

In All Things Approving Ourselves as the Ministers of God

*An Expositional and Narrative Tribute to the Faithful and Obedient Servant
Based on 2 Corinthians 6:4-10 (KJV)*

Introduction: The High and Costly Calling

The Christian ministry is fundamentally a call to sacrificial obedience, an assignment marked not by the glamour of worldly acclaim, but by the weight of divine stewardship. In the economy of God's grace, the authentication of a true servant is found in their willingness to endure, to suffer, and to remain immovably faithful in the face of deep adversity. When the Apostle Paul addresses the church at Corinth, he speaks into an environment filled with skepticism, personal attacks, and false teachers who equated spiritual authority with material prosperity and physical comfort. In direct contrast to this superficial theology, Paul offers an uncompromising defense of genuine gospel ministry. It is a defense that exposes the deep scars, sleepless nights, and emotional burdens borne by those who carry the message of the cross.

In 2 Corinthians 6:4-10, the Holy Spirit lays down an eternal blueprint for the ministerial life. This text presents an extraordinary narrative that outlines what a minister must go through, what they must possess inwardly, and how they are viewed simultaneously by the world and by God. It describes a life of profound paradox: sorrowful yet always rejoicing, poor yet making many rich, having nothing and yet possessing all things. Far from being a catalog of defeat, this passage stands as a monument to the sustaining power of God. It demonstrates that when a man or woman walks in total obedience to the divine call, their very suffering becomes a testimony, validating the truth of the gospel they preach.

This document provides a meticulous, verse-by-verse narrative exploration of this sacred text using the King James Version. To truly honor those who labor today in the same spirit of endurance, we will weave throughout this exposition other key scriptures that highlight, clarify, and celebrate the work of God's servants. From the ancient prophetic burdens to the apostolic journeys, the testimony of scripture remains unified: God honors the obedient minister, and the church is called to recognize, value, and hold such individuals in high esteem. As we journey through each verse, let it become a source of profound encouragement for those currently in the trenches of ministry, reminding them that their labor is not in vain in the Lord.

The Narrative Exposition of 2 Corinthians 6:4-10

Verse 4: The Commendation of Patient Endurance

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

The opening words of this passage shift the focus entirely away from human credentials or self-exaltation. The true minister does not demand respect through titles or earthly status; rather, they 'approve' or commend themselves in the crucible of real-world trials. The primary virtue demanded is 'much patience'—a word derived from the Greek 'hupomone', signifying a steadfast, unyielding endurance that refuses to give up under immense weight. The apostle immediately establishes three layers of hardship that test this endurance: afflictions (pressures), necessities (unavoidable needs or scarcities), and distresses (tight places where there seems to be no way out). The modern minister undergoes these identical realities when the weight of the congregation, financial shortfalls, and structural trials box them into corners.

This standard of endurance is echoed powerfully throughout the New Testament. In Romans 5:3-4, we are reminded that 'tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope.' True ministry cannot exist without this refining process. Furthermore, the Apostle Paul reminds Timothy of the absolute necessity of this trait, writing in 2 Timothy 2:3, 'Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.' To honor our ministers is to recognize that they are soldiers on a spiritual battlefield, facing constant spiritual forces that seek to cause distress and necessity, yet they stand firm in obedience.

Verse 5: The Physical and Societal Toll

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

Verse 5 transitions from general internal and external pressures to specific, physical, and societal penalties endured for the sake of Christ. 'In stripes' speaks directly of physical abuse, while 'in imprisonments' reminds us of the legal and institutional resistance to the gospel. 'In tumults' refers to public riots, civil disorder, and the chaotic instability that often follows the bold preaching of truth. Yet, the verse does not stop with external persecution; it highlights voluntary and involuntary personal discipline: 'in labours, in watchings [sleeplessness], in fastings.' The faithful minister knows the reality of sleepless nights spent interceding for a backsliding soul, the physical exhaustion of constant labor, and the spiritual disciplines of denying the flesh through fasting to hear clearly from heaven.

Paul provides a parallel historical account of these exact physical costs in 2 Corinthians 11:24-27, where he records being beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked, and in constant perils. This is the historical baseline of the gospel's advancement. In the Old Testament, the prophets faced identical treatment; Jeremiah was cast into a dungeon, and Elijah fled into the wilderness in absolute exhaustion. In Hebrews 11:36-37, the scripture honors those who 'had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment... they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented.' Those who serve in the ministry today continue

this ancient line, frequently sacrificing physical comfort, health, and peace of mind to ensure that the flock is fed.

Verse 6: The Inward Armor of Righteous Character

"By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by love unfeigned,"

Having listed the external trials and physical tolls, the narrative shifts beautifully to the internal resources and spiritual character that sustain the minister. Hardship can easily breed bitterness, cynicism, or moral compromise, but the true minister responds 'by pureness'—maintaining moral and motivational integrity. They operate 'by knowledge,' a deep, experiential understanding of God's Word and character, coupled with 'longsuffering' and 'kindness' toward those who oppose or fail them. Crucially, these are not human achievements; they are accomplished 'by the Holy Spirit' and anchored in 'love unfeigned'—a genuine, unhypocritical love that genuinely cares for people rather than using them for personal gain or statistics.

This inward armor aligns perfectly with the fruit of the Spirit outlined in Galatians 5:22-23. It reflects the pastoral heart commanded in Colossians 3:12: 'Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering.' When we look at a faithful minister who has served for decades without falling into moral ruin or cold cynicism, we are looking at a living miracle. We honor them because they have allowed the Holy Spirit to cultivate a supernatural character within them that protects the church from scandal and displays the very nature of Jesus Christ to an aggressive world.

Verse 7: The Weapons of the Gospel Conflict

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

The minister is fundamentally a preacher and a warrior in a cosmic spiritual battle. Verse 7 outlines the offensive and defensive weapons used in this conflict. 'By the word of truth' indicates that the true servant relies strictly on the unadulterated, uncompromised scriptures, not on human philosophy, political maneuvering, or psychological gimmicks. This reliance is vindicated 'by the power of God,' which brings conviction, deliverance, and transformation. Furthermore, they are protected by 'the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left.' The right hand held the sword for offense, while the left held the shield for defense. This signifies a comprehensive righteousness that covers every angle of life—protecting against the enemy's frontal assaults and subtle flank maneuvers.

This image is beautifully expanded in Ephesians 6:13-17, where the man of God is commanded to take up the whole armor of God, including the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. The weapon of truth is what demolishes demonic strongholds, as noted in 2 Corinthians 10:4: '(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)' We must honor ministers for standing as guardians of the truth, refusing to dilute the message of God in an age of relativism, and using the spiritual weapons of prayer and scripture to defend the minds and souls of their congregations.

Verse 8: The Reality of Conflicting Reputations

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

Verse 8 begins a series of astonishing rhetorical paradoxes that describe the public life of the minister. The servant of God must navigate wildly fluctuating human opinions. One day they are treated with 'honour' by those who have been helped, and the next day they face 'dishonor' from those who reject the truth. They are subjected to 'evil report'—slander, malicious gossip, and character assassination—while simultaneously receiving a 'good report' from the faithful. The world often categorizes them 'as deceivers'—charlatans, cult leaders, or fanatics—yet before the throne of God, they are found to be 'true.' This requires an incredible level of psychological and spiritual stability; the minister cannot afford to be inflated by praise or destroyed by criticism.

Jesus prepared His disciples for this exact standard in Matthew 5:11-12, stating, 'Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven.' If they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? (Matthew 10:25). Honoring those in ministry involves standing by them when they are suffering under unjust slander and understanding that a faithful presentation of the gospel will inevitably provoke a hostile response from an ungodly culture.

Verse 9: The Hidden Reality of the Hidden Life

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

The paradox intensifies in verse 9, exploring the dual realities of the minister's identity and physical state. To the secular world and the elite power structures, the minister is 'unknown'—insignificant, irrelevant, and forgotten. Yet, in the courts of heaven and to the hearts of those they have led to Christ, they are 'well known' and deeply loved. They live constantly 'as dying'—exposed to daily threats, burning out their physical lives, and dying to self daily—and yet, 'behold, we live' by the supernatural, resurrection power of Jesus Christ. They are 'as chastened'—enduring the loving, disciplinary refining of a Father who prunes every fruitful branch—'and not killed,' because their life is immortal until their god-given work on earth is completely finished.

This hidden reality is beautifully summarized by Paul in Galatians 2:20: 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' The life of the minister is a continuous demonstration of resurrection life breaking through physical weakness. This aligns with 2 Corinthians 4:10-11, which describes 'Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.' When we honor our pastors, we recognize that their physical frailty and human limitations are the very canvas upon which God paints His supernatural power and sustaining life.

Verse 10: The Ultimate Paradox of Spiritual Wealth

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

The passage reaches its magnificent climax in verse 10, delivering three final paradoxes that summarize the absolute triumph of an obedient ministry. 'As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing' addresses the deep emotional split within a minister's soul; they are brokenhearted over the sins, griefs, and tragedies of their people, yet they possess an unshakeable, underlying joy rooted in the Holy Spirit. 'As poor, yet making many rich' captures the economic reality of many who choose ministry; they may lack earthly investments, large bank accounts, or real estate, yet through the preaching of the gospel, they bestow eternal, unsearchable riches of Christ upon thousands of souls. Finally, 'as having nothing, and yet possessing all things' represents the ultimate expression of Christian contentment. The servant of God may own little in this passing world, but because they belong to Christ, they are heirs to the entire universe.

This spiritual prosperity is supported by Philippians 4:12-13, where Paul declares he knows both how to be abased and how to abound, concluding, 'I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.' It matches the instruction of James 2:5: 'Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?' True wealth is not measured by the salary package of a minister but by the spiritual legacy they leave behind. To honor those in ministry is to value spiritual currency over material currency and to realize that a community is profoundly enriched by a faithful pastor far more than by any economic development.

Conclusion: A Call to High Honor and Covenant Support

The comprehensive narrative of 2 Corinthians 6:4-10 leaves no room for a romanticized or superficial view of Christian ministry. The calling is arduous, costly, and inherently conflict-driven. It demands an extraordinary baseline of endurance, an uncompromising standard of moral purity, and a profound willingness to embrace a lifetime of public and private paradoxes. Yet, as the scriptures have consistently revealed, this life of sacrifice is entirely counterbalanced by the overwhelming grace, power, and security of Almighty God. The ministers who walk in obedience are not victims of a harsh assignment; they are ambassadors of an eternal kingdom, wielding weapons of righteousness that change the course of human lives and spiritual destinies.

Therefore, the body of Christ bears a solemn, God-given responsibility to actively recognize, support, and honor those who labor among them. The author of Hebrews commands the church in Hebrews 13:17, 'Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.' Likewise, the Apostle Paul instructs the church in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, 'And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.' Honoring the ministry is not an act of charity; it is an act of obedience to God Himself.

Let this exposition stand as an enduring tribute to every pastor, evangelist, and servant who has remained steadfast in the trenches of gospel service. When they face afflictions, necessities, slanders, and exhausting labors, let them look to the eternal weight of glory that awaits them. The day is coming when the paradoxes will cease, when the 'unknown' will be crowned in glory, and those who have made many rich will inherit the fullness of their Father's kingdom. Until that day,

let the church stand shoulder-to-shoulder with her ministers, lifting up their hands in prayer, shielding them with love, and honoring them for their unwavering obedience to the call of God.