

# The Book of 2 Corinthians

## Lesson 6: Do Not Be Unequally Yoked -- 2 Corinthians 6:1-18

There is an urgency in the way this chapter opens that we dare not miss. Paul has just finished pleading, "Be reconciled to God." Now he leans in closer and says, "Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain." It is possible, he warns, to receive grace and yet receive it in vain, to hold the gift loosely, to let it slip, to treat the mercy of God as a small thing. So he quotes Isaiah and presses the point home: "Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Not tomorrow. Not someday. Now. The grace of God is not something to be filed away for later. It is to be seized and lived today.

Then Paul does something remarkable. To show that he has held nothing back in his own ministry, he opens his life like a ledger. He lists the cost of following Christ: afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, sleepless nights, hunger. And alongside the hardships he lists the graces that carried him through: purity, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, the power of God. He is "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, yet possessing everything." This is what an authentic servant of God looks like, not someone the world would call successful, but someone in whom the power of God shines through obvious weakness.

And out of that wide-open life comes a wide-open heart. "We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open." Paul is not holding the Corinthians at arm's length. He loves them without reserve, and he longs for them to love him back the same way. "Widen your hearts also," he pleads. There is something deeply pastoral here. Paul is not merely teaching them doctrine; he is giving them himself, and asking them to receive him.

But love does not mean the erasing of all boundaries. In the same breath, Paul issues one of the most pointed commands in the letter: "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers." He piles up question after question to drive it home. What does righteousness have to do with lawlessness? What fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with the devil? And then the great reason behind the command: "We are the temple of the living God." God Himself dwells among His people. And so He calls us, tenderly and firmly, to "come out from them, and be separate," promising, "I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me." Read this chapter and hear both the open heart and the holy boundary, for the gospel calls us to both.

**Group Discussion:** Paul commands, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers," and asks what partnership righteousness can have with lawlessness or light with darkness (vv. 14-15), yet elsewhere he makes clear that Christians are not to withdraw from the world entirely (1 Corinthians 5:9-10). How do we tell the difference between the kind of close, binding

partnership Scripture warns against and the ordinary friendships and contact with unbelievers that the Christian life requires? Where do God's people most often get this balance wrong?

**Personal Reflection:** Paul warns against receiving "the grace of God in vain" and insists that "now is the day of salvation" (vv. 1-2). Are there ways you have begun to take God's grace for granted, letting your devotion cool or treating His mercy as something to act on "later"? What would it mean to respond to His grace freshly and fully today, rather than someday?

*Read 2 Corinthians 6:1-18*

## Study Questions

1. Paul appeals to the Corinthians "not to receive the grace of God in vain," and declares, "Now is the favorable time... now is the day of salvation" (vv. 1-2). What does it mean to receive God's grace "in vain," and why does this warning, addressed to believers, underscore the urgency of responding to God today rather than presuming on grace?
2. Where have you allowed your response to God's grace to grow cold or casual, putting off until "later" a step of obedience, repentance, or surrender He is calling you to now? What would it look like to treat today as the day of salvation in that area?
3. To show that he has put "no obstacle in anyone's way," Paul commends himself "as servants of God" through a long list of hardships and graces, "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing... having nothing, yet possessing everything" (vv. 3-10). What does this teach about what genuinely authenticates a servant of God, and how does it differ from the way the world measures success?
4. When you are under pressure, in hardship, criticism, or weariness, what does your conduct reveal about your faith? Is there a way your reaction to difficulty has become an "obstacle" that obscures Christ to those watching, and what grace from Paul's list do you most need God to grow in you?
5. Paul tells the Corinthians, "Our heart is wide open... widen your hearts also" (vv. 11-13). What does this teach about the open-hearted, vulnerable love that should mark relationships in the body of Christ, and why does Paul tie sound teaching so closely to genuine affection?
6. Is there a person or group toward whom your heart has grown narrow, guarded, or cold, perhaps within the church itself? What has caused you to close your heart there, and what would it look like to "widen" it as Paul urges?
7. Paul asks, "What partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial?" (vv. 14-15). What do these contrasts teach about the fundamental incompatibility between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness, and why does Paul frame the issue in such stark terms?
8. Is there a relationship, partnership, influence, or habit in your life that is quietly pulling you toward compromise rather than toward Christ? What makes it hard to address, and what would faithfulness to the Lord require of you there?

9. Paul commands, “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers,” and grounds it in this: “We are the temple of the living God,” calling believers to “come out from them, and be separate,” with the promise, “I will be a father to you” (vv. 14–18). What does it mean that the church and the Christian are the temple of the living God, what kind of separation from the world is this command actually calling for (and not calling for), and how does God’s promise to dwell among His people as a Father shape the way we pursue holiness?
10. Look back across the whole chapter, the urgency of grace, the authentic servant, the wide-open heart, the holy boundary, the indwelling presence of God. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through this passage, and what is your first step toward that change this week?

### **Now or Later**

Reflect on these passages: 1 Corinthians 15:33, bad company that corrupts good character; 1 Corinthians 5:9–10, why separation does not mean leaving the world entirely; 1 Peter 2:9–12, a holy people living honorably among the nations; James 4:4, friendship with the world as enmity with God; Romans 12:1–2, not conformed to this world but transformed by the renewing of the mind