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SECOND CORINTHIANS 6:3-7:1

As we've been in 2 Corinthians, we've seen a real emphasis put on ministry, haven't we?

A few Sundays ago we said that ministry simply means "service."

We also have said that when we think of the word "ministry" we tend to think of full time vocational servants of God...such as pastors, associate pastors, and ministers of youth and music and recreation and administration, but we need to be reminded again that if we are truly born again children of God, **we each have a ministry.**

In fact, we saw last week that Paul called us to a ministry of reconciliation, and we saw that this simply means telling those lost folks around us that they are separated from God, and that there is only one way they can ever be reconciled to Him and that is through the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

Well, in today's lesson, Paul is going to give us a realistic portrait of **himself** and **his own ministry**, and then, he's going to give **us** some real words of exhortation for **our ministry.**

Chapter 6, verse 1...

Paul says here that we are not to receive the grace of God in vain.

Since the beginning of this book, Paul has been urging us to model a New Covenant ministry...

a ministry that emphasizes and depends on the work of the Spirit as opposed to the work of the flesh.

See, the work of the flesh is **law oriented** – the work of the Spirit is **grace oriented.**

The work of the flesh depends on **self** – the work of the Spirit depends on the **Lord.**

The work of the flesh focuses on the **external** – the work of the Spirit focuses on the **internal.**

The work of the flesh focuses on the **temporal** – the work of the Spirit focuses on the **eternal,**

I believe you'd agree with me that the work of the Spirit is far superior to the work of the flesh. When Jesus shed His blood for us, we came out real winners, didn't we?

I mean, Beloved, I can't be good enough or worthy enough or pure enough or righteous enough in my flesh to **ever** be saved...and praise God, **I don't have to...**

God has extended to me His wonderful amazing grace and now, Paul tells me...

"I, don't receive it in vain."

Paul goes on in **verse 2** to tell us "today is the day of salvation," and we said last week that this means we aren't assured of tomorrow, so **we better settle the salvation issue now...**and I believe this is the **primary meaning** of this verse..

but in addition to that...I believe "today is the

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day of salvation” also means that we must live out our salvation in the “now”...in the present.

As a matter of fact, our salvation, by its very nature is three-fold...

We have been saved from the penalty of sin...This is a one time **past** reality. (Justification)

We are being saved from the power of sin...This is an on-going **present** reality. (Sanctification)

We will be saved from the presence of sin...This is a promised **future** reality. (Glorification)

Having said all that, Paul goes on to urge us not to give anyone cause to be offended at the ministry God has called us to.

Let me just say right here...

None of us is perfect! I'm surely not and I hate to burst your bubble...but you're not either!

We're going to disappoint each other. I mean, I might offend you...and I pray that it will be not be intentional. I pray that I don't just get up one morning and sit on the side of my bed and say, "Well, let me figure out a way to greatly offend someone in my class today."

But, I still might offend you, and you might offend me...but, Paul says we should not do this...because when we do, what happens?

Verse 3...our ministry is discredited!!

The ministry God has given us can be discredited by little things we do unintentionally to each other, and there's another way folks discredit their ministry.

For instance, has it ever occurred to you that when the national media get ready to portray Christians, they go out of their way to bring in the nuttiest folks they can find?

My husband and I were watching one of those news magazine shows last week, (I don't recall if it was Dateline or Primetime or what...) and they had a segment on some folks who call themselves "Christian." These folks have moved to Jerusalem so they can be there next year, the year 2000, **when Jesus comes back to set up His reign.**

Now, Beloved, Jesus **might** come next year...Jesus **could** come this afternoon...But, according to God's Word, He's not coming back **to this earth** right away...I mean, He's not coming to Israel right away. The Bible teaches that there must be 7 years of tribulation after Jesus comes for His church and **then** He'll come back and set up His millennial reign.

So, if these folks are truly Christian, being in Jerusalem right now or next January isn't going to give them an advantage over the rest of us, is it? (Anyway, the pastor said the Lord is going to take us in alphabetical order at the Rapture, and that's why when he dies he wants to be buried in Alabama...:)

I don't mean to get into the end times events, except to use it to say that if these folks are truly Christian, **they are discrediting their ministry.** And, it's a disappointing thing to me that

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the national media always interview folks like this instead of folks who are rational and who know God's Word.

Paul goes on to tell us that he has lived his Christian life in such a way as to not offend anyone, and not only that, but Paul says his ministry actually commends him as a servant of God.

Remember, Paul is calling us to a ministry of reconciliation, but he is going to show us by the example of his very life that this ministry of reconciliation must also be a ministry of integrity!!

Verses 4 and 5...

Well, you might say, "I surely don't want to sign on for a ministry like that."
Paul is not describing a life of ease, is he?

Paul sets forth for us **three categories** of the things he's been through that prove his ministry is one of integrity...

1) Inner Struggles

Afflictions... means "pressures" – the things that press in on us and weigh us down and seem to crush us.

Hardships... means the painful discomforts of life.

Distresses... means literally "narrow places"...those tight spots that corner us and make us feel trapped.

2) External Treatment

Beatings... physical torture.

Imprisonments... Paul was imprisoned a number of times...

Tumults... the idea of mob violence, of public outcry and assaults.

3) Private Discipline

Labor, sleeplessness, hunger... these descriptions show that the ministry is hard work, often filled with nights of restlessness and days of prayer and fasting.

Well, how in the world could Paul or anyone else remain encouraged in the midst of all that?

How could Paul or anyone else maintain their integrity in the midst of all that?

Well, I believe his next list will tell us...

Verses 6 and 7...

Paul says he serves God in **purity** – Paul lived a clean life...

In **knowledge** – Paul knew what he was talking about...

In **patience** – Paul knew how to be calm in the midst of a storm...

In **kindness** – Paul was not mean spirited to anyone...

Then, Paul said that he lived and walked by the power of **the Holy Spirit**.

Paul said that he did all he did out of a **genuine love** for God, and for the people.

Paul said that he never operated outside the boundaries of the **Holy Scriptures**.

Paul did not rely on his own strength when he ministered.

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Paul did not fight Satan's kingdom with human resources, but with God's resources.

...and then, Paul gives a list of paradoxes...and in all this Paul is showing forth his ministry of integrity.

Paul is telling us that in our ministry we must be able to cope with all things...and the way we do it is found in one word back up in **verse 4...endurance.**

Endurance means more than simply a passive sitting down and letting all these troubles roll over us...it means rather the ability to bear things in such a way that the struggles become triumphs!

I'm afraid I fall so far short of Paul's example...I mean, the least little struggle, and I tend to back off...to say "it's not worth it"...How I pray that one day I can have even a fraction of the endurance of Paul...

Verses 11-13...

Paul is saying, "Look folks, I've been open and honest with you... but you've kept yourselves restrained from me."

Have you ever hugged someone who didn't hug you back?
Have you ever kissed someone who didn't kiss you back?
Ever tried to talk with someone who gives you one-word answers?

What do these responses or lack thereof tell you?
They tell you that person doesn't want a close relationship, don't they?

Paul is saying, "I've been transparent with you...
I've opened my heart to you...
How about doing the same with me!"

I truly believe if God is ever going to bless our ministry both as a class and as individuals...we must learn to open our hearts up to each other...

Well...

Let's see how Paul switches gears here and draws the attention away from himself and puts it on us! Let's see what is absolutely essential in order for us to have a ministry of integrity.

Verses 14-16a...

Look at the words "**partnership,**" "**fellowship,**" "**harmony,**" "**in common,**" "**agreement**"...

I believe the point Paul is trying to make here is that **real intimacy and real freedom** cannot be experienced in an unequally yoked relationship.

I believe if I asked, and I'm not going to...but, I believe if we had the time to give a word of personal testimony those of us who **have been** or **are now** in an unequally yoked relationship would say

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at best it is **difficult**, and at worst it is **devastating**.

And, I believe this is true whether it's the bonds of holy matrimony or a business partnership or even within a family tie over which we really have no control.

Paul goes on to explain why...

Verses 6b-7:1...

Paul says, "You are the temple of God..."

You have been called to a life of separation.

You have been called to a life of cleanness.

You have been called to be God's sons and daughters.

Therefore, cleanse yourselves from all defilement of both your flesh and your spirit **and perfect holiness in the fear of God.**"

"Perfect holiness in the fear of God..."

I believe this is the key to a ministry of integrity...and I want to spend the rest of our time talking about **holiness**.

Basically, holiness means two things...

- 1) belonging to Jesus.
- 2) becoming like Jesus because you belong to Him.

You know, holiness is the purpose of our conversion!! We think that heaven is the purpose of our conversion...

But, heaven is merely icing on the cake...

Before we're called to heaven, we are called to holiness!!

1 Peter 1:15 – "...like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior."

Why? Why does God demand holiness from His children? Well, we saw last week that we are to be ambassadors for Christ...

we are to show this sinful old world the kind of God we trust in and represent. It doesn't do much good for us to go to Christian conferences or Bible studies or retreats or seminars or even give out tracts and know the plan of salvation by heart and even present the Roman Road to someone...

if we do not display in our own lives the holiness of the God whom we are learning about and talking about!!

By the way, the holiness of God is not meant to drive us **away from God**...Oh no!...The holiness of God is meant to draw us **to God**. The holiness of God is redemptive and it is evangelistic.

Remember in the sixth chapter of the book of Isaiah when Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up in all of His holiness...remember that Isaiah was convicted of his own sinfulness...

This conviction did not result in condemnation, but in confession!

Remember Isaiah said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

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Before a person can ever be saved, he must see his sin and God's holiness!

Now, Isaiah's confession didn't drive him **away from God**...it drew him **to God** because remember the angel flew to Isaiah and he had a burning coal that he had taken from the altar and he touched Isaiah's lips with the coal and the angel said,

"Behold, this has touched your lips and your iniquity is taken away and your sins are forgiven."

And, it was then that Isaiah could be used by God and could show the world the holiness of God by his own life!

Now, our holiness is patterned after Christ...

Remember the 1 Peter verse we just read...

"...like the **Holy One** who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior."

Jesus is the standard of our holiness!!

Now, let me ask you...**and be honest**...does this talk of holiness make you uncomfortable? I mean, does this seem to be an **impossible, unreachable, unreasonable goal**? Are you thinking to yourself, "Hey, that's fine for old Isaiah, but I could never live a holy life."

Do you think God is asking too much? Do you wonder why in the world God has included this in His Word? Do you think He might just ought to lower His standard a little bit for those of us who are approaching the Twenty-first Century?

Well, let me ask you this...would you really want Him to? I mean, if He did, wouldn't He be putting Himself down on our level? Wouldn't you rather try to attain to **His** holiness than for Him to attain to **ours**?

We need to understand that the purpose of our conversion is to live up to His standard...we may not reach that standard, but we must try!

Let me give you two principles...

- 1) No Christian has a right to be satisfied with his spiritual progress as long as he is falling short of that standard.
- 2) God never demands from us that which He does not enable us to do.

Remember David's burning desire to build God a Temple? Remember Nathan's coming to David and telling him he could not do this because he had bloody hands?

Yet, we see in 1 Kings 8:18 that God said this to David,
"Because it was **in your heart** to build a house for My name, you did well that it was **in your heart**."

THAT'S THE KEY!!

Cast aside the argument that holiness is an unreachable goal...

Can you say it is in your heart to be as holy as God has called you to be?

I believe what Paul is telling us here and other places and what Peter tells in 1 Peter is

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“Hey, forget the fact that you fail...Keep trying!
Live as though you **can** be perfect! Live as though
you **can** be holy! Act as though this is a reasonable
thing for you to do!!”

And, 1 Peter tells us to be holy in **all** our behavior...

This means **all the time** – when folks see you
and when they don't. In other words, our private
behavior is to be holy and our outward dealings
with other folks are to be holy.

By the way...let me just interject this...

Don't forget the standard we mentioned. What is the standard? Jesus is the standard!!

We live in a world of changing standards...Think about it!! I've used this example before,
but when "Gone With the Wind" came out, there was such a hew and cry over Rhett Butler's
parting words to Scarlet O'Hara, "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn." Well, my goodness,
that's "ho hum", now, isn't it? Now, that's "PG" rated, isn't it?

We were watching TV the other night and a commercial came on with girls in their
underwear and Bill commented, "I wonder when they'll just come on without bothering to even put
their underwear on..."

I said all that to simply say this. Our standard of holiness...our standard of absolutes and
of right and wrong is not to be based on what the world thinks is right and wrong. We're not to, as
most politicians do, put one finger up in the air and see which way the wind is blowing and that
will determine what we stand for.

**God has given us His standard in His holy Word,
and in His holy Son, and in His Holy Spirit!**

Now, I can just hear someone say, "Well, you know it's not a
good thing to be so heavenly minded that we're no
earthly good."

Beloved, do you really think there's any danger of that happening?

Well, let me just close with a lesson from the Old Testament...

The prophet Zechariah ends his book with these words,

**"In that day, there will be inscribed on the bells
of the horses, 'HOLY TO THE LORD.' And
the cooking pots in the Lord's house will be like
the bowls before the altar."**

"Holy to the Lord" were the words that were inscribed on the plate of gold that was on the
turban worn by the high priest.

The high priest had to be holy when he entered the holy of holies. If he had not purified
himself and if he weren't holy before the Lord, the Lord would kill him.

But, what Zechariah was saying here is simply that
when Jesus brings salvation to men, and God
has His way in their lives,
that which once was the exclusive
property of the high priest will
belong to everyone.

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even the horses will bear the insignia...
even the pots and pans in the kitchen will be holy...

What the prophet of God is saying is that when a man rides his horse or plows his field or when a woman prepares the family meal,
they are to do it with the same degree
of holiness that was required of the high
priest when he was entering the holy of
holies.

Think about it!!

All distinctions between the sacred and secular will be erased!!

To the Lord, all of life is sacred!!

God demands no more holiness from the preacher
behind the pulpit than he demands from the
housewife behind the stove, or the **nurse**,
or the **banker**, or the **airline attendant**, or
the **office worker**...or **any other of His
children!!**

So, here's the bottom line...here's the test...

Is your ministry a ministry of integrity?

Are you perfecting holiness in the fear of God in your life?

Can you write "HOLY TO THE LORD" across everything you do?

O, may we be like David...may it please God that it is in our
hearts to be holy in all our behavior...and when we
fail, may we know the God who has called us to
holiness will lift us up and put our feet once again
on the highway to holiness.