

“Connection You Can See”

2 Corinthians 6:3-13

October 8, 2017

We continue our study of 2 Corinthians today with chapter 6. We’ve been looking at this book through the theme of Connected to Serve. How do we grow in connection with God and one another for the purpose of serving the world around us in Jesus’s name?

Two weeks ago, we saw that we are reconciled to God in Christ. His life in us is to be given away as reconciled reconcilers. We are Christ’s ambassadors, pursuing the reconciliation of this world to God. This week in Las Vegas we’ve seen yet another heart-rending occurrence of how badly our world needs reconciliation! This world is busted and broken and desperately needs God’s people to lament and grieve and yet offer hope in Christ!

We know that ministry of reconciliation can be costly. Pursuing reconciliation is costly, taxing us physically, emotionally, spiritually. He gives us a picture of what that costly ministry looks like in and through us. What do we see?

³We put no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; ⁷by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

¹¹We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. ¹²You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. ¹³In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.

If you’ve never read the poetry of George Herbert, start today. Herbert was a wealthy Welshman and member of Parliament who left that behind to become an Anglican minister. The Lord called Herbert into ministry to the dismay of his family and to serve a small country parish near Salisbury, England in the early 1600’s.

Not only was Hebert a minister, but he was also a poet, perhaps his most famous collection being called *The Temple*, in which he uses images of church buildings as metaphors for the Christian life.

One poem in particular helps us understand 2 Corinthians 6. The poem called “The Windows”, offers a meditation on stained glass windows in church buildings that tell the story of the gospel. Yet people are the real windows through whom we see the power of God to save.

Lord, how can man preach thy eternal word?
He is a brittle crazie glass:
Yet in thy temple thou dost him afford
This glorious and transcendent place,
To be a window, through thy grace.

But when thou dost anneal in glass thy storie,
Making thy life to shine within
The holy Preachers; then the light and glorie
More rev’rend grows, and more doth win;
Which else shows watrish, bleak and thin.

Doctrine and life, colors and light, in one
When they combine and mingle, bring
A strong regard and aw: but speech alone
Doth vanish like a flaring thing,
And in the ear, not conscience ring.

What Herbert is saying is what Paul has been arguing from chapters 4 through 6. We are brittle, jars of clay, *brittle crazie glass*, yet as we suffer and pursue reconciliation in this world that may be costly, we become beautiful windows through which the power of God living in us is seen and witnessed. The power of God is seen as people look through the window of our lives.

What particularly? A life poured out, or as he says in Vs 3-4, a *life of great endurance*. It was a great endurance of love in the face of criticism, critique, attack and slander that revealed the power of the gospel at work.

The people of Corinth, as we've studied before, were relentless in their criticism of Paul because he did not match their cultural expectations. He was not a smooth public rhetorician, so they said he couldn't preach. He was not a handsome man, so they said he was not worth paying attention to. They said you are only in this for yourself, building a following or life all for your ego, so we will not listen to you, Paul.

Paul's response was, look through the window. Look at my life poured out, a great endurance, as evidence of the life of Christ reaching out to you to be reconciled.

The same can be true for us. Just as in Paul's day, many are tempted to believe that the Christian life should not be this hard, there should not be these many problems, if God is really here, then shouldn't change come more easily?

Yet consistently Paul answers that it is not the absence of pain that demonstrates God at work. Rather, his power is proven when his people endure in the middle of adversity, in weakness, when we stand when we have no earthly reason to do so. When we stand in the breach of a fallen, broken and messed up world extending hope, that demonstrates God at work.

It is proven ESPECIALLY when their hearts remain open to one another and to the Gospel, when we may find reconciliation exceedingly difficult, if you feel attacked or insufficient in your attempts to love and yet we seek to do so anyway when you find it hard to continue to be hopeful, battling against a deep cynicism about people or a place.

We are called to a great Endurance, for as v. 3 roots the remainder of the section, *we are servants of God, meaning we belong to him*. Finding strength for the costly ministry of reconciliation is rooted in that truth.

1. What We May Face

What might we be called to endure as we seek to be living windows through whom God makes his appeal? Paul lists three triads in vs 4-5.

We may face trials in general: v. 4, *afflictions, hardships and calamities*. Part of the landscape of pursuing life in a broken world of death looks like general difficulty and trouble sometimes.

We may face trials that come at the hands of other people: v. 5, *beatings, imprisonments and riots*. We see in Acts this happening again and again to Paul.

The final triad here is more internal to Paul: v. 5, *labors, sleepless nights, hunger*. He worked to the point of exhaustion, going without comforts in order to be an agent of reconciliation.

Now why would Paul lay out the things he had suffered in his pursuit of the ministry of reconciliation? Certainly not to catalog his problems, even less to gain their pity. Instead, these reveal his great love for them; their eternal lives are worth the suffering. His ministry is produced out of a deep love for these people; they are worth it, worth all the suffering because his heart had been given to them. **His life had become a window through which we get a glimpse of the loving God who pursues even at the cost of his Son.**

Paul (and we for that matter) are simply servants of God, belonging to him, and it is the Lord who pursues hearts and lives through us. As we become his instruments in this world, we may be called on to suffer...in a cruciform life, a life of self-denial similar manner to how our Savior, the Lord Jesus suffered.

The Lord Jesus pursued us through great affliction and hardship, through the calamity of the cross. Surely we see his flogging and beatings on the road to Calvary. Can we recognize his love as he endured the cross for our sin and shame, dying in our place to come after us, pursue us that we by faith are reconciled with God?

Jesus suffered abuse and became the sin offering for us that we might be made alive in him. And you and I may be called to follow a similar path, of dying to self, in order to pursue another's reconciliation and life in Christ.

I wonder who around us senses that kind of committed love? It is SO easy to give up on a people, on a place, on a church, a child when things are difficult. Just check out and go find a different place where we suspect, hope, things won't be so difficult. It is easy. But Paul demonstrates and I pray by the Spirit we are developing here a deep love for one another, willing to go through thick and thin together because we LOVE each other and count this church, this people, this place worth it. Jesus is building a family that is hard to *leave* because this is the place we *love* and are *loved*! Are we willing to suffer personal discomfort so that the people around us feel and see the committed love of Christ through and from us?

In Herbert's poem, the second stanza he said "*when thou does anneal in glass thy storie, making thy life to shine within*" he is pointing us to what Paul describes. When a craftsman made a stained glass window, even like our beautiful windows here at Central, the colors would be painted on the glass, then it would be fire-treated in what was called it being annealed. It was the fire, the heat, that locked in the color and the story to be seen in the window.

The same is often true with us. The fire of the furnace of suffering becomes the means by which the story of God's love, his forgiveness, his pursuit, his power, can be seen in and experienced through us. As you suffer these things in pursuit of reconciliation, the life and love of Jesus is seen through you. Do the people around you know that you so deeply love and are committed to them that you are willing to endure pain to show it to them?

In the fires of annealing YOU, crazy brittle glass, the story of Christ can be seen in your life.

2. How

We see what we are at times called to endure in this ministry of reconciliation, but how do we endure? Paul answers the how in vs. 6-7. The flow of thought here is that we endure, [v. 4](#), by [these things](#) in [v. 6-7](#).

How are we to do this? What shape do our lives take? [v. 6](#), by [purity](#), points to sincerity in devotion to Jesus. Being devoted to Jesus's truth, or purity, will cause us to stick out. Purity cuts against cultural values that we may prize. Enduring in purity will cut across Republican values and Democrat values at points. Purity may seem socially liberal or stridently conservative in comparison to the culture around us at times.

Further, we endure by [knowledge](#), [v. 6](#). In the context of 2 Corinthians, knowledge is more than simple content of a message. More deeply, Paul calls us to endure in personal knowledge of the Person of Christ and his gospel. Specifically, this is short hand language to remind us that we pursue reconciliation in this world BECAUSE Jesus pursued us in reconciliation. That gospel hope that he brings dead hearts like ours to life shapes the gentleness with which we pursue others. When we pursue without assurance of being heard, being approved, or even being loved in return, we remember that WE were enemies of the Lord Jesus when he stepped into our lives.

The manner of our enduring is rounded out in [v. 6](#) with the reminder that we go in [patience and kindness](#). Going in patience speaks of a calm while we wait. We can't demand someone respond or be reconciled. We can't expect that another person hop to our point of view right away, but we pursue and endure in patience, believing the Lord is at work through [kindness](#), having a generous rather than condemning spirit.

Does this manner match how the world experiences you?

[Beyond this](#), [v. 6](#) reminds us we endure by the [Holy Spirit](#). It is the resurrection life of Jesus taking root in our souls by the Spirit's work that enables us to endure. His life in us is what is seen when we endure as windows. His strength is present in our weakness.

And the chief mark of his presence comes next in the list in [v. 6](#), [genuine love](#). It is the presence of Jesus's love in you that fuels a life of love, a life given away for the good of another, that pursues even when nothing comes back.

Paul rounds out the means of enduring by pointing us to **truth and the power of God, which are the weapons of righteousness in the right hand and the left, v. 7**. Literally the word of truth is what we have to offer, which stands beside love mentioned above. In the body of Christ, love and truth go together, word and deed, truth spoken, evidenced by a life lived in love.

How will you endure in this ministry of reconciliation? By knowing his power at work in you to do far more abundantly in and through you than you could ever imagine.

3. Surviving the Accusations

Finally, Paul models for us in the end of this section how he handles the criticism and attack. We survive by clinging to the gospel when the attack comes.

v. 8 We are treated as imposters (hear the accusation: you are a phony, God doesn't use you, your love is not real), imposters yet are true.

Unknown, yet well known. Unknown, being no count, not important, but yet the gospel truth to cling to is that he is well known to his Father.

Dying, and behold we live. Yes his life is full of suffering and looks like death, but in reality, we live because Christ is alive in us.

Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, poor (you have nothing Paul was their claim, you have nothing to give away) and yet making many rich... by the love and life of Christ in them.

How do we respond to the accusations? Line them up and feel the weight: imposter, unknown, dying, punished, sorrowful, poor, nothing...how would it feel is someone summed up your life like that? It can be crushing, devastating to boil down a life like that. It is especially difficult when the criticism has a kernel of truth. Paul was in a sense dying and punished, he certainly struggled with sorrow and poverty.

Do you hear the strategy? Meet the accusation head on with the promises of the gospel of Jesus, his power alive in us and we shall endure by his power and his life. In Christ, we are true, well known, alive, not given over to death. In the power of his Word, we are making many rich, possessing everything! Another's accusation does not tell the story of your life: Jesus does in the gospel. The secret sauce of handling the critic, the disappointment, the despair—especially when it is partially true—is to remember the Gospel that proclaims Christ is with us, that by the Spirit, his life is poured into ours. Even when life feels like a colander, whatever is poured in leaks out through the holes leaving us feeling empty again...in those moments Jesus pours more in.

To sum it up, Paul is saying this: to survive in the ministry of reconciliation which calls for a life poured out, we must continually drink deeply of Jesus's life poured in. Jesus's love and life are poured into us by the Word and Spirit. The degree to which we hang onto what is poured in will govern how well we can be poured out.

We lay down our lives in love, as stained glass windows...lives stained by the crimson blood of Jesus, so that his life can be seen in and through us.

When the world looks at and even through you, whose story do they see in the glass of your life?

In the mid 3rd century, plague came to Rome, decimating the city. Many of the citizens of Rome feared catching the disease, so it became common practice to toss the bodies of the sick—even of family members—out into the streets. Christians took it upon themselves to tend to the ill and dying, opening their homes and lives to other contagious Romans. Although Christians were suspect, reviled, persecuted, still, they took to the streets armed with love. Many of them died in so pouring out their lives in neighborly love.

This sacrificial love was noticed. Emperor Julian said that the Christians took better care of Rome's sick than Rome itself did. Further, he suggested their acts would threaten the very fabric of Rome itself. He was right. Within 50 years, this

pouring out of life and love had altered the city; this fringe persecuted group had so poured themselves out that Rome itself had begun to change.

What did Rome see as the citizens looked through the window of the lives of a reviled and persecuted bunch? They saw a Jesus alive in them, a God who pursues the sinner, the sick, the helpless, and draws near in love. They saw a people who in the face of persecution spent their lives for others...because Jesus had spent his life for them. When St Louis looks through the windows of Central, who do they find?