

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

2 CORINTHIANS 5-6

Author, Jay Strack, writes about an NBA basketball game he attended that ended strangely. Dallas Maverick's point-guard, Derek Harper, dribbled the final six seconds off the clock. He thought his team was ahead by a point when in reality the game was tied.

Dallas could've used the wasted time to get off a final shot and win the game. **[VIDEO]** Instead, they lost in overtime.

Strack wrote afterward, "Dribble, dribble, dribble go the seconds - the minutes, the hours, the days, the years of our lives." *How often have you dribbled away valuable seconds you could've used to win the game?*

You could've won the prize of knowing Christ...

You could've won a reward for serving God...

You could've won lost souls to Jesus Christ... instead, we dribbled away the seconds. It was like we had *time to waste*, instead of a *game to win!* Paul's goal in this week's chapters is to help us avoid that mistake.

In 2 Corinthians 5, his sights are set on eternity!

The Apostle Paul is focused on the judgment seat of Christ. He encourages us not to waste a single second!

Verse 1, "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"

During Paul's stay in Corinth, he made tents. He was a

tentmaker by trade. Here he compares our human body to a tent. Both are temporary dwellings - both are fragile and flimsy. Our earthly house was made to fold.

I know a lot of you like to camp, *but not me!*

I like to camp in a nice hotel.

My problem isn't sleeping under the stars or enjoying the outdoors - **I just hate all the effort that goes into camping. You pack up; then set up; then tear down.** To me camping is a hassle - *and so is my body.*

Think of the time, and energy, and money I waste maintaining my body. For starters, I have to refuel it three times a day. *My car runs a week on a full tank...*

You also have to park your body for a few hours each night... A body requires frequent oil changes... A daily wash and wax... And to top it all off, you're constantly driving it into the mechanic for repairs...

And what really upsets me most about my body is I have to drag it with me everywhere I go. My body is like a tent. A lot of time, and effort, and energy, and money goes into its upkeep. *Bodies are a hassle.*

Paul says that one day we'll swap these temporary, troublesome tents for more permanent structures.

We've been promised "*a building from God.*"

When Jesus returns for His Church, we'll receive new, eternal housing - a body made from elements not subject to decay or deterioration. Your heavenly body won't have to be refueled, or rested, or repaired.

You'll be able to spend all your effort worshipping Jesus. One day our spirits will be given the keys to hassle-free housing. We'll get glorified bodies!

Once a family had a ritual they conducted whenever one of the children's pet goldfish died. Mom, dad, brother, and sister would gather around the commode.

The boys would hold the fish over the toilet, say a prayer, and then flush the fish to goldfish heaven.

On one such solemn occasion, the little sister asked her mom if grandpa, who had died years earlier, was also in heaven. The mom said confidently, "Yes, he is!"

That's when one of the boys asked, "*who flushed him?*" When the Lord returns for His Church, we'll all flush these bodies and receive new, perfect bodies.

"For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked." The philosophy of Greek culture viewed the body as evil - as totally and completely unredeemable.

Epictetus said he was, "a poor soul burdened with a corpse." Seneca called himself "a slave of the body."

The Greek hope for the afterlife was to be free from the body - be a disembodied spirit. But Paul tells us God has a greater plan! He's going to transform our mortal bodies into eternal bodies. We'll be resurrected.

"For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that

mortality may be swallowed up by life.”

God's redemption won't be complete until all traces of sin are blotted out - including its effect on our body.

If you were in a car wreck and all the insurance paid for was to repair the engine, you'd be disappointed.

How about some body-work? Well, God is not only a mechanic, He also has a body shop. He's not only an expert under the hood - purifying and sanctifying and energizing us - He also redesigns wrecked bodies!

Paul says in verse 5, "Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee (that is, a downpayment)."

The *spiritual life* we receive now is earnest money on the *spiritual body* we'll be given later. The presence of God's Spirit *in us* means there's more to come *for us*.

"So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord.

For we walk by faith, not by sight." Paul longs and "groans" for his eternal body. Imagine, skin that doesn't sag. Muscles that don't tire! Cells that won't get sick.

The older I get the more I groan for a *bod from God*, but until then, I'm coping with a flimsy and failing tent...

Paul says, "*we walk by faith, not by sight.*" In a troublesome now, we hold onto His promises by faith.

And here's Paul's faith, "We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." Two passages - 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians

4 - teach us that believers wait until the end of the age and Christ's return - an event known as **the rapture** - to receive our eternal bodies.

Yet the moment *the spirit of a believer* departs from his earthly tent he immediately finds himself in the presence of the Lord. The notion of "soul sleep" - that the soul hibernates until the resurrection is unbiblical.

The moment we die our spirit is with the Lord. Your loved ones who died in Jesus are with Him right now.

Verse 9, "Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

The term Paul uses, "*judgment seat*" is a translation of the Greek word, "bema." The "bema-seat" was the platform in Greek towns where officials made important announcements. From the bema-seat, rewards were handed out and decisions were handed down.

And one day every believer is going to stand before the "*bema-seat of Christ*" for the same purpose.

Some people confuse the *Great White Throne of Judgment* with the *Judgment Seat of Christ*. Revelation 20 speaks of the white throne where the lost will be judged, condemned, and thrown into the lake of fire.

It's for unbelievers - while the bema is for Christians.

Our place in heaven is secured by the blood of Jesus, but our service for the Lord will be tried to see what rewards we'll

receive. Our motive will be judged.

It reminds me of the widow who was furious over the fact that her husband had bequeathed all his money to his secretary. His own wife had been cut out of his will.

She rushed to the graveyard to have the inscription on his tombstone changed, but she arrived too late.

She hated spending her own money on a new stone, so she had the undertaker carve an add on. Right after "Rest in Peace" he chiseled, "Until we Meet Again."

And each of us will meet again. At the bema-seat, Jesus will judge what we did for Him? *Did we serve Him with sincerity?* Our motives will be measured.

Verse 11, "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..." A Christian has no need to fear the Lord. We're His kids. We wear His righteousness.

But we should fear for those who don't know Him.

The last place an unredeemed sinner wants to be is in the presence of a holy God. In light of unforgiven sin and guilt, His holiness is terrifying. You'll quiver in fear.

And this is why Paul preached. He says in verse 11, "we persuade men, but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences."

God knew Paul's heart and so did the Corinthians. They had lived with Paul for over a year. They were aware of his integrity. His desire was to simply serve.

"For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have an

answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart."

Paul's critics measured an apostle by appearance and image. They said a true man of God should look the part - *have some skill, stature, gravitas*. Yet Paul hoped he didn't need to prove himself to the Corinthians. They knew his heart.

And this was the real measure of a man of God. Paul didn't concern himself with *looking-good* in the eyes of people. He was all about *being-good* before God.

History tells us Paul was barely five feet tall. He had a hunched back, hooked nose, bowed legs - and his thick eyebrows ran together across his forehead.

His eyes were often infected and bulging with puss.

In addition, his body was tattooed with the scars from his beatings and stonings. Paul would never make the cover of GQ or Christianity Today. He was a walking example that its heart - *not appearance* - that matters!

And yet the false teachers in Corinth were just the opposite. They looked like FCA leaders - big men on campus - muscular, and rugged - good-looking jocks.

These guys tried hard to be cool. They were the hipsters - *tall on appearance, but short on substance*.

They wore designers jeans and put product in their hair. In the final analysis, they were more about *marketing* than *ministering*. *All hype and no holiness*.

In contrast, people thought Paul was nuts, and he did little to worry about their perception. He says, "For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for

you.” In essence, “If you think I’m crazy just know I’m crazy for God, and if you think I’m in my right mind and right on; then follow my example.”

Either way, Paul didn’t take a poll before he acted.

He was the opposite of politically correct. The only expectations he lived up to were those of the Lord.

Paul reveals his master motive in verse 14, “For the love of Christ compels us...” The reason he endured such hardships was the love of Christ. He knew how much the Lord loved him, and he loved Christ in return.

Notice so far in Chapter 5 Paul mentions three motivations for serving Jesus: rewards, fear, and love.

All three are powerful motivators - but without a question the highest and holiest incentive is love!

Knowing in your heart of hearts that Jesus loves you, died for you, rose for you, and cares for you - this is what captivates and propels a person. It causes them to go anywhere, do anything for Jesus’ sake. A tank that’s full of the love of Christ will never run empty.

Paul says, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died...” Here’s a truth about our salvation. When Jesus died, we died with Him. Our sin nature was crucified.

Think of it like “copy and paste.” My computer allows me to copy text from one document and paste it into another. God can also “copy and paste.” Spiritually, He copied you in the 21st century and scrolled back to the 1st century where He pasted you alongside Jesus on the cross. You now share in

what Jesus accomplished.

When Jesus died to sin, *the old you* died with Him.

Paul continues, "and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again." In Christ, we died to our old desires and became a brand new person.

God now gives every Christian a new identity, a new nature, a new disposition, a new love, a new purpose, a new joy, even a new power. He figures the least we can do is embrace this new life and live it to the max...

Verse 16, "Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer." This an incredibly significant verse. Really understand it and it will change your life.

Paul uses Jesus as an example... On earth, the disciples knew Him as a man - physically and tangibly.

Even today, we picture Jesus with human traits - *hopefully, with Middle Eastern features, black hair, a Jewish nose*. The Lord's humanness enabled His disciples to identify Jesus on the street and follow Him.

But now that He's ascended to heaven, we relate to Jesus spiritually. His former appearance is no longer that significant. The fact that He was with us is theologically important, but the specifics - *His height, weight, facial features, physique* - are no longer a relevant issue.

This is why God didn't provide us photographs or portraits of

Jesus. His omission was very intentional.

God is teaching us a new way to view one another.

Since we've all become new people in Christ, why focus any longer on the outward person? Why not look beneath the surface. As best as we can, God wants us to look past our bodies and relate to folks spiritually.

And the first way to apply this principle is personally.

Why get bummed about your own appearance? The real you is not the outer person, it's the inner person.

Remember, our bodies are just a tent. It's a temporary skin. It cracks and weathers. **Like a pecan, I'm more than the outer shell. The real me is the nut on the inside!** This is how we all should see ourselves.

Years ago, **supermodel, Carole Mallory commented, "Everywhere I went my figure followed. But I learned I am not my figure." In short, your looks are not you.**

Your personhood involves more than how pretty you are, or how fit, or how smart, or how athletic you are - the real person is who you are on the inside.

You are what you are spiritually.

Here's a way we men can apply *Paul's people principle*... When you see a pretty girl, remember that's not the girl! The real person is under the wrapping paper. In reality, she might be a lonely, sad, vindictive, ugly person. She's definitely a soul in need of Jesus.

Paul's point is that we should learn to see ourselves and other people in terms of who they are spiritually.

We're not our weight, or height, or shape, or looks. **The real you is the spiritual you!** Your *body* is just a pup tent that one day you'll trade in on a mansion!

Thus, Paul writes triumphantly, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

Realize, a Christian is a new species of creature that prior to the first century had never roamed this planet.

We're the first humans since Adam's fall not to possess a sin nature. Our old man has been crucified with Christ! We represent a new start for mankind.

God planted in our hearts a love for Him and love for others. We're capable of what no one before us could do - *we can grow spiritually, and live victoriously*. In Christ, we are the envy of the angels - **new creations**.

Verse 18, "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ..."

Note, God doesn't need to be reconciled to us. *He loves us. He's for us. He wants to forgive us.* It's mankind who is at war with God. We're the hostiles.

Yet Jesus died to make a way for us to return to God. He paid our penalty. He gained for us a pardon. "And (He) has given us the ministry of reconciliation..."

Not only has Jesus united us with God - he's set us on a mission to bring other folks to Him as well. He reconciles us and makes us ministers of reconciliation.

Paul continues, "That is, that God was in Christ reconciling

the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God."

Here's the mind-blower. This a phenomenal truth...

On the cross, God was in Christ *dying to save us*, but now God is in you *pleading for men to be saved!*

We're "*ambassadors for Christ*" or divine diplomats.

We're God's spokespeople. Like a foreign envoy sent to another country. We speak declarations from home in a way the locals can hear and understand.

As "*ambassadors of Christ*" we convey the message of heaven in a way earthly ears can hear and grasp.

And this involves two equal priorities... We need to be *faithful to the message*, yet *flexible with our methods - relatable culturally but reliable spiritually*. True to the message, but shrewd with our delivery.

And Paul adds, verse 21, "*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*" Jesus was the sinless sacrifice. He knew no sin. He was the spotless Lamb.

Yet at the cross, the full weight of *every grimy act* done in *every slimy place* - was suddenly thrust on Jesus' sinless shoulders. He was made sin who knew no sin - so we could become the righteousness of God.

Jesus took on all that's wrong with fallen mankind, so we could become all that is right in a holy God. *What a message*

to share! Nothing is more deserving of our max effort than to communicate the Gospel effectively.

As ambassadors of Christ, we're like an interpreter.

A good interpreter is fluent in two languages - *what he hears* and *what he speaks*. And God has made us His interpreters. **Let's be both faithful to the message of Scripture and fluent in the language of culture.**

Chapter 6, "We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain." Notice, we not only *work for Jesus*, but we *work with Him*. Paul writes, "*as workers together with Him...*"

And here, Paul "*pleads*" with the Corinthians "*not to receive the grace of God in vain.*" *And it can happen.*

Grace gets wasted on an ungrateful and unrepentant heart. Grace is God's change agent. Access to God's blessing should be taken advantage of, not taken for granted. Don't just receive grace, but grow in grace.

"For He says: (and Paul **quotes Isaiah 49:8**) "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

Paul says today is the day the prophets foretold.

Not next week - or tomorrow - but **today** is the day to be saved. The peak season for salvation is now!

Keep in mind salvation is a seasonal business.

Like beach toys, and Christmas ornaments, and Valentine

candy, there're only certain times of the year when some products are kept in stock. And likewise with salvation. Paul says, *“now is the day of salvation.”*

When time ends and eternity begins, you'll no longer be able to obtain salvation. Today though, shelves are stocked. Business is brisk. *God even needs help behind the counter! That's why he's recruited you.*

In the grocery store where I used to work, there was a rule... If customers were stacking up at the check out registers, even if you were on break or at lunch, you went back to work. *We never made the customer wait.*

This is why today God is calling all His people to the registers! You are an ambassador for Christ. We've got customers at the checkout and they need the gospel.

And when I talk about the day *“time ends and eternity begins,”* I'm not just speaking of the day when Jesus returns. Time ends and eternity begins every day for millions of people who die and meet their Maker. Right this second, people all over the globe are *checking out*, and they desperately need Jesus.

You hear a lot of talk these days about *“near-death experiences.”* Folks supposedly see bright lights and walk long tunnels. Well, I hate to burst your bubble, but that's not what you're going to see when you really die.

Near-death isn't the same as *really-dead*.

C.S. Lewis describes what we'll see the first moment after you die, *“There will be God without disguise: something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or*

irresistible horror into every creature.

It will be too late then to choose your side. That will not be the time for choosing: it will be the time when we discover which side we have really chosen, whether we realized it or not. Now, this moment is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It won't last forever. **We must take it or leave it.**" This is why now is the day of salvation.

Everyone to the check-outs! We got customers!

Verse 3, **"We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed."** Some ministries do more harm than good. They turn people off needlessly...

They're rude, or inauthentic, or hypocritical, or out of date, or out of touch. The Gospel will offend folks by its very nature - we don't want to offend unnecessarily.

"But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God..." A typical church member doesn't realize the sacrifices and difficulties a pastor faces.

The Corinthians didn't realize all that Paul had endured to bring them the Gospel. It's said, **"A ministry that costs nothing, accomplishes nothing."** And in the next few verses, Paul itemizes the price he had paid...

He begins with the **pressures of ministry** - "in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses..."

Then the **persecutions in ministry** - "in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults..." Followed by the **passion of ministry** - "in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings,"

As well as the godly **principles and priorities within ministry** - "by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left..."

Finally, he mentions a few **ministry paradoxes** - "by honor and dishonor..." It's odd how people treat me when they discover I'm a pastor. Some people show instant respect, while others react with instant disdain.

"By honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report..." In today's godless culture, it's impossible for me to teach God's Word without ruffling some feathers.

Not a week goes by that I don't make someone mad.

Every sermon I preach ends in a split decision - to some folks it's a good report - others get offended.

"As deceivers, and yet true..." Not only do I teach, but I'm also called on to lead. Those who like the direction say *"Amen."* Those who don't, call me a fraud.

But every decision I make is met with controversy.

"As unknown, and yet well known..." Everybody knows I'm **"Pastor Sandy"** - but they forget I'm Kathy's **"honey"** - I'm **"dad"** to eight kids now - I'm **"G-daddy"** to nine grandkids - I'm even a **"pastor"** to pastors.

Everybody knows I'm **"Pastor Sandy,"** but few people remember I've got a life outside of what I do for them.

"As dying, and behold we live..." We die to our pride and

sacrifice for God, as His life swells up inside us.

"As chastened, and yet not killed..." Did you know God disciplines the pastor? He's not above a spanking.

But what doesn't kill the man only makes him better.

Then verse 10, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing..."

Ministry is full of highs and lows. I can get my heart broken by a person I trusted, then seconds later have the joy of leading a man to Christ. You've got to persist.

"As poor, yet making many rich..." Most churches pay the pastor a meager salary, all the while that pastor is helping those people become spiritually rich.

"As having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

A pastors' bank account might hover near zero, but if he serves the Lord he's laying up treasure in heaven.

Paul's discussion of ministry wasn't him tooting his horn. The Corinthians questioned him. He just wanted them to know what he had endured for their sake.

And I know how Paul feels. The toughest times in ministry are when folks criticize what they see, while you're making sacrifices they can't see. It's painful...

Several years ago, I came under attack from some critics within our church. I'll never forget going to my dad for advice. I spilled my guts, "You'd think that after all these years I wouldn't have to still prove myself."

I'll never forget dad's reply, "*Sandy, in this world, you've got to prove yourself to people every single day!*" Thankfully, Paul didn't have to prove himself to Jesus, but he had to prove

himself to people every day.

Paul continues, "O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open." Paul has been spilling his guts. Verse 12, "You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections."

The Corinthians had blamed him for their problems. He is not the problem. They cause their own problems.

One night, I was listening to the Dr. Laura radio show.

A caller was talking about the problems her parents were *having* - when suddenly Dr. Laura jumped in and corrected her, "No, the problems they are *creating*."

She then explained when a tornado destroys your house - *you have a problem*. But act selfishly and make bad choices, and *you create a problem!* The Corinthians were causing problems, not being victims.

Verse 13, "Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open. Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers." What a crucial principle...

The imagery is that of a plough pulled by two oxen.

The necks of the animals are in a wooden harness, or yoke. The yoke is constructed to force the oxen to work together. It causes pain if one ox doesn't cooperate with the other. The yoke chokes the one who pulls ahead and pinches the one who lags behind.

The restrictiveness of the yoke forces teamwork.

Thus, it's easier on the animals to yoke together two of the

same breed. Mix a donkey with an ox, and you ensure friction and frustration. Different species have different natures that pull apart and fight each other.

Likewise, a believer and unbeliever are separate species - different breeds with different natures.

A believer is born of God - alive to the things of the Spirit. Whereas the unbeliever, though a nice person, is still dead in sin and unaware of God's Spirit.

Put these two breeds in the same yoke - *a marriage, a business, a roommate situation, a serious dating relationship* - and it'll produce long term frustration.

At first, the two parties might work well together, but over time they'll inevitably move in separate directions. They'll pinch or choke the other. A yoke causes pain.

And Paul asks five rhetorical questions of the person who is unequally yoked with an unbeliever, "For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?

And what communion has light with darkness?

And what accord has Christ with Belial?" "*Belial*" means "worthless" and was an ancient epithet for Satan.

Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?"

Some things don't mix: *oil and water, honey and vinegar, drinking and driving, water and electricity, Bulldogs and Gators, and... believers and unbelievers!*

Remember, Chapter 5 calls us to be ambassadors for Christ. We need to speak the language and relate culturally. We can't withdraw from the world and still be ministers of

reconciliation... *But neither can we be overly involved, and thus end up in vexed by the world.*

It's one thing to have *contact* - it's another to enter a *contract!* We can *interact* - but we step over a lethal line when we get too *intertwined* and *interconnected*.

Paul adds one more question in verse 16, "And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." We're God's kids.

That's why it's often said, "If a child of God marries a child of the devil, then the child of God is sure to have trouble with his father-in-law." *That's more true than you know.* I could fill a 5-gallon bucket with tears shed in my office by believers who married an unbeliever.

Nothing is as agonizing, and complex, and taxing on a Christian as being married to someone who doesn't share their most basic, heartfelt allegiance to Jesus.

And it's just my conviction, but it's irrefutable, "You'll never marry an unbeliever if you never date one."

Chapter 6:17 quotes **Isaiah 52:11**, "Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.

I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty."

In our interactions with the world, we need balance.

Don't *isolate* from the world, but neither should you *assimilate* - and buy into its values. We need a healthy mix...

friendship with sinners, but fellowship with saints.

A mom tried to teach this lesson to her sons. She was in the garden and held up her white gloves. She said, "Notice boys, when I stick these gloves in the dirt, *the gloves become dirty, the dirt doesn't get glovey.*"

This is what we're taught in 1 Corinthians 15:33, "Evil company corrupts good habits." Hang out with bad people for long, and eventually, you'll be *hung high*.