

Living Reconciled
2 Corinthians 6:8-10
Part four

Having unrealistic expectations in respect to anything we might become involved with can certainly become a prescription not only for discouragement but also even over time a prescription for defeat. Isn't this obvious.

If someone commits themselves to someone in marriage believing that this particular commitment will result in some kind of fairy tale ending, they most likely will find themselves very disappointed, if not discouraged and perhaps even defeated. If a person commits themselves to a new job believing that this job will solve all problems and rather than solving their problems creates for them new problems that are far more difficult for them to deal with, they will again will not only find themselves experiencing disappointment but perhaps even discouragement and perhaps even personal defeat.

Having unrealistic expectations in respect to anything we might become involved with can certainly become a prescription not only for discouragement but also even over time a prescription for defeat. Wouldn't you agree?

And certainly this is true in respect to our commitment to Christ. When we come to Christ by faith so that we might be reconciled to God, hopefully we will come to Him with realistic expectations, for if we come to Christ in order to be reconciled to God with unrealistic expectations believing that from that time forward our lives are going to be characterized by health, wealth and prosperity, I can tell you right now that we will be sorely disappointed. So, what can we expect?

This question brings us back to our study of **2 Corinthians** and more specifically to **2 Corinthians 6:1-10**. And what is the question that we are in the process of answering?

What does it mean for those who have been reconciled to live as if they have been reconciled? This is the question that we began to answer over a month ago. And what have we discovered so far?

First of all, for those who have been reconciled to live as if they have been reconciled means they will strive to not offend (2 Corinthians 6:1-3).

So now let me read for you **2 Corinthians 6:1-3** and see if this is not so. **“And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain— (2) for He says, ‘At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you.’ Behold, now is ‘the acceptable time,’ behold, now is ‘the day of salvation.’ (3) Giving no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited.”**

The Corinthians though professing to have been reconciled were living lives that were inconsistent with that profession. Paul in response to their inconsistency urged the Corinthians **“not to receive the grace of God in vain,”** or in other words to get their lifestyles aligned with their profession and to do so quickly so that they would not continue to cause offense to the ministry of reconciliation, or in other words to their proclamation of the gospel of Christ.

They needed to do this not only for themselves but also for others, for the simple reason that their inconsistent lifestyles were making it far too easy for people in the world to discount the truth of the gospel of Christ.

So again, what does it mean for those who have been reconciled to live as if they have been reconciled? First of all, for those who have been reconciled to live as if they have been reconciled means they will strive to not offend. But this is not all.

Secondly, for those who have been reconciled to live as if they have been reconciled means that they will strive to commend themselves as servants of God (2 Corinthians 6:4-10).

We know this because this is how Paul and his associates as those who had been reconciled lived their lives according to the first part of **2 Corinthians**

6:4, where Paul stated very clearly that he and his associates were **“in everything commending themselves as servants of God.”**

And why would they have wanted to do this? Why would they have wanted **“in everything to commend themselves as servants of God?”** They would have wanted to do this so that they, rather than discrediting the ministry of reconciliation as many of the Corinthians had done, might enhance it.

And hopefully we ourselves as those who have been reconciled to God by God through Christ would want to live our lives in the very same way and for the very same reason.

So now, believing that this is in fact exactly what each of us would want to do, let me ask you this question. What is the one singular quality that must be present in our lives if we, in everything like Paul and his associates, are going to be able to commend ourselves as servants of God?

The one singular quality that must be present if we in everything are going to be able to commend ourselves as servants of God is the quality of “much endurance” (2 Corinthians 6:4).

The reason why I am able to say this is because Paul after speaking of how he and his associates had commended themselves as servants in everything in **2 Corinthians 6:4** immediately spoke of their **“much endurance”** and then followed up this expression with a list of things that in fact manifested their **“much endurance.”**

So if this is true, that the one singular quality of **“much endurance”** must be present if we are going to be able to commend ourselves as the servants of God in everything, then it seems that we would have a great deal of interest in the various elements that Paul listed as comprising this particular quality in respect to his own life and the lives of his associates. And where did Paul list these various elements? He listed them in three different groupings in **2 Corinthians 6:4-10**.

So, what was the first grouping? The first grouping was a grouping of nine troubles. So now let me read for you **2 Corinthians 6:4-5** and see if this is not so. **“But in everything commending ourselves as servants of God [and now listen to what Paul says], in much endurance [there is over-**

arching descriptive heading that encompasses everything that follows, and then he says], **in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses** [or in other words in troubles in general], **(5) in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults** [or in other words in troubles endured at the hands of others, and then he says], **in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger** [or in other words in self-inflicted troubles].” These nine different troubles that Paul listed represent the first element of “much endurance.”

In other words, Paul and his associates’ “much endurance” was manifested through their willingness to persevere in ministry though suffering many troubles (2 Corinthians 6:4-5). But this was not the only element that comprised their “much endurance.” Paul went on to give a second element contained in a second grouping.

The second grouping is a grouping of nine qualities. So now let me read for you **2 Corinthians 6:6-7** and see if this is not so. **“In purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, (7) in the word of truth, in the power of God; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left.”** These nine different qualities that Paul listed represent the second element of “much endurance.”

So how was Paul’s and his associates’ “much endurance” manifested? First of all, it was manifested through their willingness to persevere through many troubles, and secondly, Paul’s and his associates’ “much endurance” was also manifested by the various qualities that were displayed in the midst of all that they suffered (2 Corinthians 6:6-7).

So Paul and his associates not only manifested their “much endurance” by their perseverance in the midst of all that they suffered, but they also manifested their “much endurance” by the manner in which they persevered in the midst of all that they suffered.

But there is still another element, a third element, of their “much endurance” that Paul spelled out for the Corinthians. And what was that?

Paul’s and his associates’ “much endurance” was also manifested by their perseverance in ministry in spite of various paradoxical contrasts that they experienced (2 Corinthians 6:8-10).

So now let me read for you **2 Corinthians 6:8-10** and see if this is not so. **“By glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers and yet true; (9) as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death, (10) as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things.”** These nine paradoxical contrasts represent the third element of “much endurance.”

And why are these nine paradoxical contrasts that represent the third element of Paul’s “much endurance” so important for us to consider? They are important because if we understand that these kinds of paradoxical contrasts can also be a part of our experience as ministers of reconciliation, then our expectations in regard to our ministry will be far more realistic. So now let us take a closer look at each of these contrasts.

The first paradoxical contrast that Paul and his associates experienced as they persevered in the ministry of reconciliation was “by glory and dishonor” (2 Corinthians 6:8). Isn’t this exactly what we see in **2 Corinthians 6:8**.

The Greek word rendered “glory” (DOXA) has the meaning here of “esteem.” And the Greek word rendered “dishonor” (ATIMIA) has the meaning of “shame” or “disgrace.”

As Paul and his associates pressed forward with their ministry of reconciliation they found themselves being treated very differently at different times by various people. Sometimes they were treated well and at other times they were treated shamefully and disgracefully. This is what Paul and his associates experienced as they persevered in the ministry of reconciliation.

Therefore if we like Paul and his associates want to manifest the same quality of “much endurance” that they manifested, then we must also like them be prepared to persevere in the ministry of reconciliation in spite of the possibility of this paradoxical contrast **“by glory and dishonor.”** So, what was the second paradoxical contrast that Paul and associates experienced?

The second paradoxical contrast that Paul and his associates experienced as they persevered in the ministry of reconciliation was “by evil report and good report” (2 Corinthians 6:8).

This statement by Paul is not a repetition of what he had just said. The preceding statement “**by glory and dishonor**” refers to the personal treatment of Paul and his associates. This statement refers to what was being said behind their backs.

As Paul and his associates pressed forward with their ministry of reconciliation they not only found themselves being treated with esteem and at other times disgracefully, they also found themselves being talked about behind their backs. Now if they were only being talked about behind their backs in flattering ways this certainly would not have been a problem, but the reality was that not only were they being talked about behind their backs in flattering ways but in evil ways as well. This is what Paul and his associates experienced as they persevered in the ministry of reconciliation.

Therefore if we like Paul and his associates want to manifest the same quality of “much endurance” that they manifested, then we must also like them be prepared to persevere in the ministry of reconciliation in spite of the possibility of this paradoxical contrast “**by evil report and good report.**” So, what was the third paradoxical contrast that Paul and his associates experienced?

The third paradoxical contrast that Paul and his associates experienced as they persevered in the ministry of reconciliation was “regarded as deceivers yet true” (2 Corinthians 6:8).

One of the evil reports which was being circulated against Paul behind his back was that he was a deceiver, an imposter, even a false apostle. Did some people believe this? Yes! Did all people believe this of Paul? No! There were many who in fact saw him as true. This is what Paul and his associates experienced as they persevered in the ministry of reconciliation.

Therefore if we like Paul and his associates want to manifest the same quality of “much endurance” that they manifested, then we must also like them be prepared to persevere in the ministry of reconciliation in spite of the possibility of this paradoxical contrast “**regarded as deceivers yet true.**”

So, what was the fourth paradoxical contrast that Paul and his associates experienced?

The fourth paradoxical contrast that Paul and his associates experienced as they persevered in the ministry of reconciliation was “as unknown yet well-known” (2 Corinthians 6:9).

Paul at an earlier time in his life, as the brilliant and ambitious young Pharisee, had achieved a considerable measure of fame, at least among his own contemporaries, but as he turned his back on those things which from a worldly point of view were gain to him, and became the despised preacher of a crucified Messiah. He largely became ignored and unnoticed by the world, but even though he largely became ignored and unnoticed by the world he was well-known to whom? He was well known to God, which in the grand scheme of things is far more important than being known by the world. This is what Paul and his associates experienced as they persevered in the ministry of reconciliation.

Therefore if we like Paul and his associates want to manifest the same quality of “much endurance” that they manifested, then we must also like them be prepared to persevere in the ministry of reconciliation in spite of the possibility of this paradoxical contrast “**as unknown yet well-known.**” So, what is the fifth inevitable paradoxical contrast that Paul and his associates experienced?

The fifth paradoxical contrast that Paul and his associates experienced as they persevered in the of reconciliation was “as dying yet behold we live.” (2 Corinthians 6:9).

Because of the many perils and antagonisms that Paul and his associates were constantly exposed to it is not surprising at all that he would describe his experience as one of dying. But rather than dying he found himself repeatedly and quite improbably delivered.

It was as if he was on an airplane that crashed into the side of a mountain, and he continuously found himself walking away from the crash. This repeated deliverance filled him with wonder that led him to utter the expression “**as dying yet behold we live.**” This is what Paul and his associates experienced as they persevered in the ministry of reconciliation.

Therefore if we like Paul and his associates want to manifest the same quality of “much endurance” that they manifested, then we must also like them be prepared to persevere in ministry in spite of the possibility of this paradoxical contrast “**as dying yet behold we live.**” So, what is the sixth inevitable paradoxical contrast that Paul and his associates experienced?

The sixth paradoxical contrast that Paul and his associates experienced as they persevered in the ministry of reconciliation was “as punished yet not put to death” (2 Corinthians 6:9).

Now as we consider this sixth paradoxical contrast it is interesting to note that numerous commentators have pointed out the fact that the expression “**as punished but not put to death**” appears to be closely aligned, not only with Paul’s previous statement “**as dying, yet behold we live,**” but also closely aligned with the thanksgiving liturgy of **Psalm 118:17-18.**

So, what is the significance of this? Psalm 118:17-18 is thanking God for seeking to correct him through His discipline of him. Even though the Lord’s discipline of him was grievous, the Psalmist acknowledged that His discipline had not yet killed him.

Though Paul and his associates were very mature they had not “yet arrived,” or in other words had not become “perfect.” Paul and his associates therefore though suffering greatly saw their sufferings as an expression of the Lord’s loving discipline that though grievous had not killed them. This is what Paul and his associates experienced as they persevered in the ministry of reconciliation.

Therefore if we like Paul and his associates want to manifest the same quality of “much endurance” that they manifested, then we must also like them be prepared to persevere in the ministry of reconciliation in spite of the possibility of this paradoxical contrast “**as punished but not put to death.**” So, what is the seventh inevitable paradoxical contrast that Paul and his associates experienced?

The seventh paradoxical contrast that Paul and his associates experienced as they persevered in the ministry of reconciliation was “as **sorrowful** yet always rejoicing” (2 Corinthians 6:10).

Paul's heart was continuously broken. His heart was broken over the lost, over disobedient immature believers, and by the in-roads of false teachers. But yet even in spite of all this Paul and his associates found himself themselves always rejoicing in the Lord, in the Lord's grace, in the Lord's power and in the Lord's goodness. This is what Paul and his associates experienced as they persevered in the ministry of reconciliation.

Therefore if we like Paul and his associates want to manifest the same quality of "much endurance" that they manifested, then we must also like them be prepared to persevere in ministry of reconciliation in spite of the possibility that we ourselves might experience this paradoxical contrast "**as sorrowful yet always rejoicing**" So, what is the eighth inevitable paradoxical contrast that Paul and his associates experienced?

The eighth paradoxical contrast that Paul and his associates experienced as they persevered in the ministry of reconciliation was "as poor yet making many rich" (2 Corinthians 6:10).

Paul's poverty in terms of this world's goods was obvious to all and might lead some to view him with pity. But that was not Paul's view of himself. He considered no man richer than himself. The salvation he had experienced through faith in Christ had caused him to know what it means to be rich toward God, and he in the midst of his spiritual riches but in spite of his earthly poverty sought to help others to know how they might also come become rich toward God.

Therefore if we like Paul and his associates want to manifest the same quality of "much endurance" that they manifested, then we must also like them be prepared to persevere in ministry of reconciliation in spite of the possibility that we ourselves might experience this paradoxical contrast "**as poor yet making many rich.**" So, what is the ninth inevitable paradoxical contrast that Paul and his associates experienced?

The ninth paradoxical contrast that Paul his associates experienced as they persevered in the ministry of reconciliation was "as possessing nothing yet possessing all things" (2 Corinthians 6:10).

Paul once again points to his apparent poverty in terms of earthly wealth, but this time rather than pointing out how he, in spite of the poverty has made many rich, he speaks only true condition as viewed through his eyes of faith.

To the uncomprehending onlooker Paul was without home, without money, without possessions, hated and hunted by his own countrymen, proclaiming a message despised by Jews and Gentiles alike. But what was the truth? He in Christ possessed all things. And why is this? To have Christ is to have all, because Christ is all. This is why Paul was able to say to the Corinthians in **1 Corinthians 3:21-22, “For all things belong to you, (22) whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or thing present or things to come; all things belong to you, (23) and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.”**

Therefore if we like Paul and his associates want to manifest the same quality of “much endurance” that they manifested then we must also like them be prepared to persevere in ministry of reconciliation in spite of the possibility that we ourselves might experience this paradoxical contrast: **“as possessing nothing yet possessing all things.”**

When we came to Christ by faith in order to be reconciled to God and became a minister of reconciliation it did not mean that our lives would be filled with health, wealth and prosperity, in fact, quite the contrary. It might, in fact, dramatically diminish our prospects of enjoying any of these things if we are fully committed to the ministry that Christ has given us, but for the true disciple of Christ the trade of what we might lose in terms of the things of this world is of little consequence in terms of what we gain.

May we by the grace of God have realistic expectations concerning what we should expect as we work to faithfully carry out the ministry of reconciliation and boldly proclaim its message.