

Living Reconciled
2 Corinthians 6:4-5
Part Two

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 (2 Corinthians 6:1-3).

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**.

So now let me read for you that particular part of the verse and see if this is not so. **“But in everything commending ourselves as servants of God.”**

Paul and his associates, as those who had been reconciled and who were seeking to live as if they were reconciled, not only did so by seeking not to offend as we saw in **verses 1-3**, but they also did so by seeking **“in everything”** to commend themselves **“as servants of God”** as we have been seen in the first part of **2 Corinthians 6:4**.

So how did they go about doing this? How did Paul and his associates go about commending themselves in everything as the servants of God?

In order to answer this question let us now pick up our reading in the second half of **verse 4** and continue to read all the way down through **verse 10**. **“In much endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, (5) in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, (6) 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, (8) 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.”

So here we have it. These verses, **verses 4-10** explain, from the standpoint of Paul, how he and his associates were able to commend themselves in everything as servants of God, not only to themselves and to others but also most importantly to God Himself.

So let us now go back to **2 Corinthians 6:4-10** and begin to explore these verses a little bit more carefully in order to see what Paul had to say about how he and his associates had commended themselves.

And we will begin by looking at the second half of **verse 4** where Paul, after saying that he and his associates had done everything they could to commend themselves as servants of God, went on to say this, **“In much endurance.”**

Those who are reconciled to God and who have been given the ministry of reconciliation and the word of reconciliation should not expect their lives to become easier. In fact, to do so is very naïve. The ministry of reconciliation that we have been given requires that we must go to those who are not reconciled and not repentant, who are claimed by Satan and are inhabitants of his kingdom. This is dangerous work as Christ’s crucifixion reveals. Do not think that the powers of darkness lie down meekly when the gospel is preached? They will not.

The Scriptures tell us that there presently is a spiritual struggle going on between the forces of darkness and the forces of light and we are at the tip of spear when we as the ministers of reconciliation take the word of reconciliation into this very dark world, so don’t think that anything will be easy for us. It will not be easy and God never told us that it would be easy therefore “endurance,” or perhaps better said **“much endurance,”** will be absolutely required if we are going to be commended as servants of God.

Now as we consider this particular phrase as Paul uses it in this text there is an important interpretive question that we must ask. Was Paul’s reference to **“much endurance”** in **verse 4** a descriptive heading for all that followed in **verses 4-10** or was it not? Or in other words, was Paul’s **“much endurance”** in the midst of all that was described in **verses 4-10** the singular

quality that Paul felt commended him and his associates as servants of God, or were there other qualities listed in **verses 4-10** that also commended them as servants of God?

What is the answer? Paul's "much endurance" is a descriptive heading and was the singular quality that Paul listed as commending him and his associates as servants of God.

And why would I say this? Why would I say that Paul's reference to his and his associates "**much endurance**" was a descriptive heading and therefore the singular quality that he was pointing to in order to establish the fact that he and his associates had in fact "**in everything**" commended themselves as the servants of God.

First of all, Paul modified the word "**endurance**" with the word "**much**" in contrast to the other unqualified designations that immediately followed this one expression that Paul used to describe the totality of all that he had to endure in the cause of Christ. Secondly, the word "**endurance**" is a singular abstract virtue in contrast to the list of plural adversities and hardships that immediately followed. And thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, it is difficult to see how these various adversities or hardships that he listed in **verses 4-10** could possibly, in and of themselves, commend Paul and his associates as servants of God unless these various adversities and hardships were related to Paul's endurance, or in other words his "**much endurance.**"

So how did Paul and his associates commend themselves as servants of God? They commended themselves through "**much endurance,**" or in other words they commended themselves as servants of God through all they endured when it came to the matters of faithfully executing the ministry of reconciliation and boldly proclaiming the word of reconciliation no matter what might be thrown at them.

Now for some, in the time of Paul, his sufferings may have been inconsistent with his claim that he was an apostle and a faithful servant of Christ. But from Paul's perspective he would be disqualified as an apostle and exposed as an unfaithful servant if he attempted to evade the suffering that Christ told him would inevitably come to him. For Paul endurance was a necessary prerequisite for being commended as a servant of God. And this is how we should be looking at ourselves as well.

If we are here this morning and we, in spite of everything that is being thrown at us, are continuing to endure while executing the ministry of reconciliation and boldly proclaiming the word of reconciliation, then we can say with Paul and his associates that we in **“much endurance have commended ourselves as servants of God.”**

But if we are doing very little or nothing to faithfully execute the ministry of reconciliation or to boldly proclaim the word of reconciliation then certainly there is no way we could possibly say with Paul and his associates that we in **“much endurance have commended ourselves as servants of God”** by virtue of the fact that we haven’t endured at all but rather succumbed to whatever temptation or trial that we have passed through assuming of course that after receiving Christ as our Lord as Savior that we actually attempted as one who had supposedly been reconciled to live like one who had been reconciled.

So after pointing his readers to the one quality that he believed commended him and his associates **“as servants of God”** or in other words after pointing his readers to their **“much endurance,”** then what did Paul go on to do?

Paul, after pointing his readers to their **“much endurance,”** then went on to detail for his readers what that “much endurance” actually entailed.

So what did his **“much endurance”** entail according to Paul in **2 Corinthians 6:4-10**? The “much endurance” according to Paul entailed a variety of different things that he divided into three different groupings in 2 Corinthians 6:4-10.

So, what was the first grouping? Paul’s initial grouping consisted of nine different troubles that were associated with his “much endurance” (2 Corinthians 6:4-5). This initial list of nine negative troubles Chrysostom termed a “blizzard of troubles.” And from this point on this is how we will refer to them. We will refer to them as troubles. So, what were some of these troubles that Paul had to endure?

So now let us now read **verses 4-5**. So, what do these verses say? **“But in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance** [there is the descriptive heading for what is about to follow and then he says], **in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in**

imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, [and then finally] in hunger.”

This list of nine troubles that Paul associated with what he had to endure can also be divided into three groupings. So, what was the first grouping?

The first grouping of troubles associated with Paul’s endurance was related to troubles in general (2 Corinthians 6:4). Let me read for you **2 Corinthians 6:4** and see if this is not so. **“But in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, in much endurance** [the descriptive heading for what follows and then he says], **in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses.”**

Jesus in this world told his disciples, **“In the world you have tribulation** [or trouble],” in **John 16:33**. When Paul met Christ, according to **Acts 20:23**, the Holy Spirit informed him that afflictions awaited him. And certainly as we know that proved very true, just as Paul in the passage we are presently examining testified. But even in spite of all these troubles that Paul suffered, Paul endured. And not only did he endure but he pressed forward with even greater determination.

He never stopped declaring the message, nor did he alter the message, nor did he hide from those who came to faith in Christ that they themselves would invariably face various kinds of troubles as a result of having become a follower of Christ declaring to them, according to Acts 14:22, that they would not enter the kingdom of God except through many tribulations.

So, what was the second grouping of troubles associated with Paul endurance that he lists for us here in **2 Corinthians 6:4-5** related to?

The second grouping of troubles associated with Paul’s endurance was related to troubles at the hands of others (2 Corinthians 6:5).

Let us now read **2 Corinthians 6:5** and see if this is not so. **“In beatings, in imprisonments, [and] in tumults** [or in other words riots].”

Let us take a look at the first word, **“beatings.”** Later in this epistle Paul will give a list of his worst beatings in **2 Corinthians 11:24-25** when he told the Corinthians, **“Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes.**

Three times I was beaten with rods.” Eight excruciating beatings! Not the only ones that he received but certainly the most notable ones.

And then what about the “**imprisonments**” such as the imprisonment that he and Silas experienced while in Philippi after having been beaten with rods and having their feet fastened in stocks. And how did they manage that imprisonment? Did they vow never to proclaim the gospel of again? No! They, around midnight while still in the stock, began to pray out loud and to sing praises to God while the prisoners in other parts of the prison listened.

But beyond beatings and imprisonments there were also the tumults or in other words the riots! Paul experienced riots in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, and Jerusalem (Acts 13:50; 14:5, 19; 16:22; 18:12, 19:23; 21:27).

Clearly a part of Paul’s troubles that he suffered as a faithful minister of reconciliation and as a bold proclaimer of the gospel of Christ were troubles that he suffered at the hands of others.

So, what was first group of troubles? The first group of troubles consisted of general sufferings. And what was the second group of troubles? The second of group of troubles consisted of sufferings that came to Paul at the hands of others. But now we come to the third group of sufferings.

So, what is this third group of troubles associated with Paul’s endurance that he lists for us here in **2 Corinthians 6:4-5**?

The third group of troubles associated with Paul’s endurance was related to self-inflicted troubles (2 Corinthians 6:4-5).

So let us now go to **2 Corinthians 6:5** and see if this is not so. “**In beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, [and then it says] in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger.”**

Paul’s reference to his labors, sleeplessness and hunger all came upon him voluntarily as he willingly worked to exhaustion and went without sleep and skipped meals to do gospel work.

When we put all these troubles together we have a picture of Paul's life. It truly was as Chrysostom said, "**a blizzard of troubles,**" from every perspective, and what was Paul's response? "**Much Endurance!**"

Clement of Rome believed that this quality in Paul's was his most distinctive quality. And in commenting upon it this is what he said. "Paul by his example pointed out the prize of patient endurance. After he had been seven times in bonds, had been driven into exile, had been stoned, had preached in the East and in the West, he won the noble renown which was the reward of his faith, having taught righteousness unto the whole world and having reached the farthest bonds of the West; and when he had borne this testimony before the rulers, so he departed from the world and went unto the holy place, having been found a notable pattern of patient endurance!"

What a man Paul was: perpetually in the dust of the arenas, beaten, bloody, mocked by the crowds, sweating, exhausted, hungry, sleepless, but always enduring.

In point of fact, Paul's sufferings did not disqualify him. Rather they proved the authenticity of his faith and commitment. The fact that he didn't quit or curse God in respect to all that he suffered, as so many have done, but endured, and his "**much endurance,**" testified to his genuine faith.

So often times our words are ignored, including our nearest and dearest. But when they observe endurance for Christ in the midst of showers of troubles, it is very difficult to deny the reality of our faith.

May God give us the grace to endure the troubles that to come as ministers of reconciliation so that we might commend ourselves as true and faithful servants of Christ.
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