

Message #11**II Corinthians 4:1-6**

There are many pressures in ministry that can leave a minister very weary. There are things that happen that can cause a minister to want to resign. Pressures can leave a good man in a condition where he is ready to quit and give up. Now most jobs have pressure—psychological and emotional. All jobs have their thorns and thistles in them. But the ministry is not just a strain to the emotions and the mind; it is a strain on the heart. Ministry is a spiritual warfare. If taken seriously, real ministry is demanding and draining. It is relentless pressure. First, you have to stay on top of your own life to make sure everything is in check and then you have to watch over everything that is happening in the church and the lives of other people. You have to be on the lookout for any unchecked sin that escalates, any rumbles of false doctrine and any arrogant insurrection that would undermine the work. You become the target of criticism and verbal attacks. People question the way you look and the way you dress. If your facial expressions aren't right or if your message isn't eloquent, you'll be the topic of discussion. If the offerings or the attendance are down, you are the one who will be viewed as responsible. While all of this is happening, you will need to spend hours studying just to feed a flock and when you do give it your best to feed a flock, you become the target of criticism and verbal attacks that are often untrue. You leave on Sunday night totally drained and then you get up Monday morning and realize this pressure is all on me again.

This is not a complaint; it is just the way it is. The pressures of ministry can be overwhelming. In fact, in Charles Spurgeon's book, *Lectures to My Students*, Mr. Spurgeon described the pressures of the ministry in a chapter he called "The Minister's Fainting Fits."

No man in ministry ever faced more pressure than the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul was taking on the entire religious world with a grace Gospel that was revolutionary. He found himself under great pressure. However, the Apostle Paul realized the importance of the new covenant of grace ministry that had been given to him by God and he was not about to quit or give up on it. Even though he was under attack, he did not back down and he did not back away. Instead, he defended himself and he defended his ministry. When we come to these verses what we see is this:

EVEN THOUGH PAUL WAS VERBALLY ATTACKED AND CRITICIZED HE DID NOT BACK DOWN, BUT HE MAINTAINED INTEGRITY IN HIS MINISTRY AND HIS PRESENTATION OF THE GRACE MESSAGE.

There are eight ministry realities that Paul brings out here:

MINISTRY REALITY #1 – Paul did not lose heart . 4:1

The words "lose heart" (ενκακεω) is a word that literally means to become cowardly (*Ibid.*, p. 154). It presents the idea of slackening your efforts or neglecting responsibilities because you are weary and fearful.

The verb is present tense, which speaks of a continual action. There were moments when Paul was afraid and there were moments when he was low and he felt like backing away (II Cor.1:8), but the continual pattern of his life was he never did.

Paul never lost heart in ministry and the reason is because Paul had received “this ministry” (την διακονιαν), which was a ministry of proclaiming the grace and mercy of God.

That word “mercy” means that Paul realized that God had shown mercy and pity on him when he was in a helpless and hopeless condition and not only saved him, but entrusted him with the new covenant of grace ministry, which he had the responsibility to take to the entire world (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 145).

The verb “we received mercy” is aorist passive, which means Paul is emphasizing that he did not have a thing to do with the action. Paul was the recipient of the action. In other words, God mercifully saved Paul and then mercifully gave him the specific ministry of the new covenant of grace.

From these words it is obvious that Paul did not believe that he deserved to be saved or have a ministry. He truly believed every bit of it was due to the grace and mercy of God and he never lost heart in taking that message to the entire world.

The grace message is that if you will believe on Jesus Christ you will be saved from all your sins and will have eternal life. He developed the theology of the doctrine of justification and imputation. God, in pure grace, justifies a sinner through faith in His Son and guarantees eternal life. Paul never backed down from proclaiming these things—he did not lose heart. He had a “determined perseverance.”

MINISTRY REALITY #2 – Paul renounced shameful things. 4:2a

The verb “renounce” is aorist middle, which means Paul, in and of himself, verbally spoke out against and renounced hidden, secret, concealed things that were shameful and disgraceful. That word “shame” (αισχυνη) refers to things that are shameful, disgraceful, base, and dishonorable (*Ibid.*, p. 14). The word “hidden” (κρυπτω) is one that refers to things hidden, secret, concealed (*Ibid.*, p. 259).

Paul was not involved in secret, disgraceful and shameful behavior in his ministry. He turned his back on such things and spoke out against such things. **Now the specific shameful behavior that he contextually had in mind was that of marketing the Word of God.** Paul never had a disgraceful and shameful agenda in the way he used God’s Word. He did not try to market God’s Word for shameful gain.

I just had someone tell me a week ago that they had gone to a church one time where they said that if the people really dug deep and gave the church their money, they would receive everything they wanted in life. This was a local church in this area.

If you could see behind the scenes into the lives of religious peddlers, you would discover that their lives are filled with shameful and disgraceful things. One such minister sent out mailings to people showing a picture of him kneeling in prayer and offering to pray his blessings on all who sent him money. Behind the scenes of his life was a sordid life of immorality that was shameful and disgraceful.

Paul says we are not involved in any shameful thing; in fact, we renounce those things.

MINISTRY REALITY #3 – Paul maintained integrity with God’s Word. **4:2b**

Now Paul specifically qualifies what he has in mind when he says we do not walk in any crafty way that adulterates the Word of God. Paul never tampered with the Word of God; he always rightly divided it and accurately taught it. He did not water it down; he did not twist or distort it to make it fit his own agenda or marketing strategy. He carefully and accurately taught God’s Word.

False teachers can make the Bible say whatever they want it to say by twisting Scripture and taking verses out of context. You could take the Bible and twist it to prove anything. But if you study to rightly divide a text in its context, you must let it say what it says.

It is a terrible tragedy that today many so-called evangelical preachers edit God’s Word. They do not prayerfully study to rightly divide Scriptures. They remove texts from contexts. They moralize or spiritualize or allegorize a text. They use passages to promote their own hobby horses or their own agenda. They hold to dogmatic positions and denominational positions that the Scriptures do not support.

Paul never did any such thing. He always had integrity when he handled God’s Word. He did not dilute it, he did not deviate from it, he cut it straight. That is why Paul told Timothy in his final charge, you preach the Word (II Tim. 4:1-2).

MINISTRY REALITY #4 – Paul maintained integrity in his life. **4:2c**

The end of **verse 2** gives us a glimpse as to how seriously Paul took ministry. The present tense participle “commending” (συνιστημι) is one that means Paul continually tried to show, prove and establish that his ministry was true to “every man’s conscience” (*Ibid.*, pp. 429-430). In other words, Paul literally tried to live what he preached for all men to see. Paul did not need letters of recommendation; he had a life that proclaimed truth and lived truth.

The last prepositional phrase “in the sight of God” means Paul believed his ministry and life were being lived out face to face in the sight of God. Everything he did and everything he taught he knew was being done in the presence of God.

Frankly, this thing scares me. I don't understand how some ministers can twist God's Word and take millions of dollars from people and not realize there is a God monitoring all of this and the clock is ticking and one will be in the presence of God. To use ministry for perverted purposes will one day prove to be fatal. Teachers of God's Word will receive a stricter judgment (James 3:1).

MINISTRY REALITY #5 – Paul understood the results in ministry were not his responsibility. **4:3-4**

It is pretty clear from these verses that Paul was being criticized for his lack of numbers. For the most part, his ministry didn't draw big crowds. Paul was being criticized for his grace message everywhere he went and preached grace, but the results weren't real impressive.

In fact, most of the time, wherever Paul went the results seemed to be so negative. Not many Jews responded to the message of grace. In fact, Paul's grace message was a stumbling block to the Jews. Not many Gentiles responded to the message of grace, because the grace message was foolishness to self-reliant Gentiles (I Cor. 1:23). Not many important people of the world were responding to his message of grace. Not many famous people, wealthy people or political leaders were responding to Paul's message of grace (I Cor. 1:26).

Paul was being criticized for the lack of results so he addressed that point here. He said "I go from place to place and preach grace and if the Gospel message is rejected it is due to the fact that Satan has blinded people's minds of those who are perishing." In other words, the problem is not with my grace message, it is with satanic blindness.

Now the first thing we need to see is that Satan is called "the god of this age," not "the god of this world." There is a big difference. The God of the world and the God of the universe is the God of the Bible. Satan is "the god of this age" (του αιωνος). Jesus called him "the ruler of the world." In this present age, Satan's mission is to blind people's minds from believing on Jesus Christ for salvation.

But Paul knew something these people did not know. Paul knew that Satan blinded minds and hearts. In fact, at one time, he himself had been blinded to the truth.

By the way, if you do not see the need to believe on Jesus Christ as your Savior, we would suggest that you go home and ask God to remove the blinders from your heart and mind so you will see the need.

MINISTRY REALITY #6 – Paul did not preach things about himself. **4:5a**

Now the "for" that begins **verse 5** is an explanatory conjunction. In view of the blindness that Satan has on the lost people of this world, Paul never preached himself. He never preached that people should believe in him or his religion. He never preached interesting stories about himself; he preached Jesus Christ.

Here is a point that should be seen by every minister, everywhere. The goal of preaching is not to preach you. The goal of preaching is not to tell a bunch of interesting stories about you. The goal is to preach the Word of God.

MINISTRY REALITY #7 – Paul did preach Jesus Christ. **4:5b**

Paul did not preach to entertain or amuse or to enhance numbers; he preached Jesus Christ. When you carefully study the writings of Paul, which reveal what he preached, he developed deep doctrine and theology about Jesus Christ. He taught that the only way to have a relationship with God was through faith in Jesus Christ; faith plus no works. His grace message was faith alone in Christ alone is what will save a sinner.

He clearly taught that Jesus Christ was the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He taught that Jesus Christ was the God/man mediator who can reconcile sinners into a relationship with the Holy God. That is what Paul preached. We are helpless to take blinders off people, but the preaching of Jesus Christ can and will do it.

Paul preached that Jesus was the Savior, He was the Christ or Messiah, and He was the Lord; that is, He was God. So the Gospel Paul preached was a message that you need to believe Jesus is the one and only Savior, He is the one and only Messiah and He is God.

If the blinders have been removed from your mind and heart then you will see and believe that Jesus is the only Savior; Jesus is the only Messiah and Jesus is God. If you don't believe that, then you are blind to truth.

MINISTRY REALITY #8 – Paul's ministry was from God. **4:6**

Now this is important doctrine here. Paul takes us back to the book of Genesis when God commanded light to shine out of darkness and he relates it to the fact that God, in His sovereignty, commands the light of grace to shine in our hearts.

God revealed grace/light to shine in Paul's heart and Paul was a communicator of that grace/light. His job was to give light to the knowledge of the glory of God which is found in Jesus Christ.

We are now in the Age of Grace in which God shines His light on those who believe.

When God's light is shining in the heart of a person, he will realize that Jesus Christ is the glorious God. He is the glorious God Savior, the only one who can save from sin.