

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

2 CORINTHIANS 5-6

Author, Jay Strack, writes about a NBA basketball game he attended that ended strangely. *(Here's a clip of the final ten seconds.)* Dallas' point-guard, Derek Harper, dribbled the final seconds off the clock. He thought his team was ahead, when the game was actually tied. Dallas could've used the wasted time to get off a shot, and win. Instead, they lost in overtime.

Strack wrote afterwards, *"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, won a reward for serving God, won lost souls to Jesus, instead we dribbled away the precious seconds. It was like we had *time to waste*, instead of a *game to win!*

Paul's goal in Chapters 5-6 is to help us avoid that mistake. He sets our sights on eternity, and focuses us on the judgment seat of Christ. Paul encourages us those of us who believe 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. This 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; set up; then tear down. Camping is a hassle - *and so is my body.*

Think of the time, energy, and money I waste sustaining my body. For starters I refuel 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 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, effort, 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. Christians have been promised *"a building from God."*

We know 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 spend all your effort worshipping Jesus.

One day our spirits will be given the keys to hassle-free housing. We'll get heavenly, 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; then flush it to goldfish heaven. On one such solemn occasion, little sister asked her mom if grandpa, who'd died years earlier, was also in heaven. The mom said confidently, "Yes, he is!" That's when one of the boys asked, "*who flushed grandpa?*" When we die we'll flush these bodies, and ultimately receive "*a building from God*" - a spiritual and eternal body.

"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." Greek philosophy viewed the body as evil - as totally and completely unredeemable. Epictetus said he was, "*a poor soul burdened with a corpse.*" The Roman Seneca called himself "*a slave of the body.*"

The Greek hope for the afterlife was to be free from the body - to 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 sin's 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 "*groans*" or longs 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. Thus Paul tells us, "*we walk by faith, not by sight.*" In a troublesome now, we hold onto His promises by faith.

And here is 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 Savior. 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 pronouncements. 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 purposes.

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, whereas 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 peace with God through Jesus. We shouldn't be frightened of God. But we should definitely 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."

Though Paul persuaded men to believe the Gospel, he shouldn't question if they believed him. He was well known by the Corinthians *and God*. They were well aware of Paul's integrity. He'd lived a year-and-a-half in Corinth. They were acquainted with his motives.

"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 stature, some clout, some gravitas*. But Paul shouldn't have had to prove anything to the Corinthians. They knew his heart. And this is the real measure of a man of God.

Paul wasn't about *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. It looked as if a caterpillar was crawling above his eyes. And those eyes were often infected - bulging with puss.

In addition, his body was tattooed with the scars from numerous beatings and stonings. Paul would never have made the cover of GQ or Christianity Today. With Paul it was heart - *not appearance* - that mattered!

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*. In the final analysis they were more about *marketing* than *ministering*. They were *all hype* and *no holiness*.

In contrast people thought Paul was nuts, and he did little to counter their perceptions. 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 hardships was the love of Christ. He knew how much the Lord loved him, and how much he loved in return.

Notice so far in Chapter 5 Paul has mentioned three motivations for serving Jesus: **rewards, fear,** and **love.** All three are powerful motivators - but without question the highest and holiest incentive to serve God 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 should captivate and propel 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, spiritually speaking we died with Him. Our sin nature was crucified with Christ.

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 us in the 21st century, and scrolled back to the 1st century where He pasted us 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 is 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 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 give us a physical depiction or portrait 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 is personally. Why get bummed about your appearance or body shape, when the real you is not the outer, but the inner person?

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

Years ago, super model, Carole Mallory commented, "[Everywhere I went my figure followed. But I learned I am not my figure.](#)" You're 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.**

And 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 has planted in our hearts a love for Him and 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 tells us, "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ..."

Note God didn'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 people to Him as well. He reconciles us, and makes us ministers of reconciliation.

"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 a mind-blower, On the cross God was in Christ *dying to save you*, now God is in you *pleading for men to be saved!*

Paul calls us "*ambassadors for Christ*" or divine diplomats. God's spokespeople. Like a foreign envoy sent to another country. An ambassador comes to that country in the clothes and language of that culture. He speaks in ways the locals will hear and understand.

As "*ambassadors for Christ*" we convey the message of heaven in ways that earthly ears can hear and grasp. And this involves two equal priorities... We need to be *faithful to the message*, and *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 the responsibility for all that's wrong with fallen humanity, so we could become what's right to a holy God. *What a message we have to share! Nothing is more deserving of our maximum effort than to communicate God's glorious Gospel effectively.*

Again, as ambassadors we're like an interpreter. And a good interpreter is fluent in two languages - *what he hears* and *what he speaks*. Sadly, some churches lose touch with the truth of heaven, whereas others forget how to speak in the dialect of earth. And as God's interpreters, *we need to 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." For 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 now is the day prophets foretold. Not next week, or tomorrow, but **today** is the day to be saved!

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 the 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 use 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 servants to the registers! You are an ambassador for Christ. We've got customers at the checkouts - 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 you 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 needlessly turn folks off. *They're rude, or inauthentic, or hypocritical, or out of touch.*

The Gospel will offend folks by its very nature, you and I don't want to offend people unnecessarily.

In the next few verses Paul speaks of his ministry - which parallels with the ministries of most pastors. **"But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God..."** A typical church member doesn't realize the sacrifices and difficulties his or her 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** of ministry - **"in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults..."** Followed by the **passions** of ministry - **"in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings,"** As well as the godly **principles** and **priorities** of 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 Paul 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 evil report and good report..." In today's godless culture, it's impossible to teach God's Word without ruffling feathers. *Here's my job... every week I make somebody mad.* Every sermon is a split decision - to some folks it's a good report, while others get offended.

"As deceivers, and yet true..." Not only do I teach, but I'm also called to lead. Those who like the direction say *"Amen."* Those who don't, question my motive. But every decision a pastor makes 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 eleven 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 pride, and sacrifice for others, even as God fills us with His life.

"As chastened, and yet not killed..." Did you know God disciplines pastors. Hey, I'm not above a spiritual spanking. What doesn't kill us, will makes us 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..." Trust me, being a pastor isn't a way to get rich, but it is a wonderful way to enrich others. That should be the goal of all pastors.

"As having nothing, and yet possessing all things." A pastors' bank account might hover near empty, but as he serves the Lord he's laying up treasure in heaven.

Paul's discussion of ministry wasn't about him tooting his horn. The Corinthians had questioned him. He wanted them to know what he'd 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, "*Dad, you'd think after all these years I wouldn't have to still prove myself.*"

I'll never forget my 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 knew he had to prove himself to people.

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

The Corinthians blamed Paul for their problems, but He wasn't the problem. They should look in a mirror.

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 creating problems, not having them.

Verse 13, "Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open." I've been open with you, now you be open with me. *And then a crucial principle, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers."*

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

Thus, it's easier on the animals if two of the same breed share the yoke. Mix a donkey with an ox, and you insure friction and frustration. Different species have different natures that pull apart and fight each other. And likewise, a believer in Jesus and an unbeliever are separate breeds with different natures.

A believer has been born of God - alive to the things of the Spirit. Whereas the unbeliever, though perhaps a nice person, is dead in sin, oblivious to 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 a 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*," It was an ancient epithet for Satan. And, "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. Thus, we can't withdraw from the world and still be ministers of reconciliation... *But neither can we be overly involved, and thus end up 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 the tears shed in my office by believers who married

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

Though it's just a conviction, it's hard to argue, "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 people don't *isolate* from the world, but neither should you *assimilate* into the world, and buy into its values. We need a healthy balance - *friendship with sinners*, but *fellowship with saints*.

Once, a mother 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 get dirty, the dirt doesn't get glovey.*"

And this is what we're taught in 1 Corinthians 15:33, "Evil company corrupts good habits." *Hang out* with the wrong people for long, and eventually you'll get *hung*! We're in the world, but we shouldn't be of the world.