Corinthian's were frustrating the grace of God in their lives. They were not living by grace and their animosity toward Paul was evidence of it. They needed to stop frustrating the grace of God immediately because it was damaging the credibility of the ministry.

Verse 3 points out the damage that was being done to the ministry. **giving no cause for offense in anything**, no cause at all. The animosity was giving cause for offense. The world could look at them and justifiably reject Christianity. Is that the message we want to end the world? Do we want to give them by our actions and behaviors justifiable cause to be offended? How often have we heard or been told that someone has no interest in Christ because a professing Christian did not live in a manner worthy of the calling to which he had been called? That is to become a stumbling block. So Paul is

urging them to immediately stop frustrating the grace of God so that we do not give a justified **cause for offense in anything**.

Why? Paul states explicitly, **so that the ministry will not be discredited**. The word **discredited** means “to find fault with, to criticize, to censure.” We don’t want the ministry that we have, namely, the ministry of reconciliation, to be open to criticism. But when we frustrate the grace of God in our lives by not depending upon His provisions we do open the ministry up to criticism. Again, how many times have you heard this testimony from those you want to come to Christ? “Well I’ve seen Christian’s whining and bickering and moaning amongst themselves and I just don’t have any interest in Christ because I see no difference between those who follow Him and those who don’t.” It is a very sad thing that Christian’s do not live by grace and instead live according to the flesh and thus turn people away from Christ. Do you know how serious that is? It’s so serious that Jesus had only one thing to say to those who would turn people away from Him. “It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.” Selah as the Psalmist would say, “Go think about that!” It is very serious thing to get so involved in your little fleshly pursuits that you become a stumbling block to others (Luke 17:1-4).

The first three verses of chapter 6 are descriptive of the grace life. He said in verse 1 that he was working together with God on behalf of His grace but the Corinthian’s had failed to live by grace and so he is urging them to start living by grace immediately. Depend on God, Paul would say. In verse 2 he quotes the OT prophet Isaiah to bring out the point that now is the time, now is the day to start living by grace. God’s grace toward you is always available and now is the time to tap into it by depending upon Him to solve your problems and not yourself. Verse 3 gives the purpose for starting to live by grace now and that is so that the ministry will not be open to criticism.

Now in verse 4 we have Paul’s own ministry which is set in radical contrast. You note the key word **but**, a strong contrast in the Greek. Everything from here on out is a contrast as Paul sets forth his example in ministry as wildly contrastive to the Corinthians and ultimately how he wants them to be reconciled to Him. Paul had not received the grace of God in vain, he was living by grace. In fact, as he said in 1 Corinthian’s “I labored more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.” Paul had learned to depend

upon God in all circumstances; He lived by grace, through faith, the only thing that is consistent with grace. So we see the contrast between Paul and the Corinthian's. And therefore what Paul is doing is putting himself forward as an example of how to labor by the grace of God and the Corinthians needed to take his example to heart and change the way they were living. He says, **but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God.** The word **commending** means "to demonstrate or show" ourselves to be **servants of God.** Question: are you showing yourself to be a servant of God in everything? If we asked people you know about your life would they say you are a servant of God? Paul showed himself in every way to be a servant of God. It was unmistakable. He has a big long list here that demonstrates how he was a servant of God and there are stories in the ministry behind these. We may not be able to identify each story but if Paul were here he could tell you each one and how in that story he depended upon God and as a result demonstrated he was a servant of God. That's the sequence in which the passage unfolds.

There are 28 expressions used here and they come in three groups so there's a progression, generally speaking, from the situations Paul was involved in to how he depended upon God to handle the situations and finally how it demonstrated he was a servant of God. There's something of a blending in the progression, the divisions aren't hard and fast but you can see the three groups introduced by three different words in the English text. The first group is introduced by the word **in** and they are informing you of the situation Paul was in. For example, he was **in afflictions, in hardships, etc...** someone might quibble that verse 7 says Paul was **in the Holy Spirit** and that doesn't make sense but I would argue that he was **in the Spirit** in order to handle the situations he was in. So verses 4, 5, 6 and 7 are all introduced by **in** and recall situations Paul lived in and through. Then you see in verse 8 that several are introduced by the word **by**; these tell you the means by which Paul overcame the situation; **by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left** and so forth, they explain, generally, how Paul depended upon God. And then in verses 9-10 you see several introduced by the word **as** to show the results when looked at from the human standpoint vs from the divine standpoint, **as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live,** etc.... So the situations Paul found himself in, the means by which he overcame them and the results from the human vs the divine standpoint that demonstrated he was a servant of God.

So we want to behave accordingly in the ministry and essentially that means that whatever situation comes your way you live by grace, depending upon God so that in the end the results are clear that what is foremost in your life is God and His grace shown us in Christ.

The first several start in verse 4 where he says **in much endurance**. This doesn't really go with any of the three groups, it's sort of a catch all for all ministry. The word means to bear up under considerable pressure. As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ who is an ambassador for Him you need to have the ability to bear up under significant pressure. That is an extremely important quality in ministering lest you stumble and fall. So the question is when you are under pressure how will you handle it? Will you buckle and fold, depending upon the flesh and frustrating the grace of God, or will you depend upon God and His grace provision? Paul went the grace route in all these circumstances. It was going the grace route that enabled him to endure.

The second one in 4, Paul says **in afflictions**. Can you think of any times in the ministry Paul faced afflictions? The Greek word means "tribulations, distresses" They could be external distresses or internal distresses. We have accounts that Paul experienced both. As an ambassador of Jesus Christ you will face both. How will you handle it? Is His grace sufficient? Third, in verse 4, Paul found himself **in hardships**. The word means "pressures." Paul experienced pressures in the ministry and he handled it by grace. You, as an ambassador, will face pressures. How will you handle them? God's grace is sufficient. Fourth, in verse 4, Paul found himself in **distresses**. This word means "narrow places." He found himself in places where there were very narrow escapes. Remember the time at Damascus where he was lowered out of a window in a basket, a very narrow escape. In certain ministry contexts you as an ambassador may very narrowly escape. But the grace of God is sufficient to get you through. Fourth, in verse 5, Paul found himself **in beatings**. At Lystra he was beaten by the Jews and left for dead. But even the grace of God was sufficient for this. Fifth in verse 5, he was **in imprisonments**. Remember Paul and Silas at Philippi. After they were beaten they were thrown in jail due to a misallocation of justice. And yet God's grace was sufficient for even this. It turned out as an opportunity to evangelize the jailer. You have to think about these situations, try to put yourself in the shoes of Paul and ask yourself, "How would I respond?" Would I be able to depend upon the grace of God? Would I be able to reason that God

has a purpose for even this? Would I be able to trust Him when I'm beaten illegally and cast in jail? These are big things in life, they may be setting you up to give the gospel to someone and see them come to salvation. You may not be facing things this big but you do face little things every day and those are the training ground for the big things. How do you handle the little things? Do you turn immediately to God in voluntary dependence and trust in Him so that there is passive production?

Also in verse 5, Paul found himself **in tumults**. The Greek word is "riots." Paul was caught up in a riot at Ephesus, he was almost killed in a riot in Jerusalem and probably would have been if the Roman army hadn't come in and saved him. And all the while he depended on the grace of God, he was able to relax and it commended him to others as a servant of God. In verse 5, Paul found himself **in labors**. The Greek word means toilsome work. He occasionally had to work as a leather-maker because of lack of funds and this kept him from giving himself entirely to the ministry. It was difficult mentally, it was a strain, he wanted to devote himself entirely to the word. But he trusted in the grace of God nonetheless to get him through. Also in verse 5, Paul found himself **in sleeplessness**; nights when he could not sleep because of his concern for others, because the situations of other believers wouldn't stop racing through his head. He cared for people and it affected his sleep. But the grace of God got him through. Lastly in verse 5, **in hunger**. Paul found himself without sufficient food. How do you feel when you haven't had sufficient food? Do you handle that by the grace of God and depend upon Him? Or do you throw a big fit? All of these require you to turn from self-dependence to God-dependence, to consciously, voluntarily depend upon Him.

Verse 6, **in purity**. Paul lived with practical righteousness and this, of course, is difficult in a world that is full of filth. It strained him but he relied on the grace of God to get him through the temptations. Also **in knowledge**, this is practical knowledge used to be sensitive when dealing with others. Sometimes people are so stupid but practical knowledge enables you to be sensitive to them even when you are thinking, my goodness, if they'd just done what I'd told them they wouldn't be in this predicament. But Paul was able to graciously handle it with practical knowledge. Also verse 6, **In patience**, the word here means to "bear up when you're being provoked," you know, people mouthing off, mocking. Paul was able to relax under that pressure. Patience is a fruit of the Spirit. Also verse 6, **in kindness**. This is

“the quality of being helpful or beneficial to others” It’s another fruit of the Spirit. I’d say all of these are fruit of the Spirit. That’s why he puts the Holy Spirit in here explicitly in verse 6. The **Holy Spirit** is metonymy here, a figure of speech where the cause stands for the effects. Paul would be saying that all these effects are due to the Holy Spirit. These are all fruit of the Spirit. I don’t think the list in Gal 5 is exhaustive of the fruit of the Spirit. It’s a list that is representative of the kind of fruit that is produced by the Holy Spirit but it’s not exhaustive. And so I’d say that everything in vv 4-6 is the fruit of the Spirit. Paul is showing us that he voluntarily depended upon God and as such there was this passive production of the fruit of the Spirit. There’s more here at the close of verse 6, **in genuine love**, the adjective **genuine** shows it was love without pretense, love that was sincere and this, of course, is another fruit of the Spirit.

Verse 7, **in the word of truth**, notice his speech remained truthful. **In the power of God**, that is the source of it all, not his own strength but God’s strength. Paul depended upon Him. In the middle of verse 7 he shifts to introducing things with **by**. **By the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left**. You see we’re in combat; spiritual warfare and our weapons are righteousness for casting down empty speculations and vain thoughts.

Verse 8, **by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report**. Paul dealt with situations of **glory** and situations of **dishonor**. He knew both sides. Paul received **evil reports and good reports**. He knew both sides there too.

He was **regarded as a deceiver** by some **and yet** he was **true**. These comparisons go on and only down through verse 11. The big point is that his ministry contrasted wildly with the Corinthians; they depended upon the flesh and the result was animosity with Paul, Paul depended upon the Spirit and the result was the fruit of the Spirit, he was commended to God as a servant of God no matter what the circumstances, he handled it by the power of God and with His weapons and as a result was interpreted in wildly contrasting ways, but it was all for the glory of God.

In (Paul’s situations)	By (Means of handling)	As (Comparison from human view)
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	situations)	point vs divine view point)
In afflictions	By the weapons of righteousness	Deceivers and yet true
In hardships	By glory and dishonor	Unknown and yet well known
In distresses	By evil report and good report	Dying and yet living
In beatings		Punished and yet not killed
In imprisonments		Sorrowful and yet rejoicing
In tumults		Poor yet making many rich
In labors		Having nothing and yet possessing all things
In sleeplessness		
In hunger		
In purity		
In knowledge		
In patience		
In kindness		
In the Holy Spirit (or in a spirit of holiness)		
In genuine love		
In the word of truth		
In the power of God		

ⁱ J. F. Strombeck, *Disciplined of Grace*, p 36.

ⁱⁱ Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (2 Co 6:1). Galaxie Software.

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