

Series: 2 Corinthians
Title: Cleansed for the Ministry
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Subject: Cleansed for the Ministry

2 Corinthians 6: 11: O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged.

Paul and faithful ministers of the gospel are addressing erring believers. “*Our*” is Paul and Timothy, along with Silvanus, Titus—faithful ministers of the gospel of Christ. “*Ye*” and “*you*” are erring believers at Corinth. The first two verses of the letter tells us the letter is from Paul and Timothy to the church of God, to the saints at Achaia. So these were erring believers.

2 Corinthians 1: 1: Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia:

The mouths and hearts of Paul and Timothy were open in love and affection, ready to receive them as soon as they repented from their error. We see Paul’s heart throughout this epistle. He began the letter speaking of trouble that this error had caused.

2 Corinthians 1: 3: Blessed *be* God,...4: Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort [Christ] wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God...7: And our hope of you *is* stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, *so shall ye be* also of the consolation.

Knowing Christ always saves his people from error, he said, “*And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.*”

They had maligned his character for not coming to them as he said he would, if the Lord was willing. Yet, we see how Paul’s mouth was open in love. He corrected them, saying that they yet needed rebuke. But in love of heart, he did not come because he was giving them time to repent.

2 Corinthians 1: 23: Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth. 24: Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand...2: 1: But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness...4: For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you. 5: But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all.

Paul did not overcharge them in that he did not charge everyone in the church at Corinth because not everyone in the church was guilty of this offense. Nor did he overcharge them in that he did not even accuse those who were guilty of causing him grief, though they did.

So in chapter 5, it was *not to unbelievers* but to *these erring believers* that Paul and Timothy wrote unto, saying, “*be ye reconciled to God.*” Let’s begin in verse 12 of chapter 5:

2 Corinthians 5: 12: For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart.

The erring believers at Corinth were *glorying in appearance, not in heart* like the unbelievers they were influenced by. Paul tells them that they should be constrained to preach Christ and him crucified alone. And Paul declares that this constraint should be the same constraint by which he and the faithful brethren at Corinth were constrained.

2 Corinthians 5: 14: For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: 15: And *that* he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. 16: Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we *him* no more.

When a believer is in error, we are not constrained by the love of Christ but by our flesh. Anytime a believer is leaning on the arm of the flesh, we are not living unto Christ who crucified our old man on the cross. We are living unto our flesh. These erring brethren were using fleshly wisdom, fleshly constraints and they were glorying in the flesh. Paul reminds them these old things ought to be passed away for any man who is in Christ and all things should become new.

2 Corinthians 5: 17: Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. 18: And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

He is addressing erring believers when he says God has reconciled us. He is including himself with them. This, too, ought to be our constraint to turn from our flesh and live unto him who loved us and gave himself for us—he reconciled us to God while we were enemies.

Also, Paul reminds them that not only did God reconcile us in Christ, God has given to us the ministry of reconciliation which we are to preach. He is reminding them of the sole purpose for which God left you and I and every other child of God in this earth. Our charge is to preach Christ, nothing else! This is what we should be focused on, not earthy, fleshly things which are not pointing sinners to Christ! This is what we should be preaching from the scriptures and nothing else:

2 Corinthians 5: 19: To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

But since this was not the case, he refers to himself, Timothy, Silvanus, Titus and all the brethren who stood with him faithfully preaching Christ, as ambassadors for Christ. They are beseeching these erring believers on behalf of Christ:

2 Corinthians 5: 19: Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* [erring brethren] by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

Paul said to these erring believers, “Repent from this error, be reconciled to God and be at peace with God and your brethren. When we are not at peace with a brother in Christ then we are not at peace with Christ. Christ said, “*Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*” (Mt 25: 40) Here is the greatest constraint we have to be reconciled to God and to our brethren:

2 Corinthians 5: 21: For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Believer, beholding what God did for us in not sparing his own Son, but delivering him up for us all by making him sin for us, and pouring out justice on him, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, our hearts are broken into submission to God our Father. Beholding, how our Substitute, who knew no sin, willingly gave himself to be made sin for us then bore the justice of God in our room and stead, making us the righteousness of God in him, how can we not turn from our flesh and come begging him to cleanse us from our sins! If I am yet lifted up in pride, walking contrary to God and to my brethren, then let me hear Christ speak to me now and be reconciled to God and my brethren! God our Father and our Savior gave too dearly for us to insist on being right at the expense of God's glory and our brethren's peace for us not to surrender to our heavenly Father, trusting Christ to work in his people, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. God hates all sowers of discord! (Pro 6: 12-19)

Proverbs 6: 12: A naughty person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth. 13: He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers; 14: Frowardness *is* in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord. 15: Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy. 16: These six *things* doth the LORD hate: yea, seven *are* an abomination unto him: 17: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, 18: An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, 19: A false witness *that* speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

Let me hear God and the Lord Jesus say this to me personally, "Be ye reconciled to God!"

Then Paul also deals with something equally as offensive to God.

2 Corinthians 6: 1: We then, as workers together *with him*, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

He says, "In addition to beseeching you to be reconciled to God, we beseech you also do not receive this ministry God has given us in vain." Paul said in chapter 5 that God not only reconciled us to himself but God also entrusted us with this ministry by his grace to preach his grace in Christ. Let us not receive this ministry in vain by giving the impression that it is vain to preach only the ministry of reconciliation!

Brethren, if we become taken up with insignificant doctrine that saves no one, doctrine that is not the offense of the cross which no sinner is mad and full enmity about, then we are saying it is vain to preach only Christ and him crucified. If that is what we imagine then we are in grave error!

Or if we become taken up with preaching the believer's works at the expense of shutting sinners up to Christ and the reconciliation he has already accomplished for his people then we give this world the impression that it is vain to preach the very message God has committed to us to preach and promote worldwide!

Or if we begin to entertain the thought of using other means other than the preaching of the gospel, we are saying the preaching of the cross is vain. Something of this nature or all of these things is what these erring Corinthian were doing. Paul gives reason why we should never do so.

2 Corinthians 5: 2: (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee:...

In Isaiah 49 from where this is quoted, when Christ condemned Israel's rejection of him he said, "*I have labored in vain.*" (Is 49: 4) But do not think our ministry is in vain because Christ did not mean his ministry was in vain! He was condemning the children of Israel when he came unto his own and his own received him not. Proof that his ministry was not in vain is that God said to Christ, that though Israel was not gathered, yet

Christ would be glorious in the eyes of the LORD!" So Christ said, "My God shall be my strength!" Let us do the same and preach Christ come what may!

God said to Christ not only would God be his servant to raise up his elect in the tribes of Jacob and preserve his chosen from among Israel, God said he would also give Christ for a light to his elect among the Gentiles so that Christ will be God's salvation unto the end of the earth." God did this and Christ is doing this through his church. So let us preach Christ, come what may!

God said to Christ who man despised and who the nation hated, to Christ who became a servant of rulers, "Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel and he shall choose thee." (Is 49: 5-7) God did this for Christ! And Christ promises to do the same with us. So let us preach Christ, come what may!

Paul quotes Isaiah 49: 8, where God said to Christ, "*I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee!*" When from the cross Christ cried 'it is finished', it was the time accepted because Christ had justified his people. So God heard him. It was the day of salvation for all God's elect when God succoured and helped Christ by raising him from the dead and us in him. So Paul says not only is our ministry not in vain...

2 Corinthians 6: 2...Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)

God hearing and raising Christ is proof-positive that now is the accepted time for us to spread this ministry of reconciliation far and wide. Now is the day of salvation! So Paul urges these erring brethren to return to preaching reconciliation by Christ and him crucified...

2 Corinthians 6: 3: Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: 4: But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God...

These erring brethren were in danger of doing what every true child of God fears most—bringing reproach on the gospel and on our fellow brethren. We prove we are ministers of God...

2 Corinthians 6: 7: By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,...

We prove ourselves as true witness of Christ, not by promoting some teachings we got from ungodly unbelievers. And we do not do so in own strength. We use only the word of truth, God's holy scriptures. And we depend upon the power of God. Our armor is the righteousness of Christ so we surrender to him. And when it comes to this ministry of reconciliation which he has entrusted to us, our armor is to do what God says is right, that is, preach Christ as God commands us. So we see why Paul says to these erring brethren in our text,

2 Corinthians 6: 11: O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. 12: Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels.

Paul adds, "*Our hearts are wide open to receive you, there is no narrow place in us...But ye are straitened in your own hearts.*"

Those erring believers were so pressed in heart that they had no peace. Brethren, we know that this is true because we have no peace when we are walking contrary to Christ and to our brethren in Christ. No matter how right we may think we are there is no peace apart from Christ! Only Christ is our Peace and he will not give peace if we warring against him and our brethren! I can see these Corinthians walking the floor,

wringing their hands, going over every self-justifying argument to condemn Paul for rebuking them while exalting themselves as being in the right. There is no peace of God in our hearts when such a root of bitterness has sprung up from our flesh and defiled us!

By this, they were pressed so narrowly in their hearts—*thinking themselves right while thinking Paul and all this host of brethren wrong*—that they had no room to receive the very man God used to preach the gospel to them. They had only disgust and disdain for him!

Proposition: The only cure for a true child of God when we fall into error is to hear the minister God sent to us, to break every tie with unbelievers and flee to Christ to cleanse us.

HEAR AND OBEY GOD’S FAITHFUL PASTOR

2 Corinthians 6: 13: Now for a recompence in the same, (I speak as unto *my* children,) be ye also enlarged.

The cure for error for a true child of God is to repay the faithful pastor God has sent to us by hearing the word of God at his mouth and obeying his godly counsel.

Since, these erring believers were glorying in their flesh, surely they thought that they were proving to everyone that they were strong mavericks in the faith, standing tall and alone for God and truth! Yet, by refusing to humbly receive the wise counsel given by this apostle who was their father in the faith—who had far, far more experience than they—instead of proving themselves wise, they proved to all that they were “*novice[s] lifted up with pride, fallen into the condemnation of the devil.*” (1 Tim 3: 6)

But being the faithful apostle he was, Paul said the way they could re-compensate him—for loving them, for laboring tirelessly to preach the gospel of Christ to them by which God saved them, for being faithful to continuing to try to spare them the sorrow their error would end in, for yet having his arms open ready to receive them—was to “*be ye enlarged.*” He said “Being my children in the faith, you can repay me one way, by opening your hearts to receive my rebuke and my instruction for Christ’s glory, your own good and the good of the whole church of God!”

Brethren, sometimes those younger and more inexperienced brethren in the faith do not see how something we are doing will bring reproach on the gospel and hurt our brethren. So when God sends a faithful, experienced pastor to rebuke me from the scripture—especially if all my brethren are in agreement telling me the same thing—wisdom is for one younger in the faith to entreat him as a father, as one who is looking out for my best interest, the interest of Christ, and the interest of the whole church at large. But by all means, I must never rebuke an elder. God says clearly in his word,

1 Timothy 5: 1: Rebuke not an elder, but intreat *him* as a father;

Leveticus 19: 32: Thou shalt rise up before the hoary [white-haired] head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I *am* the LORD.

1 Timothy 5:19: Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.

Let Korah teach us how unwise it is to rise up against an elder in disrespect and disdain, boasting, “*You take to much on yourself, we are all holy!*” God swallowed him up in the earth! The least I could do—if there are any bowels of mercies, any shred of humility in me, as recompence for the faithfulness my pastor has shown me—is open my heart to his instruction, obey his word in the Lord and thank God he sent him for my good!

BE NOT UNEQUALLY YOKED WITH UNBELIEVERS

2 Corinthians 6: 14: Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? 15: And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? 16: And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?

The cure for error is to break every tie with unbelievers before we become unequally yoked with them.

Note the words “*fellowship, communion, concord, part, and agreement.*” Only Christ gives sinners oneness with God and with brethren. He gives it by making us righteous by his obedience unto the death of the cross, apart from our works. Only by Christ giving us the Light of Christ are we light in the Lord. Only by Christ giving us a new heart with one mind, do we have concord with brethren in him. And Christ only does this work through the preaching which exalts God in Christ who reconciled his people to himself. And Christ only does this work in our hearts by the word preached from his holy word!

So “*be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers*”. This applies to marriage, to where we assemble to worship, to business partners, and to friendships. And here, it applies to our ministry, our message, the word we preach. Notice, how much emphasis Paul puts on preaching Christ from the word of God in weakness and fear throughout his two letters to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 2: 1: And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. 2: For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. 3: And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. 4: And my speech and my preaching *was* not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: 5: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

2 Corinthians 4: 1: Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; 2: But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God...5: For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake.

In this second epistle, we have a word that reveals that only part of the professing believers at Corinth had acknowledged Paul and the gospel of Christ he wrote and preached. He wrote,

2 Corinthians 1: 12: For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity [Christ alone] and godly sincerity, [the truth according to God’s word alone] not with fleshly wisdom, [not using the wisdom of unbelievers] but by the grace of God, [receiving our message by God’s grace, preaching it by God’s grace and depending on God’s grace to bless it] we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward. 13: For we write none other things unto you, than what ye read or acknowledge; and I trust ye shall acknowledge even to the end; 14: As also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also *are* ours in the day of the Lord Jesus.

God was giving Paul the scriptures as he wrote to the Corinthians. These letters were to become the very word of God we hold in our hands. Don’t you know the unbeliever feels stupid now that he knows Paul’s letters were God giving the Holy Scriptures?

Only part of the Corinthian brethren read and heard Paul preach Christ. Only part acknowledged him in love, obeying him in the Lord in faith. But the other part let unbelievers influence even their ministry for Christ. This is what Paul addressed in chapter 6, saying, “*receive ye not the grace of God in vain, give no offense in anything, that the ministry be not blamed, approve yourselves the ministers of Christ by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness.*”

Brethren, the vain babblings of unbelievers in the news, in politics, on the internet or anywhere else should never be where I get my message, *even if they use God’s word* to promote their ungodly cause. God did not give it to them or me if I get from them.

Be sure we understand this: to do so is to be yoked with unbelievers as much as if we preached the lie of universal atonement or salvation by the will of man. It will divide us personally from Christ, divide us from our brethren, and will do the same in those who hear us.

There are far too many ways *the gospel of God’s righteousness in Christ* is under attack for us to preach useless dribble, unequally yoking ourselves with the ungodly who hate our gospel!

God only blesses his word, which he alone must give us to preach, in the singularity of Christ and him crucified! No other source, no other message, no other method!

1 Corinthians 15:33: Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. 34: Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak *this* to your shame.

There is a muddy river called the Ouachita River back where I come from. There is a place where a clear creek runs into it. Where they meet, for about a hundred yards, they flow side-by-side so that you can distinguish the clear creek from the muddy river. But soon, the clean water turns muddy and you cannot tell them apart.

If you get nothing else be sure to get this: God prohibits every kind of union in which the character and interest of the believer loses our distinctiveness and integrity. Brethren, let it never even appear that you are united with unbelievers in what we believe, preach or practice! Give not even the appearance of this evil!

FLEE TO CHRIST FOR CLEANSING

2 Corinthians 7: 1: Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

The cure for an erring believer is to flee to Christ for cleansing. The one way believers cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God is by Christ fulfilling God’s promise in our hearts!

In regeneration and every hour after in which we need cleansing, Christ our Head brings his redeemed out of this world to him begging, “*Lord, if thou will thou canst make me clean!*” Each time, Christ says, “*I will be thou clean!*” (Mt 8: 2-3)

Believer, what are these promises of God we have which Christ fulfills in us? We find them back in 1 Corinthians 6: 16:

1 Corinthians 6: 16:...as God hath said, I will dwell in *them*, and walk in them and I will be their God, and they shall be my people

Christ hews out of this earth, and separates out of this earth, his redeemed and makes us living stones through the preaching of this gospel. He build us up, fitly framing us together, making us “the temple of the living God” where God dwells and walks by Christ in you. Then Christ our King commands us in our hearts:

2 Corinthians 6: 17: Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing;

Christ grants us repentance from vain doctrines and vain works and separates us from this ungodly world by speaking effectually into our hearts, “*Come out from among them and be ye separate.*” This is the only way sinners like us will ever come out of darkness into his marvelous light; come out of the ungodly world to his feet for mercy. Christ commands what we could never and would never do and by his command makes us willing!

Christ says, “*touch not the unclean thing*”—bring none of this world and its doctrines and its vain works out with you. In Isaiah 52 from where this is quoted, the Lord said to the priests who bore the priceless vessels of his temple—“*Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.*” (Is 52: 11) So when they were enslaved in Babylon, God sent king Cyrus and freed them. They cleansed themselves then took the vessels of the Lord which the king of Babylon had stolen back to Jerusalem.

Brethren, in regeneration, God sends forth Christ our King who frees us from the great whore Babylon. He makes us priests unto God by his own blood shed on the cross. The Spirit of God washes us in his blood, purging our conscience from vain doctrines and works. Then Christ commits to us the word of reconciliation—the unsearchable treasure of his gospel riches which we bear as we use them to bear his chosen vessels of mercy to heavenly Jerusalem.

Therefore, Christ continually cleanseth his church, *purging our conscience from the vain doctrines of this world and sins of our flesh*, which would bring reproach on the ministry and on our brethren. Believer, hear and heed the apostle John who said,

1 John 1: 6: If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: 7: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. 8: If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

2 Corinthians 6: 17...and I will receive you, 18: And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

These verses show us the family of God. Everyone in God’s family—from God our Father and Christ our Everlasting Father, to his sons and daughters—loves one another. Christ said “*by this shall all men know you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.*” (Jn 13: 35)

While we are defiled in our sins, lifted up in pride, in all our arrogance and so-called stance for the truth, *we dishonor God our Father and disrespect our brethren.*

But when Christ cleanses us, *the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost and we come crying, “Abba, Father!”* (Rom 5: 5; 8: 15) Our chief desire becomes to honor our heavenly Father and not ourselves any longer. God receives us and is a Father unto us in love to us and we are his sons and daughters in love to him.

Likewise, the love of Christ constrains us to love our brethren as *obedient sons and daughters of God*. His love for us makes us repent from hurting our brethren by our haughty arrogance. His love makes us comfort and edify our brethren with the consolation wherewith we have been comforted, Christ Jesus our Lord. We see this love of brethren throughout these two epistles of Paul to the Corinthians. This is love Christ worked in Paul by which Paul was constrained to continue saying to his unappreciative, unreceptive, unloving brethren:

2 Corinthians 7: 2: Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man. 3: I speak not *this* to condemn you: for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die and live with you. 4: Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.

Next time, we will see that Christ worked this love in the heart of these erring believers and brought them to repentance so that they received Paul and Paul received them in love.

This work of Christ in the hearts of his people is why Christ said “*by this shall all men know you are my disciples*”—that you have been taught in heart by me—“*if you have love one for another.*” (*Jn 13: 35*) Sinners can fake a lot of things but love for God and brethren ain’t one of ‘em!

My prayer for my brethren everywhere is that Christ manifests to all men that we are Christ’s disciples, having love for God our Father and our Everlasting Father Jesus Christ, along with our brethren. May our gracious King cure some erring brother or sister by saying in our hearts, “Hear and obey your faithful pastor, break every tie with unbelievers before you become unequally yoked giving no offense in anything that ministry be not blamed and flee to your Redeemer immediately that he might cleanse you from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, bringing you to that perfect end of holiness in the fear of God. Only then shall we be cleansed to once again help our brethren spread this ministry of reconciliation into all the world!

Amen!