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# **Fighting The Good Fight of Faith**

## **2 CORINTHIANS 6:4-10**

### **Introduction**

1. How many of you remember the teachers you had in school (i.e. grade school, college, graduate level).
2. Which ones stand out the most in your mind?
  - a. Are they the teachers who had a deep love for their profession?
  - b. Are they the ones who challenged you and expected the best from you?
3. If so, you were blessed, and you are a better person for having had them.
4. In the verses before us tonight the apostle Paul provides us with a description of His ministry — the problems and pressures, both internal and external which he faced.
5. In these verses, we also find those things which made Paul the apostle he was.
6. In spite of the pressures and difficulties he faced, Paul recognized that it was the grace of God which made it possible for him to fulfill his apostleship.
3. As we walk through these verses before us I would like for you and I to realize that there is nothing which we may face in our effort to walk faithfully before our God which He will not also provide us the strength to accomplish.

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## **I. The Conflicts We May Face In The Good Fight**

### **A. CONFLICTS FROM WITHIN**

1. Afflictions, tribulations (thlipsis) (v. 4)
  - a. The things which physically weigh us down in our spirits.

- b. These are the sorrows which burden our hearts.
  - c. Disappointments which take the wind out of our sails.
  - d. In the upper room on the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus told his disciples, “In the world you will have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).
  - e. As Paul and Barnabas were returning home on their first missionary journey, they encouraged the saints in these fledgling congregations of Asia Minor, telling them, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).
  - f. As we noticed in our lesson this morning, Paul promises us that tribulation will not separate us from the love of Christ (Romans 8:35).
2. Hardships (anagkē) (v. 4)
- a. There are burdens in life which we can escape, but others which must be born.
  - b. The greatest of these is sorrow.
  - c. Only a life which has never known love can escape sorrow.
3. Distresses (stenochōria) (v. 4)
- a. These are those times when the walls seem to be closing in around us.
  - b. Times when we have no room to turn around, when our lot seems to be nothing but frustration.
  - c. Please know that from God’s perspective we are never in hopeless situations, because with God, “all things are possible” (Mark 10:27).
  - d. As we have sung in the past and will likely sing in the future, we know the Lord will make a way for us.

**Slide 3****B. CONFLICTS FROM WITHOUT**

1. Beatings, stripes (plēgē) (v. 5)
- a. “Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was

beaten with rods” (2 Corinthians 11:24-25a)

- b. The beating with rods would have been at the hands of the Gentile civil authorities.
  - c. The only one of these recounted for us is that involving Paul and Silas before the magistrates in Philippi (Acts 16:23).
  - d. On that occasion, both men patiently endured the mistreatment and when put into the inner prison and placed in the stocks, they still found it in themselves to pray and sing praises to God.
2. Imprisonments (phulakē) (v. 5)
- a. Later in 2 Corinthians 11:23, Paul would write of have been “in far more imprisonments.”
  - b. Only one of these imprisonments has been recorded for us by Luke in Acts — his and Silas’ imprisonment in Philippi on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:23ff.).
3. Tumults, riots (akatastasia) (v. 5)
- a. The hatred by the Jews for Paul was such that they used every opportunity to turn crowds against him.
  - b. In Acts, Luke records some eight such instances.
    - 1) On his first missionary journey: Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:50), Iconium (Acts 14:5), Lystra (Acts 14:19).
    - 2) His second journey included Philippi (Acts 16:22), Thessalonica (Acts 17:5), Corinth (Acts 18:12)
  - c. On his third mission journey the silversmiths in Ephesus (Acts 19:23ff.) sought to stir up the people against him.
  - d. Another, in Jerusalem, took place after this letter was written.

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### C. THE EFFORT PAUL EXPENDED IN HIS MINISTRY

1. Labors (*kopos*) (v. 5)
  - a. The word which Paul uses describes labor which results in sheer exhaustion.
  - b. It takes everything a person has to give in terms of mind, body and spirit.
  - c. In spite of the great toll these labors had taken on Paul, he exhorted these brethren in his first letter to “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).
2. Sleeplessness, sleepless nights (*agrupnia*) (v. 5)
  - a. In 2 Corinthians 11:27, Paul wrote that he experienced “many sleepless nights.”
  - b. How many of those nights were spent in prayer.
  - b. How often was he in such a state of peril or discomfort that it was impossible to sleep.
  - c. No doubt, Paul frequently went without sleep or shortened the hours that he did sleep in order to devote more time to his preaching and teaching and prayer.
3. Hunger, fastings, without food (*nēsteia*) (v. 5)
  - a. In 1 Corinthians 4:11, Paul wrote “to this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty.”
  - b. In his letter to the brethren in Philippi, Paul wrote “I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need” (Philippians 4:12).
  - c. How often did Paul go without food or drink because he was trying to get to the next city in order to preach the gospel.
  - d. How often did he go without because he had no money left with which to buy food.

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## II. How God Equips Us For Our Life In Christ

### A. QUALITIES OF THE MIND

1. Purity (*hagnotes*) (v. 6)
  - a. Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).
  - b. Paul instructed the saints in Philippi to let their minds dwell on those things which are pure (Philippians 4:8).
2. Knowledge (*gnōsis*) (v. 6)
  - a. Ultimate knowledge is summed up in our Savior, in whom according to Colossians 2:3, “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”
  - b. To know God’s Word is to know that which gives us “wisdom that leads to salvation” (2 Timothy 3:15).
  - c. This knowledge is *saving* knowledge which God freely offers to all of us regardless our status in life.
3. Patience (*makrothumia*) (v. 6)
  - a. Because of the injustices imposed upon Paul by certain members of the church in Corinth had required of him the greatest exercise of patience.
  - b. In his letter to those in the church in Ephesus, Paul urged them “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:1-3).

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### B. QUALITIES OF THE HEART

1. Kindness (*chrēstoēs*) (v. 6)
  - a. Like patience, kindness is a part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22).
  - b. It is also an expression of Christian love — “Love is patient, love is kind” (1 Corinthians 13:4).
  - c. Paul told the Ephesians that God has extended “kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7).
  - d. Seeks to put others at ease and to avoid giving pain.
  - e. Paul exhorted those in Ephesus to “be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ has also forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).
2. The Holy Spirit (*pneumati hagiō*) (v. 6)
  - a. Peter’s promise to those on the day of Pentecost was that with their baptism, God would not only forgive their sins, but also give them the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).
  - b. Paul’s prayer for the saints in Ephesus was that they would be “strengthened with power through His [God’s] Spirit in the inner man” (Ephesians 3:16).
  - c. His prayer for the Christians in Colosse was that they would be “strengthened with all power, according to His [God’s] glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience” (Colossians 1:11).
  - d. The things which Paul was praying for on behalf of others, God was also doing for him through the Holy Spirit.
3. Genuine love (*agatiē anuplkritō*) (v. 6)
  - a. Literally, this is unhypocritical love, love free from insincerity.
  - b. Love which is mixed with insincerity, which “seeks its own” is not Christian love.

- c. In Romans 12:9, Paul wrote, “Let love be without hypocrisy.”
- d. Peter said that is this “sincere love of the brethren” which causes us to “fervently love one another from the heart” (1 Peter 1:22).
- e. We are most like God when we love this way because “God is love” (1 John 4:8).
- f. It is also an expression of God in action on our behalf because “God so loved that world that He gave His only begotten Son” to save us (John 3:16).
- g. It is also an expression of God at work through us (1 John 4:11).  
“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” (1 John 4:11, NASB95)

**Slide 7****C. EQUIPMENT FOR THE WORK**

- 1. “The word of truth” (logō aletheias) (v. 7)
  - a. This was the message which Paul proclaimed.
  - b. He told the Ephesians that it is “the gospel [good news] of your salvation” (Ephesians 1:13).
- 2. “The power of God” (dunamai theou) (v. 7)
  - a. It was this divine power which was experienced by the Corinthians when Paul was first there, proclaiming the gospel.
  - b. “I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:3–5, NASB95)

## Conclusion

1. I want each of you to know tonight that your life in Christ will at times involve great testing.
2. Why? Because Satan is determined to see that you do not finish the course you have begun and that you have no successes along the way.

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3. However, I would also like to remind you of something which the apostle John once wrote:

“You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4, NASB95).

4. With this being said, I want to leave you with the words of the apostle Paul himself:

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 15:58, NASB95)

5. Is Christ in you this evening? If so, you have the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27).
6. If not, why not surrender your life to Him this evening?
7. It is the most important decision you will ever make in your life?