

2 Corinthians 6

Written by K B Napier

Saturday, 11 February 2017 14:59

“...come out from among them...”

As a very much younger Christian I was part of an industrial strike and took my place amongst the other strikers, standing outside the factory every day. (I came to see that this was futile, as was the strike). It was in the middle of summer and very hot. One day, my colleagues said they were going to the bottom of the road to the pub for an ice cold beer.

They knew I did not drink and was a Christian, but they asked me to accompany them and sit outside. I followed and sat on a bench outside whilst they got their drinks. I must say that I was thirsty as could be!! Time and again they asked me if I wanted a drink and each time I refused.

“What about a simple shandy, then? Surely that will only be a cold drink, with very little alcohol?” as the sun beat down my resolve crumbled and I said “Well, maybe a shandy, seeing as it only has a small amount of alcohol... and it *is* very hot.”

One of them got me my drink and as soon as I took my first sip, everyone pointed and said “Ah, see! He’s taking a drink after all. So much for his Christianity!!” I fell for it hook, line and sinker! They had set me up and I fell for it. That stuck with me for many years.

Today I have a more mature outlook (I hope), but it showed me how devious men can be when they want to bring a man down. Though it is certainly not the case, those unsaved workers thought that taking that single weak drink somehow destroyed any claim I had to Christian belief, and so my witness was suddenly eradicated from their minds.

Every Christian, no matter how weak, must remember every moment of every day that someone is always out there to bring them down, and is watching for any departure from what they perceive to be Christian belief or practice. For them, even a tiny mistake is enough to tarnish the whole of God’s word.

This is why Paul, in this chapter, tells the Corinthians not to do anything that will bring down the ministry. I do not believe that we should live in a bubble, or that we should allow the world to dictate what is, and what is not, Christian belief and behaviour. However, every Christian walks

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a tight-rope. The world does not accept our excuses and they watch us 24 hours a day! One slip and they will taunt us for a very long time. And that one slip could cause the Gospel to be lightly spoken of. In other words, Paul wants us to live holy lives, true to God and to our own claims to Christian faith and behaviour.

We do not have the luxury of being depressed, or failing, even for apparently acceptable reasons. Everything we do and say has consequences. What seems a small deviance from truth or good behaviour now might come back as a massive deficit in the future. At this moment I am locked in a long debate with an internet reader who believes that though God elects those who will be saved, He also gives us all free will to choose. Obviously, this is Arminianism. Once we accept that men have a free will, the whole basis of predestination falls apart. To fail on that single teaching is to fail altogether.

Verses 1-3

1.

“We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

2.

(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)

3.

Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed:”

In the previous chapter Paul says the apostles were ambassadors for Christ. The direct interpretation of these texts is not applied to us, but to the apostles. However, they do apply to all Christians by reason of association. If we associate with Paul and the apostles (today in thought and heart) then the same observations can be placed upon us, too.

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Paul and the apostles (and then us) were workers together with Christ, **sunergeo**, helping Christ in His task with the power given to them by the Spirit. This is not just working together, it is working as companions and friends,

sunergos

. This does not make them equal to Christ, but servants who happily share His vision and aim, with enthusiasm and total trust.

As such, Paul beseeches the Corinthians (and us) to listen and act upon his teaching. This beseeching is to call them to his side with words of comfort and instruction. Too many Christians today think they can get away with mulling over their own thoughts and acting upon them without conscience. They live by a 'theology of parts', and each part is usually unrelated to the others! They shun the idea of a teacher called by God, and that they should receive instruction. So, they live out their lives isolated from true scriptural teaching, relying only on their own thoughts, untested by God's word and therefore false, though they usually claim "I know what I'm doing!". Paul speaks against this pride.

He earnestly desires them to listen and obey. As always he wants them to obey him only insofar as he himself obeys the Lord. In other words, if he is teaching them only what God has given him, then when they obey Paul, they are actually obeying the Lord, Who is acting through him and the other apostles.

The desire of Paul and the other apostles is very plain – that the Corinthians should not have been saved in vain, **kenos**, devoid of truth. This is yet another rhetorical statement, because it is not possible to be saved unless we know the truth. But, Paul is giving one of his famous contrasts. He is telling them what they must *not* be like. For a person to live in a state of *ke*

nos

is to live in emptiness, with no spiritual substance or gift. He has no spiritual treasury in his soul; he will speak of his salvation yet show no spiritual fruit. His works will have no effect and no real use for they have no true purpose.

Evidently the Corinthians were slipping back into their old ways and so were not displaying the

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fruit of their Christian state. Every Christian is given gifts. Salvation itself is a gift, as is love and faith. These are hard truths to grasp as I know from my postbag, for they embody the fact of God's supreme Lordship over our beings! Christians can become slothful and rest on former glories. They know the truth in their heads but lose it in their hearts. In The Revelation we read of pastors who do this and are judged by God. It is important that all of us retain the freshness of spiritual youth to drive our mature minds! We cannot be without purpose!

Verses 4-10

1.

"But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,

2.

In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings;

3.

By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned,

4.

By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,

5.

By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true;

6.

As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed;

7.

As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

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Paul is telling the Corinthians what he and his fellow apostles must be like, and so, by association, what they (and we) must be like. When they were saved Christ succoured them, **bo etheo**

, gave them help with great strength, by His word,

boao

. Many Christians have no stomach for Christ's help, because His demands are total and powerful. They hide their faces from their tasks, because to go down the road of Christ is to enter into trust, a trust that leaves their own thinking and logic behind. They know there are rewards, but they do not want the pain that might go with it. So, they hold back and slowly recede back to what they were like before. Thus, they live a semblance of faith, which has no power.

Christ never says we must act some time in the future, or be saved later. *Now* is the time of salvation! Now is the 'accepted time',

euprosdektos

, the time or opportunity to be received. Now is the 'day',

hemera

... the time to stop sinning. Paul is not telling them they needed to be born again, but that they needed to be saved from their own sinful desires and acts.

Now

is the time to stop. God never tells us to stop sinning later. We must always stop NOW. Sadly, Christians think sin has to be stopped in stages, so that they can become used to less evil in degrees. This is a fallacy. It does not matter what the sin is or how long we have done it – it must be stopped NOW.

We must give 'no offence', **proskope** (something that causes others, or ourselves, to fall into error; a 'stumblingblock'), in anything we say and do, otherwise the ministry will be blamed and made a mockery. Every time a Christian sins the entire Church of Christ is mocked by the world. That is why they must stop their sin immediately. There is no excuse to retain a sinful thought, word or action, for those who are unsaved will use them as weapons against the whole Church. And they will then not listen to ministers of the Gospel. In this way Christians who sin openly are **momos**, a disgrace to the Church.

Untaught Christians teach that to give 'no offence' means never to raise objections, or to confront other Believers with their errors, or in any way to 'rock the boat'. This is itself an error as the above proper interpretation proves. To 'give offence' means to cause others to fall into

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spiritual error by sinning ones' self.

Again referring to Gospel preachers and teachers (and yet to all Christians), Paul insists on being approved as ministers, **sunistao**, being commended by standing together with Christ and so proving their allegiance. I have heard from some who claim Christian faith, that they do not need to prove their faith to anyone but God. This is an absurdity; God does not seek us to prove ourselves for His sake – He already knows us inside out! We must prove ourselves to *others*

, otherwise we bring the Gospel into disrepute, as this text shows. Part of this process is to have a 'combined' or systematic theology, which can only come from interpreting scripture as it interprets itself, which is some of the meaning of *sunistao*

Those who truly love God and follow Christ will show immense patience, **hupomone**, the steadfastness and endurance of a man with true purpose, loyalty to Christ and real faith. He will remain true and steadfast no matter what he suffers. Indeed, it is at his times of worst afflictions that his faith shines the strongest. This is why I cannot accept the excuses of continuous neurotic depression and anxiety, which are signs of sin and failure rather than of spiritual trust and obedience.

At this juncture I would call on all who display marks of any form of neurosis to stop immediately, repent, and march onward in real faith. That goes not just for obvious depression, but also for all those silly things human beings tend to accumulate as self-tortures... fear of open or closed spaces, depression without any obvious cause, anxiety over normal things... you name it, and if it is neurotic it is sin. It is not *hupomone*, which is the mark of a true Believer walking with God. The way to stop a neurotic trait is simply not to do it! This is an immediate act and does not require a long period of counselling, drugs, or phased cessation. You stop entering into a depression by not sitting alone or avoiding people. You stop a fear of open spaces by going out. The 'fear' is self imposed, irrational and sinful, because you allow your own human feelings to push away God's stretched out hand. And so on.

Afflictions, **thlipsis** (tribulations, persecution, oppression), and 'necessities', **anagke** (distress caused by adverse circumstances and calamities) must not deter a Christian from standing firm and faithful. Nor must stripes,

plege

– plagues, physical assaults (

plesso

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) or widespread problems in society; being put into prison for trust in God; tumults,

akatastasia

, disorder and public confusion; and labours,

kopos

, sorrow coupled with intense work leading to 'beating the breast',

kopto

.

In other words our circumstances cannot dictate to us our spiritual response to life. We must stand firm through all manner of problems and dire straits. We will certainly know fear and anxiety as immediate reactions, but these must be replaced by a quiet rest in Christ's arms. When we resort to depression and anxiety in permanent form, we are actually shunning Christ and going back to our 'old man' and sinful self. The answer is simply to stop it! If we do not stop it, it is because we refuse to let go of our sin, which is a comfort, just as the Hebrews wanted to return to their enslaved state in Egypt. They did not want the hard work leading to trust in God and any possible new danger or hardship. It is always easier to sin than it is to trust God.

We must show our resolve (verse 6) by pureness, **hagnotes**, an upright life with chastity (in all things) and a sense of reverence (

hagnos

); by knowledge,

gnosis

, a general understanding of our beliefs and faith, and what is good or bad; by longsuffering,

makrothumia

, endurance, constancy, and a slow response to being wronged. And by watchings,

agrupnia

, literally meaning being sleepless in our watchfulness (being a watchman); and by fasting,

nesteia

, caused by poverty or need. It can also refer to voluntary fasting for a spiritual purpose.

We must also show kindness, **chrestotes**: goodness, gentleness, moral integrity. The falsity of the 'evangelical smile' is not included in this virtue! Nor is the annoyingly superficial servility shown by so many evangelicals. We are referring here to something genuine, not a smile covering a hard heart or sense of inner hatred. There are times when kindness involves tough talk and tough action.

The place of the Holy Spirit is shown amidst all these virtues, for He is the Prompter and Sustainer of us all. We must also display love, **agape**, a charitable brotherly love with affection,

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rarely found amongst Christians today as it is replaced by a superficiality of intent. This love must be 'unfeigned', ***anupokritos*** – without hypocrisy and sincere. Anything else is a sinful lie.

It does not end with these virtues, but goes on to include the 'word of truth', ***logos aletheia***: whatever is true in all things, whether to do with God or with men's duties and beliefs, etc. We must not only

do

what is true but

love

what is true,

alethes

; loving and speaking the truth, even if it goes against our own desires. This is yet another virtue that is lost to most Christians today, as their clinging to personal, denominational and local church beliefs prove.

If we have this love for truth we will also display the power of God, ***dunamis theos***. Though reformationists deny it, this includes the miraculous as well as spiritual strength. Spiritual strength is given to all Christians who obey and is not confined to a special few. The same power exhorts us to be morally upright and to show spiritual depth and integrity.

We will also wear the armour of righteousness. The armour, ***hoplon***, is what protects a person. It is both the protection and the weapon of a Christian and is used in warfare... something else a superficial Christian hates. What protects us? Righteousness,

dikaiosune

; that is, the condition we ought to be in as Believers and saved people – accepted by God, with integrity, pure lives, correct thinking and actions, and so on. We must live like this no matter what angle in life we are viewed from, or in whatever circumstance we are in, 'on the right hand and on the left', thus showing our authority and power.

It does not matter if we are shown honour or dishonour by the world, or whether the world wrongly accuses us of evil or they think highly of us, whether the world calls us deceivers or true. Throughout it all we must stand firm and faithful.

We might be unknown to the world, but we will be known to God (verse 9). We may die for our faith, yet we shall live in eternity. We will suffer hatred and anger and yet not be killed (in this

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text meaning made to be extinct).

We will be sorrowful, **lupeo**, grieving with heavy heart, and yet will rejoice, **chairo**, joyfully remember God is our Master and loving Father, showing this joy to others in all circumstances. Some think this means ignoring our sorrows or putting on a 'brave face'. This is not what is meant. Not even Paul pretended to be happy when he was sad! It means that throughout all trials we know an inner peace and quiet, because the Holy Spirit resides in our soul.

Perhaps we are poor on this earth, yet by Gospel teaching we will make many others rich in soul. We may end up with nothing material in this world, yet we will be given the riches of heaven by God, so long as we serve Him. Paul is telling us we will know calamity and trials, but that it is as nothing compared to what God has given us.

Verses 11-16

1.

"O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged.

2.

Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels.

3.

Now for a recompence in the same, (I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged.

4.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?

5.

And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?

6.

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And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

Paul reminds the Corinthians – ‘We are open before you and our hearts go out to you!’ By ‘mouth’ or **stoma**, is meant their thoughts. The reference to their enlarged hearts is one of welcome and an embrace in love.

He tells them that they, the apostles, do not make them groan, but that their own actions make them sad. I have heard many Christians blame God for their trials and problems, when, all along, they are castigated by their own sins and failures of obedience. To put things right, says Paul, just be as welcoming and loving toward us, as we are toward you (verse 13).

Paul warns them not to be ‘unequally yoked’ with unbelievers, **heterozugeo**... in this text Paul is telling the Corinthians not to have any contact with idolaters. Generally, it means not to be in closeness with anyone whose life and beliefs are ‘not equal’. This is because their lives are unrighteous,

anomi

a ...
they violate God’s word and law and are wicked. It does not matter if the person is ‘nice’ in human terms; in godly terms he or she is wicked and bound for hell.

There is no connection whatever between righteousness and unrighteousness, so a Christian and a wicked/unsaved person do not mix! The two are like oil and water, or light and dark, truth and lies. They are both incompatible, because Christ cannot mix with Belial (meaning worthless or wicked – a name for Satan). A Christian cannot join with an unbeliever in any lasting sense, because he is an infidel or **apistos** – faithless and not to be trusted.

The temple of God (The Church) cannot have concord with idols (things of Satan), because we *are* the temple of God and God cannot have evil in His presence. God dwells in us and no false god or evil can dwell in the same place. We belong to God and He is in us, so there is no room for Satan’s envoys and teachings. That is why we cannot mix with unbelievers.

Verses 17&18

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1.

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,

2.

And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

Because of all this, says Paul, we must come away from unbelievers and be separate. We must move amongst them but not stay with them or allow them access to our hearts and minds. We must be in this world but not of it. We must, then, be separate, **aphorizo** – divided and severed from them, set apart. Then we will not ‘touch... the unclean thing’... which God sees as foul. Only when we do this will God accept us and be pleased. He will be our Father and we will be His favoured sons and daughters.

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