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2 Corinthians

We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed.

2 Corinthians 6:3

The construction of this verse is in the participle form and thus it is a resumption of the thought from verse 6:1. Verse 6:2 then was a parenthetical insert. In verse 1, he had admonished his audience to not receive the grace of God in vain. After that came the parenthetical thought that implores acting on that grace today. And now, to bolster the thought that the apostles were pleading with God on our behalf (also from verse 1) he says, "We give no offense in anything."

It would be futile to "plead" with someone over a matter while at the same time offending them. In fact, it would be contradictory to do so. In order to have their pleas responded to favorably then, they ensure that no offense was coming from them. The word for "offense" is *proskopé* rather than the more common word *skandalon*. This is its only use in the NT and it comes from another verb which indicates dashing something to the ground. The idea then is that they have determined not to allow anyone to fall because of their actions.

And the reason for this is then explained, "...that our ministry may not be blamed." The purpose of their ministry was to bring people to a saving knowledge of the Lord and to properly train them in the ways of the Lord. If they were causing people to fall instead of being saved, their ministry would be blamed for its inappropriate handling of their responsibilities.

This word for "blamed" is *mómaomai*. It is used just twice in the NT, here and in 2 Corinthians 8:20. However, it comes from another similar word which is found in 2 Peter 2:10 when speaking of "those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority" (2 Peter 2:10).

The apostles' desire was to be above reproach in all ways so that they would be effective ministers of the word of salvation and so that their ministries would be a light for others to see and draw near to. How good it would be if all pastors and teachers of the Bible were so motivated!

Life application: Though we are not apostles, each of us who bears the title "Christian" is a representative of the One who bestows that title on us. Let us remember this as we conduct our lives in the presence of others. Their perception of Jesus may be limited to how we present ourselves.

But in all *things* we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, 2 Corinthians 6:4

The word "but" is based upon what he just said in the preceding verse. It was the aim of the apostles to give no offense in anything in order to keep the ministry from blame. Instead of allowing this to occur, he notes that in all ways they commended themselves "as ministers of God."

The word "commend" isn't meant in the sense of "a pat on the back" but rather "how to behave." Their actions and behavior were constantly being subordinated to the importance of their ministry. It was as if they had a subprogram running in the back of their mind, constantly reminding them of the solemnity of their work. Therefore, they were always ensuring their behavior was kept in line with the expectations Christ would have of their ministry.

After noting this, he now begins a lengthy list of such expectations beginning with "much patience." This is perfectly in line with what he said to the Corinthians in

his first letter. In his great discourse on love in 1 Corinthians 13, he says that "love suffers long." This is something then that would be expected of an apostle. The demonstration of much patience, especially with those who were lost in sin, was necessary to bring them from their darkened state to the light of Christ.

He next says, "...in tribulations." This is the same word used in 2 Corinthians 4:17. It indicates a "narrow place that 'hems someone in'; *tribulation*, especially *internal pressure* that causes someone to feel confined (restricted, 'without options')." The apostles, particularly Paul, as is documented in Acts, faced such pressures as they ministered to others.

His next description of them is "in needs." It indicates "calls for *timely help*, i.e. *strong force needed* to accomplish something *compulsory (absolutely required)*. This kind of situation is typically brought on by great pain or distress." Again, the life of the apostle was frequented with such hardships.

Finally, this verse ends with "in distresses." As with the previous two words, HELPS Word Studies gives us a clue concerning what Paul is trying to relay. This word means "properly, a narrow place; (figuratively) a *difficult* circumstance – which God always authorized and hence only produces a *temporal sense of confinement*. Through Christ's inworking of faith, *internal* distress (sense of pressure, anguish) is ironically the way He shows His *limitless* work – in our 'limitations'!"

Such was the life of the apostle as they endeavored to keep their ministries free from scandal. It was their heart's goal and desire to glorify Christ and not bring any scandal upon His glorious name.

Life application: We live in a world of comfort and ease. But should that end for whatever reason, let us remember our testimony as bearers of the title "Christian" and endeavor to never bring discredit upon that glorious title.

...in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings;
2 Corinthians 6:5

In this verse, Paul continues with his list of what the apostles were willing to endure in order "that our ministry may not be blamed." He begins with "stripes." These would have come from both Romans and from Jews and the method in which each conducted them was different. Either way, it was a most painful procedure which was intended to humiliate and degrade the offender as if they were really scandalous people. Paul notes later in this epistle (verse 11:23-25) that he was scourged five times by the Jews and that he was beaten with rods three times. In Acts 5:40, other apostles were beaten by the Sanhedrin. Certainly other such "stripes" were to be found among the other apostles at other times as well.

Next is noted "imprisonments." Peter and other apostles are noted as having been imprisoned in Acts. Paul is also so noted on several occasions there. Similarly, Paul was later imprisoned at the end of Acts. He wrote some of his epistles from prison. Roman prisons were dirty and smelly. If it was cold, they were very cold. If it was hot, they were very hot. The prisoners were often bound in chains so that they could hardly move. Sanitation was completely lacking. And yet, the apostles are recorded as having endured this for the name of Christ.

The word for "tumults" is described by Vincent's Word Studies - "This is one of the words which show the influence of political changes. From the original meaning of unsettledness, it developed, through the complications in Greece and in the East after the death of Alexander, into the sense which it has in Luke - political instability. One of the Greek translators of the Old Testament uses it in the sense of dread or anxious care." From this word, we can assume that Paul is speaking of any time they spoke and which was met with a great unsettling because of their words. The book of Acts is replete with such instances.

"In labors" is indicative of the constant work the apostles engaged in as they conducted their ministry. Paul was a tent maker and supported himself as he also labored in the sharing of the gospel. In order to feed themselves and live, it was not considered shameful to also work hard in labors. This is something almost

foreign to the idea of being a "pastor" today. Jets and expensive hotels often await many as they travel around sharing watered-down messages to people. However, there are also many faithful pastors out there who are willing to show up on Sunday to preach and also do what is necessary to keep the home well fed during the week.

The words "in sleeplessness" are obvious. The days were long, the nights were filled with instruction, traveling was difficult and even dangerous if by land or by sea. The apostles endured long hours as they moved throughout their regions of evangelism in order to share the wondrous news of salvation through the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

Finally, today's list includes "fastings." There are probably two types of fasting referred to here. The first would be voluntary. The apostles would forego meals in order to continue sharing the gospel. They would fast in order to petition the Lord for His favor. They would fast so that they could travel without being heavy with food. For whatever reason, they would have voluntarily fasted. However, they would also have faced involuntary fasts. They would face a scarcity of food due to a lack of money, a lack of availability, or even because they were facing the "imprisonments" where they may have been denied proper food. For these and certainly other reasons, the apostles faced fastings which were hard on the body but good for the soul.

Life application: How easy we have had it in the modern world. But we must remember that there are, even to this day, faithful Christians who are in the mission field who are facing similar difficulties that the apostles faced. Let us pray for our missionaries and be thankful that there are such faithful people who are out doing great things in order to bring the message of Christ to a lost and dying world.

...by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, 2 Corinthians 6:6

Paul's list of what the apostles held fast to for the sake of the gospel continues to grow in this verse. His next characteristic is "by purity." The idea he is certainly conveying is more than just a general concept of pure living which is free from sensual sin, but the purity of morals and of mind which are behind his actions. The apostles endeavored to be pure in all ways to the exclusion of even any impure thoughts. They had their thoughts, as it were, "fixed on Jesus."

Next he includes "by knowledge." Scholars disagree on what Paul is referring to with the Greek word *gnosis*. Is he speaking of a knowledge of the law, of prudent living, or something else? Based on his constant emphasis on the gospel of Christ, the simplest explanation of what he is speaking about is referred to in Ephesians 3:4 where he notes "my knowledge in the mystery of Christ."

Although Paul was given specific knowledge of the gentile-led church that the other apostles apparently weren't given, they were all endowed with understanding the things which had been revealed. In 2 Peter 3:15, Peter speaks of Paul's wisdom on spiritual matters and he elevates Paul's writings to the level of the rest of Scripture. Therefore, the "knowledge" he is referring to here for all of the apostles is certainly a gospel-based one.

His next category is "by longsuffering." In the previous verse he mentioned "patience." Now he brings in longsuffering. This isn't just patience in the sense of waiting for others to learn, but rather it is the patience of enduring external attacks and fierce trials which attempted to thwart their effectiveness. Instead, they endured through these things, looking forward to a greater reward.

From this he moves to "kindness." Despite the trials and external attacks, it was their goal to return kindness to those who persecuted them. This is in line with Jesus' admonition to "turn the other cheek." The apostles knew that argumentation and a defiant attitude would never change the hearts of their hearers.

"By the Holy Spirit" shows their grand reliance on God to conduct them and to lead the way for them. Instead of succumbing to the pressures and difficulties they faced, they relied on the strength of God which indwelt them. And with the fellowship of the Spirit, they were able to evince joy and contentment, even in the most difficult of circumstances.

Finally in this verse, he mentions, "by sincere love." Of all of the fruits of the Spirit, this is the one most highlighted in Paul's writings. Instead of loving through pretense, they truly relied on the Spirit to fill them with the highest form of love. It is the love described in 1 Corinthians 13 and which allowed them to tend to those who otherwise would be rejected. But the love of God which filled the apostles was there because they had the example of Christ Jesus who went before them. He died for a world full of miserable wretches, and so He became that purest example for the apostles to emulate.

Life application: As the apostles lived, we too can live. If we simply rely on God and are in line with His word, we should be able to conduct ourselves in the same manner in which they did.

...by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, 2 Corinthians 6:7

In this portion of the on-going list, Paul gives specific gifts of the apostles which were a part of their ministry. The first is, "by the word of truth." This is a way of saying "that which imparts God's truth to men." In their presentation, there was no corruption of the gospel through human systems of philosophy or of works being added to what God had done. Rather, it contains that which is pure and undefiled concerning the plan of salvation and the right division of the word of God.

Next he says "by the power of God." The apostles were noted for having miraculous gifts which they exercised from time to time. These are recorded in

Acts and a study of them shows that they were not always available, but it seems they knew exactly when they were and how to use them exactly as God intended. Further, "the power of God" is probably also speaking of the effect of the gospel on its hearers. People who had never heard of Jesus were converted by a simple explanation of who He is and what He came to do. If nothing else, that is a great example of the power of God working effectively in others!

In his next category, he changes the preposition from *en* (in or by) to *dia* (through or "by means of") - "by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left." The endowments they exercised were done so by the means of righteousness. There was nothing false in how they conducted themselves and what they did was for the glory of God and it was in accord with His righteous nature.

The term "on the right and on the left" is intended to show that they were fully prepared for whatever came their way. Just as a Roman soldier was capable of fighting with weapons in either hand, and as they were normally armed with a weapon in one hand and a shield in the other, they were able to fight both offensively and defensively. Likewise, the apostles were so prepared for the spiritual battles they faced. The idea is given a more thorough description in Ephesians 6 where Paul goes on to describe the whole armor of God by which they (and which includes even us today) were prepared for meeting the challenges they faced.

Life application: The apostles were given certain gifts and abilities which no longer exist today, but they were also endowed with gifts and abilities which each of us can exercise. With training and constant use, we can hone our abilities to become effective soldiers in the spiritual battlefield which rages all around us. Read Ephesians 6 today and think on how you can better prepare yourself for the challenges we as Christians are asked to face.

...by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; 2 Corinthians 6:8

This again continues with the list of how the apostles were perceived by those around them and how they responded to those perceptions. They pressed forward though in order that they would "give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed (v.3)."

The first item in this verse is "by honor and by dishonor." This is referring to how he and the other apostles were perceived, not by how they actually conducted themselves. In John 7:12, this same type of thought is given about Jesus. There it says, "And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him. Some said, 'He is good'; others said, 'No, on the contrary, He deceives the people.'" It is certain that Jesus conducted Himself and His ministry with honor, but some chose to look at it in a contrary manner, speaking ill against Him. This is the same thing that the apostles faced. But they persevered in an honorable way in their efforts regardless of how they were spoken of.

Paul next says, "...by evil report and good report." This is similar to the previous item in the list. Paul was constantly maligned (as certainly were all of the apostles) as evil doers. Reports were sent against them; some good and some bad. An example of a good report is found in the decree of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:22-29. An example of a bad report is found in Acts 17:5-9 where Paul and his associates were accused of having "turned the world upside down."

Finally in the list of this verse, he notes that they are regarded "as deceivers, and yet true." Again, this is similar to the first two thoughts in that accusations of false teaching and heresy were leveled against the apostles. The Jews saw the Christians as a false, breakaway sect. In their mission travels, they were accused of introducing an illegal form of religion under Roman law. They were accused of making stuff up out of their heads and even being insane.

And yet, the message that they carried was and is the only true path to salvation. Without it, there is no hope for fallen man. But with it, there is reconciliation between God and man and the hope of an eternity of joy in His presence. The apostles carried this message faithfully and stood on it, even to death itself.

Life application: Concerning salvation, there is one truth of God and only one. It is found in the pages of the Holy Bible and it reveals the message of Jesus Christ. It has become more and more unpopular to the people of the world to hear that this is so. Because of this, faithful Christians can expect to be maligned, dishonored, and even accused of deception. These accusations may bring real trouble for Christians in the near future, but we are to be prepared for such a time and to be ready to make a defense for the hope which we profess. Be ready! Stand firm! Proclaim that Christ is Lord!

...as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; 2 Corinthians 6:9

Paul's list of the things the apostles went through for the sake of the gospel is expanded to include "as unknown, and yet well known." The apostles were ignored as if they were nobody's. People looked over them as if they were just one of many faces in a crowd, or someone passing by on the street without a nod of the head to say hello. Dignitaries looked down on them and others thought they were troublemakers.

And yet, they were fully known to God. They were selected by Him for His special work of beginning a (so far) 2000-year proclamation by the church of the message of Christ. They were well known by those who had received their words of peace with God and they were treated with respect by them for the important work they were doing. Even if the world at large cared nothing for them, those who truly mattered knew them well.

Next he says "...as dying, and behold we live." In 2 Corinthians 1:9, Paul noted that "we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves

but in God who raises the dead." He also noted in his first epistle to them that he "died daily" for the sake of Christ. But despite these types of things, they lived on. He uses the word "behold" for emphasis here. It is as if their dying itself died each day, turning into life by the power of God who sustained them. There is in this a hint of the great victory of Christ over death which allowed them to face death, knowing that it had no true hold over them.

Finally in this verse are the words "...as chastened, and yet not killed." This is probably not speaking of the chastenings of man (such as scourges and whips), but rather that of God. Paul notes in 2 Corinthians 12:7 that "lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure."

God allowed this chastening influence in his life in order to keep him humble and dependant on the grace of Christ in all things. Such a chastening may have been severe, but it was not enough to take his life. Instead it was there to lead others to life! Such is the manifold wisdom of God. What we often think of as evil may actually have a good purpose in God's plans.

Life application: Reading and thinking on the story of Joseph will provide a real-life recorded example of what Paul is speaking of in this verse. Take time to read his account, from Genesis 37-50 and compare it to the words of Paul here. You will see exactly what Paul is speaking of. And while doing so, think on the same type of situations you have faced. In doing so, you can be more reassured that your own trials are not unknown to God. Instead, they are fully known and have been, and are being, used for His good purposes.

...as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things. 2 Corinthians 6:10

Paul completes his lengthy list of things the apostles endured for the sake of the gospel with this verse. He begins with the words, "...as sorrowful." The life of the

apostle was one which, by its very nature, included an element of sorrow. They evangelized the lost, many of whom never received the message they proclaimed. For Paul, he carried an especially great sorrow for the lost of his own people, Israel. Concerning their state, he wrote this in Romans 9 -

"I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, ² that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart." Romans 9:1, 2

Along with sorrow for the lost, they certainly felt sorrow during their afflictions, trials, and imprisonments. The life of an apostle was one of all of these as they were continuously under attack for what they proclaimed. And yet, at the same time they were "always rejoicing." They possessed something that could never steal their joy; the sure knowledge of the truth of Jesus Christ. Salvation had come to the world!

Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:16, "Rejoice always." He was the perfect example of this. Despite his sorrows in his earthly afflictions, there was a deeper and more perfect joy which those afflictions could never steal away. The 69th Psalm very closely reflects the sentiments which Paul writes about here. In it, David writes of the numerous trials and afflictions which he faced. And yet, in the midst of it he writes of sorrow mixed with joy -

"But I *am* poor and sorrowful;
Let Your salvation, O God, set me up on high.
³⁰ I will praise the name of God with a song,
And will magnify Him with thanksgiving." Psalm 69:29, 30

Next Paul writes that they were "as poor, yet making many rich." The word "poor" describes paupers. They were literally destitute of any earthly wealth. Paul worked with his own hands to feed himself. The rich and luxurious life he once knew ended when he called on Christ. He once sat with the ruling council of Jerusalem,

but later he often sat in dirty Roman prisons. He gave all for the cause of Christ as he testifies to in Philippians 3:8 -

"Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ."

And yet, in their poverty, the apostles made "many rich." Jesus asked in Matthew 16:26, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" In other words, all the wealth of the world is mere poverty without salvation. But through Christ, eternal riches await those who will but receive Him. This was what the apostles offered to a sick and dying world. Through their message many have become kings! It is a message which still has the same ability today, and so even though dead, their words are still bringing this eternal wealth to people everywhere.

Finally, Paul closes this thought with "as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." Charles Ellicott explains these words this way -

"The series of paradoxes culminates in this. In language which has found echoes in the thoughts of sages, saints, mystics, he utters the truth that in the absolute surrender of the thought of calling anything its own the soul becomes the heir of the universe. All things are his, as with the certainty of an assured inheritance. The beatitude of the meek, of those who claim nothing, is that they "shall inherit the earth," and so all things are theirs—the forces of nature, and the changes and chances of life—for all are working together for their good."

Even with the loss of all of their earthly riches, they had gained the greater, eternal riches of heaven. The verb used in this verse means "possessing all things to the fullest." Paul confirms this thought in 1 Corinthians 3 -

"Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours. ²³ And you *are* Christ's, and Christ *is* God's." 1 Corinthians 3:21-23

Life application: Should Christians find themselves robbed of everything they possess, they still possess everything. Let us not worry about the temporary, corruptible, earthly things we have. Rather, let us rejoice in our eternal inheritance which Peter writes about for us to revel in -

"Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵ who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." 1 Peter 1:3-5