

OBSTACLE-FREE MINISTRY

2 Corinthians 6:1-7:1

Robert Murray McCheyne understood that effective ministry requires personal integrity. He affirmed, “My people’s greatest need is my personal holiness. His godly lifestyle and Spirit-filled preaching impacted thousands, sparking a revival that spread across Scotland to northern England.

Sadly, many Christian leaders have been involved in shady financial dealings or sexual improprieties that dishonor the name of Christ and the gospel.

Nothing discredits the gospel more than hypocritical, unethical, or immoral actions.

Paul affirms that his credibility in ministry depends on his personal holiness and integrity.

His conscience was clear concerning his conduct.

His example challenges US to put no obstacles in anyone’s path.

God wants US to be involved in drawing people to Christ.

We need to be committed to obstacle-free ministry.

Lest we become an obstacle to someone being attracted to Christ.

MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION 5:17-21

It’s our privilege to represent God in the task of reconciling sinful people to God and watching Him change lives.

EXHORTATIONS BASED ON OUR MINISTRY 6:1-7:1

Paul exhorts us on the basis of the ministry God has made possible for His servants.

RESPOND APPROPRIATELY TO GOD’S GRACE 6:1-2

Paul concludes chapter 5 with a summary statement of the gospel => 5:21

Based on that view of the gospel, => 6:1-2

This is a **two-edged sword—a two-sided message.**

Appeal to readers to trust Christ; to be reconciled to God.

If you're here this morning without Christ I want to join Paul in urging *YOU* to be reconciled to God—to trust Christ and receive His gift of eternal life.

Appeal to his followers to join together to call others to God

-because now is the time for action—Today is the day of salvation!

We ought to be about our Father's business.

Which of these is Paul's point?

I've gone back and forth. He seems to desire *BOTH!*

Don't respond inappropriately to God's grace.

We are fellow-workers with Him.

By God's grace, God's people receive rich blessings.

We want to be careful lest that blessing become unprofitable—useless.

God's grace shouldn't remain unproductive.

We didn't receive it *for nothing*—that is, to do *nothing* with it.

This is the day of salvation.

God is at work bringing people to Christ.

Therefore, ***we ought to get busy!***

As ambassadors of Christ, we ought to be urging people to come to Christ.

We're part of the team, just like Paul is!

Urging people to Christ isn't the work of the church staff.

We're in this together—we're fellow-workers.

Don't waste the grace!

Take advantage of the moment—*today's* the day!

NOW is the day of salvation.

We're co-workers in pointing people to the Savior.

IMITATE HIS SACRIFICIAL MINISTRY 6:3-10

Paul wants us to acknowledge *his* self-sacrificing ministry, *follow his example*, and participate in

ministry as he has, for this is a time when God is saving many. **3-4**

He avoids any behavior that might discredit his ministry.

He doesn't want to be an obstacle to others by self-serving conduct that brings disrepute to God.

He wants to ensure that no handle be given for adversaries to take hold of, when they wish to ridicule or malign the gospel.

We serve a God of salvation, in a day of salvation,

therefore, we don't want to place obstacles in the way of people God calls to salvation.

Faithful servants of God face trials, without regard for self.

With God's enablement we *endure* all kinds of affliction.

Endurance in the midst of adversity is the primary quality of authentic ministry.

This isn't something we're able to do in our own strength.

We can only live this way, enduring affliction, by God's enablement.

Nine trials Paul endures, in three sets of three. **4-5**

Paul reviews the diversity of hardship he endures.

First, general trials, oppressive experiences (troubles, hardships, and distresses)

Then, sufferings inflicted by other people (beatings, imprisonments, and riots)

Finally, self-inflicted hardships (hard work, sleepless nights, and hunger)

=> troubles that came to him voluntarily,
as he willingly worked to exhaustion,

went without sleep, skipped meals to do God's work—work of salvation.

Despite his references to his suffering,

Paul never *sought* adverse circumstances nor glamorized his trials.

Nine inner qualities worth imitating. 6-7

His endurance rests on purity of motive and lifestyle.

His character is stable, unwavering through glory and dishonor, through good and bad reports.

Though misunderstood, he doesn't retaliate or compromise his integrity.

Godly living must be at the heart of ministry!

As fellow-workers it's essential for all of us—not just pastors!

Without godly living, we have nothing to offer a pagan world!

Nine pairs of paradoxes. 8-10

The antitheses point to the tension of living as a persecuted ambassador of Christ.

Painful afflictions won't destroy him.

Painful afflictions are the source of blessing.

Notice the last couple of contrasts:

His life has much sorrow—yet he is always rejoicing.

He is poor—yet he makes many others rich.

His poverty makes it possible for the riches of the new heavens and new earth to belong to those who follow Christ.

He has nothing—yet he possesses everything.

In worldly goods he had little, practically nothing.

He lost home, family, friends, livelihood.

These things were of little importance.

He set his eyes on the future promised to God's children.

He shares in Christ's inheritance.

He presents all of these aspects of his life—the afflictions and the character qualities—as an EXAMPLE for us.

If we are fellow-workers, we *will be* fellow-sufferers.

If we are fellow-workers, we *must join him* in godly character.

If we are fellow-workers, we will experience the tension
=> suffering together with blessing.

He's determined not to let ANYTHING become an obstacle. that will discredit his ministry as an ambassador. **3**

He is committed to do whatever it takes to commend himself as an ambassador of Christ. 4 *Are we?!!*

OPEN OUR HEARTS AS PAUL OPENED HIS 6:11-13

Paul has been honest in his dealings with them, but they're treating him otherwise.

Behind his openness is a warmly receptive attitude of concern for them.

He speaks the truth in love.

Appealing to them as a father, he urges them to respond as his own children.

SEPARATE FROM PAGAN ALLIANCES 6:14-7:1

6:14

One significant reason why they can't respond to his openness and concern for them:

They've made alliances with pagans in their community. **6:14-16a**

They have joined forces with the enemy!

Paul warns them to *stop* teaming up with people who reject the truth.

They want to be like everybody else—to cooperate with everyone, without distinction.

"It doesn't really matter what others believe! Let's just get along!"

Joe Bayly wrote: "The evangelical church is sick—so sick that people are crowding in to join us. We're a big church . . . big

enough to tolerate almost anything pagans do. We're no longer narrow; it's a wide road of popular acceptance for us." In 1 Cor., Paul has already made clear that he doesn't mean we're to have nothing to do with unsaved people.

Otherwise, you'd have to leave the world.

You'd never be able to lead people to Christ.

But this exhortation deals with those who want to team up with unsaved people to serve God together. *It won't work!*

A yoke is designed to join two beasts of burden together.

It doesn't work to join two different kinds of animals together.

They don't pull the same way!

That's the problem when we try to team up with people who have a different philosophy of life than we do.

If we're not in agreement, we won't pull the same way.

Five rhetorical questions—expecting a negative response—demonstrate the wide chasm between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan.

—the incompatibility of Christianity and pagan culture. **14-16**

The foundation of our separation is to realize that **we're the temple of God. 16b**

The main reason we can't team up with unbelievers is because we belong exclusively to God—we are already teamed up with Him!

We're the temple of the Living God.

God lives in us.

We're God's people.

Therefore we ought to be different—distinct from the world around us.

A series of O.T. passages illustrates **the danger of spiritual impurity**

—trying to blend together incompatible world views. **17-18**

God made clear that His people should stay separate from pagan peoples, lest they start to act like them!

These warnings emphasize the importance of separation and purity.

Don't form partnerships with people who don't believe, especially, in context, with false teachers who've been criticizing him.

The failure of Christians to separate ourselves from our culture has always been a serious problem.

God wants His people to be marked by purity and separation from evil.

It never works to try to maintain that kind of lifestyle, while teamed up with ungodly people.

They will always pull us away from godly living.

Many people only apply this passage to believers marrying unbelievers.

That's a serious issue the passage does apply to.

But it's true on a much broader scale also.

The context speaks specifically about *ministry* alliances.

Paul's point relates to at least **three levels** of application:

1. Most direct: Don't *make ministry alliances* with unbelievers.

Don't team up in ministry with people who teach other doctrines.

They think they can unite with people who represent other systems of thought. That will ultimately pull them away from God and His truth.

2. In general: Don't *make alliances* with unbelievers.
Applies to business partnerships, etc.

3. Specific application: Don't *marry* unbelievers.

How can you cooperate with each other, when you're operating on a different frequency—building on a different foundation?

Abstain from evil deeds. 7:1

Since God has made us the promise that we are His children (6:18), we should act like His family.

Corporately, we're the temple of God (16)

Individually, we're sons and daughters of God (18)

We should act like God's family . . .

We should be pure, as He is pure.

We should be holy, as He is holy.

We should be marked by things that characterize holiness,

Not those things which contaminate God's people.

We'll never maintain that kind of lifestyle, while teaming up with pagans.

Only GOD can keep us holy.

Teaming up with pagans will never nudge us toward godly living!

We should team up with people who will nudge us on to becoming all that God wants us to be.

WHAT PRINCIPLES DOES PAUL REVEAL FOR OUR LIVES?

How should we put them into practice today?

J. Vernon McGee—Bank V.P. he worked for told story of a teller who sang "Jesus Satisfies" in church one Sunday. A woman responded "Sounds like a voice straight out of heaven."

The next week, the woman came to the bank. The teller was trying to balance his accounts but it wouldn't come out. He began to swear in frustration. The woman asked "Who is that man?" The V.P. responded it's the "voice straight out of heaven!"

He knew that for that man Jesus didn't satisfy. He was immoral, a drinker, a man of vile language. He warned McGee, "Vernon, don't be a preacher unless you mean it!"

God says, "Don't be a Christian unless you mean it!"

Don't sing "Jesus Satisfies" unless He does!

When people see us act that way, it becomes an obstacle to our testimony.

God wants us to be marked by obstacle-free ministry.

Family Visit

This week I spent several days with several members of our family.

They have all made a profession of faith in Christ at some time in their life.

They have all teamed up with pagan associates.

During our time together, they talked and laughed, joking about their lifestyle.

They'll *never* nudge one another on to godly living!

You won't find encouragement to obstacle-free living, teaming up with pagans.

God wants us to be marked by obstacle-free ministry.

God wants us to stand out as different.

We're HIS children.

We ought to live up to the family tradition.

Only teaming up with God's children will encourage us to live to please Him.