

Following Jesus When it's Difficult

2 Cor. 6:1-10

God's 'Glory in the Ordinary' series

Nov. 12, 2017

You've heard the saying: ***please don't shoot the messenger!*** *But you know that sometimes they do...*

Psalm 109... (I was reading this yesterday...)

My God, whom I praise, do not remain silent, ² for people who are wicked and deceitful have opened their mouths against me; they have spoken against me with lying tongues.

³ With words of hatred they surround me; they attack me without cause.

⁴ In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a man of prayer.

⁵ They repay me evil for good, and hatred for my friendship.

This isn't right! And who doesn't long to be appreciated!?

2 Corinthians 6:1-10

1. Our privilege: Cooperators! **6:1** Ever 'get' to work with someone and it's a real privilege? Ever 'get' to help someone and it's not? "I'll let you do that." I know someone who says that all the time... **This** term means to work alongside of, a coworkers, a co-labourers "God's fellow workers" NIV.

-With some urgency, 6:2, If you have understood... Don't delay in responding to God's gracious offer and invitation. For Paul, in writing to his audience, he was hoping that they all had responded, but wasn't completely sure of everyone... 'Seek him while he may be found!' Particularly here in Canada, we are currently in a gospel rich age. How long will this continue into the future? It seems to be waning. Just look at France today. There was a time when the gospel and churches flourished in France. Read up in the Huguenots (French Calvinists) early 1500's to late 1700's and their history! But through persecution and cultural shifts, this

departed (they departed, c. 400,000) and had now virtually vanished. France needs to be completely re-evangelized! North America is no longer the 'Christian hub' it once was...

2. Our endurance. a. **Nine Hardships.** 6:3-7. "We put no stumbling block in anyone's path..." Paul was quite concerned that amidst all the bad press he was getting (antagonists and opponents) that he may actually **fail** in some regard (in his mission) and bring disgrace to the name of Jesus Christ because of his behaviour. His approach then, has to commit himself to endure (endurance) in every way. He spells out **9** hardships that dogged him, month after month, year after year. The first can be described as involuntary, then some are more voluntary. 'In Troubles/afflictions'; these are trials under pressure, when you are pressed down by circumstances. 'Hardships' and then 'distresses'; refers to experiences where you are pushed into a corner where there seems to be no way of escape. The Bible term means 'a narrow place.' Next: 'in beatings'/whipped (5 times Paul received the '39 lashes' from the Jews), 'imprisonments' like in Philippi, and riots', like in Ephesus, where Paul and his companions were not merely caught up in some civil unrest, but the rioting mob was focused on them! These men were disrupting their livelihood. These all happened in the course of doing ministry work. Other consequences were more **voluntary** that came his way... choices and submission: 'In Hard work' and the accompanying bone-tiredness. 'Sleepless nights and hunger'/fastings. He mentions these as reminders of his love for them...

b. These are followed by **9** qualities of **endurance**: what does it look like? Paul generally sees it flowing out of 'purity' (being morally clean). This wasn't easy back then... and it isn't east now. How many more actors and artists are going to come forward either with 'me too' allegations or to face the music of an allegation? The **9** qualities of endurance in purity here are: *understanding* (in dealing with difficult people), *patience* (in difficult circumstances) and *kindness*, in the Holy Spirit. It's of course essential to have His *power* to produce the Fruit of the Spirit in you, such as '*kindness*' and '*sincere love*.' 'In truthful speech,' (spiritual knowledge) and in the power of God, with weapons of *righteousness* in the right hand and in the left. Paul knew the power of God. In **1 Cor. 2** he spoke of how "*I was with you in weakness and fear and much trembling...*" His own personal limitations were evident, yet his teaching and preaching were

powerful and persuasive with the power of God! Power experienced... is power communicated! 'With weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left;' perhaps Paul was working on that image of the believer in 'his spiritual armour' as he endures! On one hand you would hold your shield (of faith). With the other, you'd be holding your sword (the word of God). You've got a picture of defense and offense. Actually 2 Cor. was written about 5 years before Ephesians where we read about the armour of God.

3. The last '9' grouping describes some very **Real Challenges** (when it gets very difficult to serve Jesus!). These are all pairings (some like a paradox) with each connected by either '**and**' or '**yet**.' Through glory and dishonour, bad report and good report, genuine yet regarded as imposters, known yet regarded as unknown, dying, yet we live on. Beaten and yet not killed. Sorrowful yet always rejoicing, poor, yet making many rich (the temporal vs. the eternal), having nothing yet possessing everything! Paul had a lot of mud and rotten tomatoes thrown at him! Everything his opponents could dig up, and then they would just invent stuff! How well do you hold up under challenge and distress and lies!? And particularly when it's of a **spiritual** nature?

So; do you typically tackle hard things, projects? Try it... great practice! Note, Paul was writing all this, and only about mid-way in his serving/ministry career... the **second half** was still to come!

Expectation adjustments? Some TV preacher- teachers (always on TV) are trying to sell the notion that the normal Christian life you should be expecting **here and now... is complete comfort and ease**. No poverty, no sickness, no struggles, and **no** hardship. I have heard it with my own two ears! I think that such is only marketable in North America. It just doesn't fly elsewhere in the world. They will actually find it offensive and profoundly unbiblical. And of course, it doesn't align with what **Jesus** told his followers to expect. '*Don't be surprised by the painful trials you are suffering as though something strange were happening to you!*' **1 Peter 4:12**. Those who want to be rich will fall into many temptations and traps. Jesus became poor... so that we might become rich! **2 Cor. 8:9**. Can you imagine the sobriety that a young world war one or two infantry soldier experienced when for the first time, on the battlefield, he had

another enemy soldier actually shooting at him, trying to take his life! We are all combatants in a very real spiritual conflict.

So, should we **never** expect gratitude? No, even though someone has joked “If you want to find gratitude, go look in the dictionary!” Ever gone from hero... to zero?!

People burn out in serving Jesus **not** usually because of just over work, but because of disappointment and the frustration of unmet expectations. Solution? Adjust your view, your perspective. Understand the privilege of serving as a fellow worker with the Lord! Carefully protect your perspective. Paradoxes will come... “I’m sharing ‘good news’ ... why don’t people like me and what I’m saying?” (Answer: 4 weeks ago... the fragrance of life, or of death!)

We endure, believing and trusting that one day... all will be made right. Absolute justice will be dispensed!

Our context today: IDOP, The International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church,
www.idop.ca