

2 Corinthians 4

4:1 Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2 Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

In verse 1, Paul points out that his ministry and the Corinthian church's ministry were God given. Their ministry is the same as the one given by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20, "*19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" It is the same ministry that we are given when we accept Jesus as our Savior. The verses in Matthew 28 are a two step ministry. First, we are to Go and make disciples and second, we are to teach. Most churches today are good at step one or step two. As a church, which step do we do best?

In verse 2, Paul makes sure that they understand that in his ministry he has not used any tricks or he has not misled anyone when he preached the Gospel of Jesus. He tells them that they should be commended because they have done the same.

Today there are numerous churches that alter or water down the Word of God to get more "nickels and noggins". Those that share a prosperity Gospel or the Mormons or the Jehovah's Witnesses are examples groups that have changed or watered down the Word of God.

In verses 3 and 4, Paul says that the Gospel is veiled to the perishing. Paul tells them and us what he told them in 1 Corinthians 1:18, "*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*" Which came from Isaiah 29:14, "*Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.*" To a nonbeliever or the perishing the need for a savior is foolishness. The fact that there is more than death is folly. The fact that there is only one way and that Jesus had to die make no sense to those that do not believe. Paul says that their ability to understand has been "veiled". I would guess that to the Calvinist, since Paul said that there is a veil over the Gospel to the nonbeliever, this makes them correct to think that God picks who can and cannot accept the Gospel message.

"When the Christian message is conveyed by ministers who deceive or who rely on worldly wisdom, the gospel may be veiled. But when it is proclaimed plainly with a focus on the glory of

Christ in his death and resurrection, the problem does not reside in the gospel or in its ministers. . . Satan and his demons have been given a measure of dominion over the fallen world (Eph. 6:12). One of their greatest powers is the ability to deceive and blind people to spiritual truths. Paul affirmed that this was the case when unbelievers rejected the gospel of Christ.” (Holman New Testament Commentary - 1 & 2 Corinthians)

In verse 5, Paul uses the pronoun ‘we’ so he is speaking about himself and those that speak based on his teaching at the Corinthian church. What Paul preached and taught them to preach was Christ and Him crucified. 1 Corinthians 1:23 says, “*But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness.*” If you attend a worship service and the speaker preaches about himself, then it is time to get up and leave. David Koresh (Branch Davidians, Waco, TX) claimed to be his church’s final prophet. Based on these verses in 2 Corinthians, his followers should have taken off running. Paul is saying, “The Lord God who created light in the physical world can fill your heart with spiritual light, even if you are blinded by the god of this age.” Satan’s work of blinding is great, but God’s work of bringing light is greater.

Verse 6 begins with a quote from Genesis 1:3. The NLT is the best translation. It says, “*For God, who said, ‘Let there be light in the darkness.’*” If God can make the light shine in the world then he can also make the light shine in our hearts. This light is the light of Jesus. In the Book of Revelation, we are told that we will not need the sun or moon because we have the light of Jesus. Revelation 21:23 says, “*The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.*”

As mature Christians, people should be able to see Jesus in us and want what we have. When we accept Christ, we become a changed person and others should see that change in us. Paul most likely uses this illustration because of his own conversion in Acts 9:3. It says, “*As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.*” The light Paul saw was life changing. Verse 6 makes me think of the children’s song, “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.”

7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

In verse 7, Paul says that we have this treasure in earthen vessels. The treasure is the Gospel message living in us, the earthen vessels. Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 64:8 that “*We are the clay and God is the potter. We are the work of your hand.*” God’s plan for the Gospel is to be passed from believer to nonbeliever. The jar of clay symbolizes that those like Paul were just the vessels that God chose to use. The vessel is of no value except to carry the refreshing liquid. In this case, Paul and the Corinthian church were the vessels carrying and sharing the love of God

through the Gospel message. The way the Gospel is to be passed is foolishness to the wise. Why would God put something as valuable as the Gospel message in something as fragile and self-focused as humans? In our weakness, God's power shows through.

In verses 8 and 9, Paul talks about his own suffering that was meant by Satan and nonbelieving men to destroy his resolve or his body but it only made him more determined to share Jesus with others. He or his followers were:

- a. *Afflicted in every way, but not crushed;*
- b. *Perplexed, but not despairing;*
- c. *Persecuted, but not forsaken;*
- d. *Struck down, but not destroyed;*

10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. 12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

In verse 10, Paul says that we carry around the death of Christ. The death of Christ did so much for us. He became the perfect sacrifice, once and for all, to take our imperfections and made them perfect. Why did He die for us? Love. Jesus said, "*Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.*"

Paul faced death numerous times. Later in this letter (2 Corinthians 11:25-30), Paul will list some of the things that he faced before being beheaded for Christ. According to numerous theologians, there was a faction in the Corinthian church that had issues with Paul. They doubted he was a true apostle. "From his sufferings concluded against the truth of his doctrine, or his favour with God." (Poole)

Consider this, the only way that the Corinthians heard the Gospel message was through Paul's willingness to face death. So they received eternal life through Jesus which was delivered by Paul as he faced death. The NLT makes it easier to understand. It says, "*So we live in the face of death (Paul and other missionaries), but this has resulted in eternal life for you (us and the Corinthian church members).*"

13 It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, ¹⁴ because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. ¹⁵ All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

Paul quotes Psalm 116:10. This translation is different than most modern translations. Online the Brenton Septuagint Translation matches most closely. Paul is saying that if you believe in what the Word of God says, then you should tell others.

“We also believe and therefore speak: This is a great principle — that faith creates the testimony. Paul *really believed* God had a purpose in his death-like sufferings, and *really believed* he lived and experienced the resurrection life of Jesus. Therefore, he wasn’t hesitant to speak about it.” (Guzik)

Verse 14 tells us the reason we tell others about Jesus regardless of the consequences. The reason for sharing the Gospel is eternal life for all who believe. It makes me think of the saying, “If you had a cure for cancer, wouldn’t you share it?” Paul’s proof for eternal life is that God had the power to raise Jesus from the dead, then He has the power to raise all who have faith in Jesus.

In verse 15, Paul tells them and us that everything that God has done is for the benefit of all believers. Also, everything that Paul has endured is for the benefit of his ministry. The more we share the good news of Jesus Christ, the more believers there will be in Heaven. The more believers that are in heaven, the more God will be praised and the more amazing the celebration when we get there.

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

In verse 16, Paul says “Don’t lose heart.” Or as he says throughout his letters “Stand firm!” I don’t know about you but the aging process takes its toll on my body every day. Paul says even though the body is aging, the spirit is being renewed every day.

“Outward man has the same idea as *earthen vessels* in 2 Corinthians 4:7 and *mortal flesh* in 2 Corinthians 4:11. The message is the same: “On the outside, we are suffering and taking a beating, but on the inside, God is blessing and renewing us!” (Guzik)

Before retirement, I didn’t spend nearly as much time studying God’s Word as I should have. Now if I miss my Bible Study time, I truly miss it. The more time I spend with God, the closer I am to Him. The closer that I am to God, the more my spirit is renewed. In the final two verses in this chapter, Paul tells us and the Corinthian church to focus on eternal life. I am reminded of a Youth Sunday sermon by Anthony Terry. He used an illustration of a rope. He had a short section of rope that represented our life on earth and another really long section that represented eternity. Our life on earth is just a short time but eternity is forever.

Paul is telling the Corinthians and us, don't focus on our lives in this world but look ahead to the glory of heaven. Paul could endure what he endured because he was looking ahead to eternity. The NLT translates the final verse as, "*So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.*"