April 5, 2015

2 Corinthians: Whose Ministry is It, Anyway?
Ministry Character
Lesson Scripture: 2 Corinthians 6 HCSB

Key Passage – 2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Dig Deeper? You can do additional reading and research on 2 Corinthians 6 using the commentary at: http://tiny.cc/vb39qx

Step by Step through the Week

Monday: Begin your week of study by praying that the Holy Spirit would reveal God’s truth to you and provide the wisdom you will need to obey God’s word.

Read 2 Corinthians 6

• Read the following chapter summary:

Paul implores the Corinthians not to take God’s grace for granted: to realize the depth of the gift they have received. He has, and will, continue to do what it takes to minister to them with integrity and sacrifice. Again, he lists the ways in which he has suffered for their sake. But, he also includes the characteristics he has tried to model through his ministry (many of which are evidences of the Spirit: kindness, patience, love, etc.). Paul pleads with them to accept him as he does them. He has given everything for them; now he asks them to do likewise, as a gesture of their love, and to listen as he teaches them. Paul then shifts to a discussion about being adequately “yoked” (believers marrying unbelievers). He uses the image of the temple to illustrate his point. The believer is the temple (dwelling) of God (through the Spirit). Therefore, believers should seek always to keep a pure and holy temple and not associate their bodies with unholy things or unholy relationships.

• Identify key words or major ideas in the chapter.

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• Reread the passage. What has the Spirit of God taught you after reading through this chapter?

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**Tuesday:** Read 2 Corinthians 6. *If possible, read the passage in two or three different versions of the Bible. Multiple versions are available at www.biblegateway.com*

**Observe: 2 Corinthians 6:1-2**

Look up Isaiah 49:8 and compare it with 2 Corinthians 6:2. How does the Old Testament verse differ from Paul’s use of it? How do these two versions complement one another?

What words or phrases does Paul use to express the urgency of his message?

How is he calling his hearers to respond?

**Examine: 2 Corinthians 6:1-2**

**SALVATION:** Many people are looking for “steps to salvation.” People like the idea of an instruction manual with five steps that, if followed, will result in salvation. An example of this is Islam with its Five Pillars. According to Islam, if the Five Pillars are obeyed, salvation will be granted. Because the idea of a step-by-step process to salvation is appealing, many in the Christian community make the mistake of presenting salvation as a result of a step-by-step process. Various Christian denominations add baptism, public confession, turning from sin, speaking in tongues, etc., as steps to salvation. But the Bible only presents one step to salvation. When the Philippian jailer asked Paul, “What must I do to be saved?” Paul responded, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” (Acts 16:30-31). Salvation is not about certain steps we must follow to earn salvation. Yes, Christians should be baptized. Yes, Christians should publicly confess Christ as Savior. Yes, Christians should turn from sin. However, these are not steps to salvation. They are results of salvation. Because of our sin, we cannot in any sense earn salvation. We could follow 1000 steps, and it would not be enough. That is why Jesus had to die in our place. We are absolutely incapable of paying our sin debt to God or cleansing ourselves from sin. Only God could accomplish our salvation, and so He did. God Himself completed the “steps” and thereby offers salvation to anyone who will receive it from Him. (adapted from gotquestions.org)

In verse 1, Paul provided a two-word explanation of salvation—God’s grace. However, he indicates that a response is needed: receive it! Review these verses in...
Romans—3:23, 3:26, 5:8, 10:9, 10:13, 5:1—and explain how we receive God’s gift of grace in Christ Jesus.

Apply: 2 Corinthians 6:1-2

On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being highest), how would rate your passion for sharing the gospel with unbelievers? What can you do to deepen your love for lost people?

Do you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? Have you given Him full control of your life? If not, today is the day of salvation. Believe on the name of Jesus Christ and receive God’s gift. Share your response with someone in your class, your teacher, a friend, or a church staff member.

Wednesday: Read 2 Corinthians 6. If possible, read the passage in two or three different versions of the Bible. Multiple versions are available at www.biblegateway.com.

Observe: 2 Corinthians 6:3-10

Paul used a poetic format to explain the way in which God had formed him as a minister. What difficulties did he face in ministry?

What Christ-like character traits did God form within Paul and his co-laborers?

How did they experience God’s work in their ministry? (hint: look for the surprising ways God made strengths of their weaknesses or difficulties)
Examine: 2 Corinthians 6:3-10

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER: A.W. Tozer described character as “the excellence of moral beings.” As the excellence of gold is its purity and the excellence of art is its beauty, so the excellence of man is his character. Persons of character are noted for their honesty, ethics, and charity. A person’s character is the sum of his or her disposition, thoughts, intentions, desires, and actions. It is good to remember that character is gauged by general tendencies, not on the basis of a few isolated actions. For example, King David was a man of good character (1 Sam 13:14) although he sinned on occasion (2 Sam 11). Although King Ahab may have acted nobly once (1 Kngs 22:35), he was still a man of overall bad character (1 Kings 16:33). Character is influenced and developed by our choices. Daniel “resolved not to defile himself” in Babylon (Dan 1:8), and that godly choice was an important step in formulating an unassailable integrity in the young man’s life. Character, in turn, influences our choices. “The integrity of the upright guides them” (Prov 11:3a). Character will help us weather the storms of life and keep us from sin (Prov 10:9a). It is the Lord’s purpose to develop character within us. “The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the heart” (Prov 17:3). Godly character is the result of the Holy Spirit’s work of sanctification. Character in the believer is a consistent manifestation of Jesus in his life. God sometimes uses trials to strengthen character: “we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Rom 5:3-4). The Lord is pleased when His children grow in character. “You test the heart and are pleased with integrity” (1 Chron 29:17; see also Ps 15:1-2). (adapted from gotquestions.org)

Read Galatians 5:22-23. Match the characteristics from Galatians 6—provided by the Holy Spirit—with the characteristics of ministry in 2 Corinthians 6:3-10. How do each of these characteristics (love, patience, kindness, as well as knowledge and purity) relate to successful ministry?

Apply: 2 Corinthians 6:3-10

What difficulties in your life have formed you in Christ and prepared you for ministry?
Who would you consider a man or woman of true Christian integrity? Why do you view them so highly?

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Thursday: Read 2 Corinthians 6. If possible, read the passage from a different version of the Bible.

Observe: 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

What words does Paul use to describe Christians? What words does he use to describe non-Christians?

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What phrases indicate Paul is referring to close relationships?

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What reason does God use (see 16-18) to prohibit close relationships with unbelievers?

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Examine: 2 Corinthians 6:14-18

UNEQUALLY YOKED: The phrase “unequally yoked” comes from 2 Corinthians 6:14 in the King James Version: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers...” The New American Standard is a little more forthright: “Do not be bound together with unbelievers...” In 2 Corinthians 6:14, Paul discouraged them from being in an unequal partnership with unbelievers because believers and unbelievers are opposites, just as light and darkness are opposites. They simply have nothing in common, just as Christ has nothing in common with “Belial,” a Hebrew word meaning worthlessness (v 15). Here Paul uses it to refer to Satan. For a Christian to enter into any type of close partnership with an unbeliever is to court disaster. They have opposite worldviews and morals. Of course, the closest alliance one person can have with another is found in marriage, and this is how the passage is usually interpreted. God’s plan is for a man and a woman to become “one flesh” (Gen 2:24), a relationship so intimate that one literally and figuratively becomes part of the other. Uniting a believer with an
unbeliever is essentially uniting opposites, which makes for a very difficult relationship. (adapted from gotquestions.org and bible-truths.com)

The term “mismatched” (HCSB), “bound” (NASB), or “yoked together” (KJV) is the translation of *heterozugeo*, which is a compound Greek word meaning, “to yoke up differently; to associate discordantly; unequally yoke together.” Other than marriage, in what other types of close relationships do we choose to become involved?

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**Apply: 2 Corinthians 6:14-18**

How can a mismatched relationship harm your Christian character?

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How can you avoid close ties with unbelievers and yet still maintain relationships with people who need Christ?

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**Friday:** Read 2 Corinthians 6 and the following devotional from Ray Steadman:

Paul loved these people in Corinth, and he has manifested that love in various ways toward them. He has demonstrated it, as he says here, by two special things. Our mouth is open to you, he says. That means he communicated with them; he told them what was going on in his own life; he shared with them his feelings, struggles, failures, pressures, and problems, and he let them know how he coped with them. That is always a mark of love. To open up to others is to love them. Conversely, to close up and not communicate is to violate love.

This is a frequent problem in churches today. Christians actually think it is right for them to be closed in on themselves, to be private persons, unwilling to communicate who they are and how they feel and where they are in their lives. That, of course, is the way of the world. The world teaches us to let no one see who we are. But we need to understand that when we become Christians, we must learn to open up to one another.

Our heart is wide, he says. He means there is no favoritism; he includes the whole congregation. He did not merely love the nice people among them. He loved them all: the difficult ones, the ones who were struggling, and the hard-to-get-along-with ones
as well. There were no preconditions that he demanded before he would love somebody in the congregation either. He accepted them as people. Though he knew their struggles, their weaknesses, their heartaches, their failures, and their resistance, he loved them.

The problem was that they did not love him in return. This is the problem in churches, in individual lives, in homes, in families, and in marriages today. It is a failure to understand the reciprocal nature of love. Love is a two-way street. It always is; it is inherently so. Love requires a response. Paul was loving them, but they were not loving him back. They were closed; they were unresponsive; they were coldly self-contained toward him. And the result? Paul puts it in one word: They were restricted (2 Corinthians 6:12 RSV). What does that mean? It means they were limited; they were imprisoned within the narrow boundaries of their own selfish lives.

That is why Paul pleads here with these Corinthians: Oh! Corinthians, widen your hearts unto us. You are not restricted by us. You are restricted by yourselves, in your own affections. If you really want to experience the richness of love, then love back when you are loved. This is one of the most important lessons we can ever learn in life. Love must respond. When you are loved, what do you do? Do you love back, or do you say, What a wonderful feeling! I hope they will keep that up? Do you expect it all to come to you without a reciprocal response from you? No, that is impossible. Love must respond.

Father, help me to respond with open mouth and heart to those who have reached out to me in love. Thank You for the love You have shown me.

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