

## **DEAR JESUS, I RESIGN**

### **2 Corinthians 6:1–13**

**Dr. George O. Wood**

Let me begin by asking you a question. How do you feel when you are not appreciated? How do you feel, especially when the whole conduct of your life merits appreciation and you don't get it? Do you feel like resigning?

That's the impression I get of the context of the spirit that is behind the words of Paul in today's passage. Many in the Corinthian church simply did not appreciate him—in spite of what he had done as a servant of the Lord for them. He has to plead with them to open their hearts to him. I wonder if the apostle Paul ever sat down and wrote the Lord a note that said something like this, "Thanks, Lord, for calling me as an apostle. But, dear Jesus, I've had enough. I resign."

I guess you can't resign from an apostleship, unless you do what Judas did. There are a lot of times in life when we feel like checking out of our responsibilities, saying, "I don't have to take this anymore." It's to such an individual and such a mood that this marvelous Scripture comes. It is in times like this when we discover again the fundamentals of what it is to be a Christian. Paul begins this passage by giving us the three foundational principles of his life and ministry. Those three foundational principles are grace, integrity and endurance. He pleads with the Corinthians that they not receive the grace of God in vain. Which is a way of saying that there are times in our life when we feel like checking out, yet it is at that time when we need the grace of God the most to check in. The grace of God is like the motor oil in the crankcase. As long as the motor oil is there in sufficient qualities and quantities, the engine can run. But when the grace of God is emptied out of the Christian's life, so that we no longer exist in an attitude of receiving grace or giving grace, things go awry.

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Paul pleads with the Corinthians not to receive the grace of God in vain. They had received the grace of God in conversion. Now we need God's grace, His benevolent attitude toward us and toward others all through our Christian experience. That's one foundational principle.

Another foundational principle is simply that of integrity. He is concerned, in verse 3, that his ministry, his life, will not be discredited—a realization that what we do is so loud that what we say sometimes may not be heard. Therefore, a passion of the Christian life is to present our life to God and to others in such a way that our living squares with our saying, that our private presence squares with our public presence. That our deeds square with our words.

A third great enduring thing, which our life is to be governed by, is the word “endurance,” which is in 2 Corinthians 6:4, “We commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance” (NIV). That word “in great endurance” sort of heads up the seventeen other attributes that immediately follow it. They're all under that word which means “to abide under.” The modern translation of the word is this—“Hang in there, baby!” It is staying power. When things are not changing around for you, then it describes things changing in you. A fourth-century church father calls this word “the root of all goods, the mother of piety, the fruit that never withers, the fortress that is never taken, a harbor that knows no storms, the queen of virtue, the foundation of any right action, peace in war, calm in tempest, security in plots.”

With a life that is proceeding from a base of grace and integrity and endurance, Paul talks to us about three other things in this passage—the pressures to resign, the enablement that God gives to prevent the resignation, and the paradoxes that are involved in living out the Christian life.

#### **I. The pressures to resign (verses 4 and 5).**

A series of nine words that are subdivided into three different headings.

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In the first heading, Paul gives three words that speak of internal conflicts—not of one’s own choosing—that bring about pressure to check out.

**A.** The first word is the word “troubles.” It’s that delightful word which we introduced when we went into the 2 Corinthians series. It is the word *thlipsis*. It describes the squeeze, the pressure of life, that which is tightening. Things that weigh upon the spirit.

**B.** The second word is the word “hardships.” It is literally the word “necessities.” It describes the things in life we cannot escape. The things that have happened that there is no way of taking back. The situations of adversity in which we find ourselves that are not changing—the hardships. Fanny Crosby, the great hymn writer who was blind all of her ninety-five years, gives us a glimpse into her soul as to how she coped with that hardship, that necessity. There was no way she could change her blindness. And God, for one reason or another, chose not to heal her. So how was she going to deal with the necessity of blindness that was laid upon her? At the age of eight, she wrote that the clue to her life was already formed, “Oh, what a happy child I am. Although I cannot see. I am determined that in this world, contented I will be. How many blessings I enjoy that other people don’t. To weep and sigh because I’m blind, I cannot, and I won’t.” Hardships.

**C.** And “distresses,” the third internal conflict not of our own choosing. It literally means “narrow places.” It describes being hemmed in. It’s a word used of an army that’s caught in a narrow mountain pass and cannot maneuver or escape. There are situations where we cannot maneuver or escape. Spiritual claustrophobia comes upon us, and we are caught with that conflict internally because that’s where we are. Troubles, hardships, and distresses.

**II. The next three words describe pressures that are external conflicts against us.**

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They are not of one's own choosing. Perhaps they do not describe very many people in this room.

**A.** One is the word “beatings.” It's external. He had undergone the *thlipsis* and hardships and distresses of spirit. The beating was something physical and external. In 2 Corinthians 11, a chapter which is coming up, verses 23–25, Paul notes that five times he received the thirty-nine lashes. That amounts to one hundred and ninety-five lashes. Three times he was beaten with rods, which are metal or wooden canes. Paul's back, in the human flesh, must have been a sea of scars. He knew what it was like to experience that. “Lord, I don't have to take this! I wouldn't be taking this if I weren't called by You.”

**B.** “Imprisonments,” a second category of external conflict against him. For an active person like Paul, this must have been tough. Prisons aren't nice today, but compared to first-century prisons, they're palaces. Clement of Rome, the late first-century father, said that in all, Paul was in prison seven times. A very difficult external conflict.

**C.** And “riots” or tumults. We know something of riots, if we've never been in one, just by watching, in 1980, what happened at the American Embassy when a group went wild and people were caught up in that surging sea of humanity. Paul knew what it was like as a preacher of the gospel to be in many different tumults. John Wesley tells us of an experience he had in England, when a mob “came pouring down like a flood. To attempt speaking was in vain because the noise on every side was like the roaring of the sea. So they dragged me along until we came to the town. Seeing the door of a large house open, I attempted to go in. But a man, catching me by the hair, pulled me back into the middle of the crowd. They made no more stops until they had carried me to the main street, from one end of town to the other.” Tumults.

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#### **III. The third category that prompts the temptation to resign is the sheer effort of the Christian life.**

Paul had not chosen the internal pressures. Those had been foisted upon him. He had not chosen the external things. Those also had come upon him. But he chose the third category—the sheer effort of the Christian life. One of which is “hard work.” It means toil to the point of exhaustion, hard labor and “sleepless nights,” which were occasioned by the anxiety for his churches and the desire to reach and convert the lost. All in the days before Sominex.

And “hunger” or voluntary periods of fasting. The sheer effort of the Christian life. So we have the pressures to resign. There are nine words—nine terms and three subcategories—but what enables one to continue, to avoid resigning. There are three of these.

**A.** The first Paul gives us is the God-given qualities of the mind. It’s interesting that in many of Paul’s letters he pleads that Christians will be of sober mind or of a sound mind—because it is a sound mind that enables us to keep going when the time is tough. The first quality Paul gives of a God-given quality of mind is the word “purity,” which means “freedom from stain.”

I think that we can only resist pressures to get picked off if we deal constantly in our life with the temptation to be angry, bitter, and unforgiving. When we allow continuing anger and bitterness and unforgiveness to dominate our life or to dominate a relationship, we are going to be continually pulled to walk off that relationship and responsibility. It is the need for purity—the cleansing of bitterness, the cleansing of anger, the cleansing of unforgiveness—that give us staying power.

I may be speaking to someone who has a lot of bitterness and anger within a family relationship or maybe within a work relationship. God will give us the power to see things through as we

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open ourselves to His cleansing, that we might be pure. Wash me, O Lord of anger and bitterness and unforgiveness.

Another God-given quality of mind is simply “understanding,” or knowledge. There are a lot of things that happen to us in life—we don’t know why they happen, why God allowed them. But there are some things we know. That’s part of knowledge. One of the things we know is whom we have believed in and we are persuaded that He is able to keep us. We know that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. We know that He has prepared an eternal home for us. I know. I know. I know.

Then there’s the other quality of mind that enables us to continue, and that is the word “patience.” Long emotion or literally—a way of saying it in English—“persons who have a long fuse rather than a short fuse.” Especially this word, “patience,” as it is used here, most commonly relates to patience with people rather than patience with things. Patience with people. A quality of mind that can preserve us.

One Christian was heard saying, “There are a lot of people I know who are wonderful Christians. I know they are going to heaven someday and, O, how I wish they would hurry up!” Patience.

**B.** To go along with God-given qualities of mind as enablement, there are also God-given qualities of the heart. There is “kindness,” which is the opposite of harshness and severity. It’s the spirit of Abraham, who lets Lot have the well-watered plains. It’s the spirit of Isaac, who lets others have the wells. It’s the person who is not only right, but right in being right. How often is it the case that you can be right about an issue and wrong in your pursuit of it? Kindness is simply being in the right. It’s being kind to parents, being kind to children, being kind to the body of Christ. Being kind to others. Kindness.

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Then another God-given quality of heart is the presence of the Holy Spirit, who comes to us, not as some bombastic individual. But the Spirit, when He is pictured, is commonly pictured as a dove, Someone whose presence is gentle in our life.

Then another God-given quality of the heart is simply “sincere [or “unfeigned,” “unfaked”] love.” Not put-on love. The real thing. Not the company tone of voice. But the real tone of voice. When our loving acts are given to enhance our own standing or to get our own way, then it is not unfeigned love. Qualities of life that are real. Love that isn’t put on or faked, but that continues. Paul’s able to resist these pressures of getting picked off, because God has given him certain qualities of mind and heart. And also He’s given him God-given equipment for the work of spreading the gospel. There are three terms he uses for that.

“Truthful speech,” or the word of truth. When we speak the truth, we never have to worry about getting caught in an inconsistency or having to cover our tracks with some other action. Truthful speech stands us in good stead. In fact, having just spoken about love, it’s interesting that I’ve said many times that love and truth in our life, when they are operational, absolutely do not allow the enemy a foothold at all, because he cannot work where the light of truth and love is so bright.

**C.** Then there’s “the power of God,” which Paul knew in his life, giving him equipment to escape the power of the evil one.

Then he also knew what it was like to have “weapons of righteousness” in his right hand and left hand. His right hand held the spear or sword. It was the weapon of offense. The left hand held the shield, the weapon of defense, employing the Word of God when he got into straits, and employing prayer when he got into straits that he could not handle. He found the ability to both advance and defend. There are times when we are in situations that are very difficult. But God

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really is going to use that situation for us to advance, while simultaneously with that we are defending ourselves.

This is special for someone in this service. You really identified with me when I talked about being hemmed in and having no ability to maneuver or escape. One of the things that prayer and the Word of God will do in your life—if you give yourself to God in these ways—is give you an ability to advance and to get out of that, and at the same time, defend yourself while you're getting out.

#### **IV. Pressures to resign, enablement to continue, and the Christian life also consist of the acceptance of paradoxes.**

There are four such paradoxes in Paul's life, which he describes here.

One is the paradox of his reputation. Some hold him in glory, some in dishonor. Some speak evil of him, some speak well. Some regard him as genuine; others regard him as an imposter. Some regard him as known; others regard him as of no account, an unknown. Not everyone will have the same attitude toward us. It's not necessary that we win unanimous approval from everyone in order to conduct our life as a Christian.

He faces the paradox of health. Dying, yet we live on. Beaten, and yet not killed. Paradoxes in his mental state. Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.

And paradoxes in his finances. Poor, that is, destitute; yet making many rich. Having nothing and yet possessing everything.

God, deliver us from the fallacies, from the lie that, in order to be happy, you must have things, must have money, must have material possessions. There is no good virtue in life that has a price tag on it, because it does not cost money to be happy. It does not cost money to love. It does not

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cost money to be truthful, and it doesn't cost money to be joyful. Paul is saying, "having nothing, yet we have everything."

Paul has faced the disappointments and the pressures to resign. Now he's asking the Corinthians, as he closes this section, for a response. He gives open communication of what is in his life. He says, "My heart is open to you. My affection is open to you." Now, he says, "Open wide your heart to me." There's nothing worse than a cold, uncaring group of Christians. Persons who will not open their hearts. Nothing will destroy a family quicker than hearts that are not open.

Nothing will destroy the church quicker than hearts that are not open. Open wide your heart.

Is God asking this of you today? Open wide your heart. Is someone asking this of you today?

Open wide your heart.

C. S. Lewis said it so well, "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Often, we are afraid to take risks. Love anything and your heart will be continually wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping your heart intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries. Avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safely in the casket or the coffin of your own selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless place, it will change. It will not be broken. It will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The only place outside heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and disturbances of love is hell." "People," Lewis says, "often are afraid to love and afraid to risk, because their heart will be broken. Very well, then. Don't take the risk. But know this, if you try to put your heart in a safe place, it's going to disintegrate through inactivity."

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It is a risk to love. Paul knows this. That's why he doesn't resign. "No, dear Jesus," when I feel like resigning. Here is what the apostle is saying: "I must go back and get some more of the grace of God."

My mother used to say of her father, when he was asked what he wanted as a birthday gift or Christmas gift, he would say, "Just give me some grace, more grace. That's what I need. Grace." God, give us more grace.

### **Closing Prayer**

Father, You give more grace when the burdens grow heavy. And for persons in this sanctuary today who have come burdened of heart and perplexed by life, finding themselves in a vice, a squeeze of responsibility and pressure, we know that You are opening Your heart today to them. And giving to them a personal assurance of Your love and Your help and the promise of the prophetic word that there will not fail us regarding any of God's promises. That You are equal in us to the challenge we face. So Lord, we thank You for Your grace outpoured upon us. I ask, Lord, for those who are in that place of getting picked off, and who are wanting to quit; that You would walk them through this passage of Scripture anew and anew and anew, until the qualities of the mind and the heart and the enablement You want for us to have will be present in great degree. We know, Lord, that all the water in the world cannot sink a ship, unless it gets inside the ship. That's why, Lord, within us, we thank You that the Holy Spirit is outpoured to give us sound minds and loving hearts. Wrap in Your arms all those who are in danger. And bring them through. Thank You for our love for us. And, dear Lord, we're not resigning, but with Your help, we're going through. In the name of Jesus. Amen.