

THE GLORY OF THE MINISTRY
2 Corinthians 4:1-15

Human beings are constituted (made by God) with a knowledge of an existence beyond this present life. Apart from the knowledge of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, men will struggle with their imaginations. This explains the popularity of the New Age Movement (reincarnation), Postmodernism (no absolute truth), and thus the Bible has no authority.

It also explains the theories of annihilation by Jehovah's Witness.

After dealing with the fading glory of the law under Moses, Paul presents the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

How does anyone ever get "saved"?

If you begin where the Bible begins; with sin and guilt and condemnation charged to all men because of Adam's one sin, then you should see that man is in a helpless and desperate condition. If man is helpless, truly helpless, then God must take the initiative. This lesson will deal with how God saves sinners.

1. A Reason to Take Heart

4:1

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.

"Therefore" refers back to Chapter 3. As glorious as the Old Covenant was, and it was indeed glorious, it was not as glorious as the New Covenant. The Old Covenant was temporary and was fading, even as the radiant glow of Moses' face eventually faded away. The reason for our encouragement is the mercy of God.

We have this ministry of the Gospel and we are encouraged.

2. A Ministry that comes from Mercy 4:1-2

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.

² But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

“We do not lose heart.” See also 4:16. The Greek phrase means “we do not behave weakly, nor do we faint; we are not distressed.”

With all of the issues that Paul had to deal with in the church at Corinth the emphasis is on the mercy of God.

Instead of approaching the ministry with reluctance or discouragement or impatience; Paul lists three positive actions he will take.

First, there is no secrecy [3:18]. New Covenant believers live with unveiled faces, apostles, teachers, disciples, must be examples of openness.

Second, we renounce shameful ways. Shame comes from exposure of our deceitful ways. Paul did not fear exposure [2:17].

Third, there is no deception. Paul refused to handle the Word of God in a cunning and deceptive way. Much of what is popular and “successful” today is deceptive; there is a refusal to preach about sin and the need for repentance.

3. A Denial of the Truth 4:3

³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing.

Paul's opponents claimed that the Gospel of grace and freedom was veiled [obscure]. The “thou shall not's” of the Law were easier to understand than the idea that the Holy Spirit changes people by putting God's laws in their hearts and minds. While law works may be easier to understand, they are impossible to obey to the satisfaction of God.

Religion by rules and ritual removes the personal responsibility to be continually responsive to the Holy Spirit.

Just let someone tell you what to do and how to think and perform some ceremony for you to watch and you are released from the need to be involved at a deep spiritual level.

Sometimes the Gospel condemns [2:15-16].

4. The Gospel Message

4:4-6

⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

So, how does anyone ever get "saved"?

Jesus Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. You will know God only so far as you know Him in Jesus Christ. All the "god-words" spoken are a denial of Jesus Christ when Christ is not in the thoughts of the speaker.

What is the glory of God and where is it seen?

There must first be objective truth. The Word of God is the only infallible and unchanging truth. The objective truth of God's Word is revealed truth!

It takes the power of the Creator in creation to break through the deadness of sin and reach the heart and mind of a guilty sinner.

There are three words in verse 6 that answer the question:

What is the glory of God and where is it seen?

KNOWLEDGE: Greek, *gnosis*, a spiritual truth; that which is known is important to the one who knows; a seeking to know; an active relationship between the one who knows and that knowledge.

FACE: Greek, *prosopon*, the presence of a person; the noblest part; the person himself. The face expresses the mind.

GLORY: Greek, *doxa*, primarily an opinion, and hence the honor resulting from the quality of that opinion. The Hebrew word is *kabod*, from a verb that means weight, heaviness, or to honor.

Now look again at verse 6: ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

5. Treasure in Jars of Clay

4:7

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

“Jars of clay” may refer to earthenware pots in which the first-century people concealed valuables. The jar itself was of little value. It could be broken and replaced. The value was in what the vessel contained. What an apt description of the minister of the Gospel.

There is no place for arrogance, as was a problem in Corinth, in the person who, by receiving the Holy Spirit of Christ, has the light of Christ dwelling in him.

God, who made the light shine out of darkness, created life in the believer.

6. Power on Display in Battered Clay 4:8-12

⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you.

The Bible is honest. Jesus said to “count the cost” of discipleship.

The false teachers of our day preach a “prosperity gospel” and a “health and wealth” message and are doing what Paul called in verse 2, disgraceful and underhanded.

Believers are not promised an exemption from any affliction that is common to man. Consider the words that Paul used to describe his afflictions; each time offset by the assurance that there are limits beyond which problems cannot take those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There will be varying words in different translations but the message is the same.

Hard-pressed, afflicted in every way means to be squeezed, encumbered, crowded, or pressured. But God keeps us from being “crushed,” meaning crowded into a narrow place and cramped to the point of inaction.

Perplexed, means to be in doubt, without a solution, and not knowing which way to go. But we are not destroyed or in despair meaning utterly without resources, desperate.

Persecuted, means to be pursued with harmful intent, put to flight, or driven away; but never **abandoned**.

Struck down, means to throw or knock down. But God never allows the believer to be “destroyed,” which means to utterly kill, or perish.

Paul compared personal suffering as carrying “in our body the death of Jesus.”
What brings death to the minister may bring life to you.

7. To Believe is to Know

4:13-14

¹³ Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, “I believed, and so I spoke,” we also believe, and so we also speak, ¹⁴ knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

Paul writes that the sharing in the death of Jesus ends in sharing in His resurrection. He knew [*oida*, to know by personal observation], beyond a doubt that God would raise him and all believers into His eternal presence at the Lord’s coming [1 Cor 15:23].

8. To Believe is to be Thankful

4:15

¹⁵ For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

Everything done in ministry to the body of Christ, the church, is ultimately for “the glory of God.”

The grace of God was reaching more and more people. The more people that the grace of God reaches, the more thanksgiving overflows to God for them.

Paul then returns to the thought in verse 1; “So we do not lose heart.” [16]

We will continue from 4:16 next Sunday, D.V.