

## II Corinthians Lesson 04

II Cor. Chapter 4

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Memory verses for this week: *1 Peter 5:10 But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.*

**Introduction:** Last week in Chapter 3, Paul spoke of how the Christian has great liberty in Christ. While some of the Old Testament ministrations have ceased, many such as the ten commandments are still in force. The New Testament ministration will not be replaced with a third ministration. Things will continue as they are until Christ breaks that Eastern sky.

### I. The Message of the True Gospel Ministry

*2 Corinthians 4:1 Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; 2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*

In light of the glory of the gospel ministry, Paul indicated his determination to continue therein. "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not." Of interest is the fact that in virtually every case in the Pauline epistles where the Apostle used the word *ministry*, it is preceded by an article or an adjective. Here, he speaks of this ministry. In other places, he will refer to 'the ministry,' or 'thy ministry,' etc. With the exception of Romans 12:7, the word *ministry* is never used as a free-standing word. It is all that is involved with the propagation of the gospel and discipleship thereafter. In as much as God has so entrusted us with such a privilege, he wrote, as we have received mercy, we faint not. Paul simply stated that he would not give up.

Paul uses chapter 4 to declare that his preaching was open and sincere. Each of us need to be men and women that speak straight on and are people of integrity. The gospel may be hid to many, but it is not due to men like Paul who clearly preached the complete and whole gospel of Jesus Christ. When we remember what kind of mercy God had for us when He saved us from our sins, we will have courage to speak boldly.

Too many today are concerned about what man will say, and they tend to try to please them. A minister's number one goal should be to please God, and to do that you must declare and preach the whole word of God without concern if it convicts the sinner. That is truly the purpose is to bring the lost to conviction

that they might turn to Christ for salvation.

A man who is a true minister of God will not fail to preach the entire word of God. He will renounce the hidden things of dishonesty, and do it openly and with sincerity. He is to never handle the Word of the Lord deceitfully. People deceive others when they change the Word of God to say what they want it to say, or take a scripture out of context to teach something that God never meant. We have so many preachers on television that tell us that great prosperity will come our way when we send our money to them to continue their ministry.

While I know God will bless those who give to the church, nowhere in God's Word does it promise we will have great prosperity and all of our problems will vanish when we make an offering. Rather, we are told that Satan is against us and that every day will be a battle. What He does promise is grace to help in that day, and that God will never leave us nor forsake us.

In verse 2, Paul announced that he and his associates had renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully. Again, his point is simple: his character and his message were completely legitimate. His ministry was by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Throughout Paul's ministry, he had by exposition of the truth proved himself in the conscience of all as well as in the sight of God. Both his message and his character demonstrated the integrity of his ministry, God being his witness.

*II Cor 4:3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: 4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. 5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.*

The Apostle furthered his response to his critics who claimed his message was not understood. He continues "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." The word translated as hid (*kaluptw kalupto*) also has the sense of being 'veiled.' It is not likely that Paul used this word coincidentally. Rather, he likely is referring back to 3:16 where he wrote that when the heart turns to the Lord, the veil of spiritual blindness is removed. Just beneath the surface is the implication that one of the problems of his critics was their hardened hearts. When a heart is hardened by sin, the gospel is veiled to such.

Verse 3 says if the gospel is hid, it is hid to those who are lost. It was certainly not Paul's fault that the gospel was hid because he preached Christ and not self. A true minister will faithfully put forth the truth of God. By doing this, he commends himself to the people by a clear conscience due to a life that is lived to the honor and glory of God. If we speak swelling words and don't back it up with actions, our words will not have the impact that the life lived for God will have.

Unbelievers, suffering from a heart hardened against Christ, have another problem. The god of this world, Satan, further blinds their minds, lest the light of Christ should shine unto them. In making this point, Paul notes the vast distinction of the two great adversaries of the ages. He refers to the *god* of this world—the devil. Jesus, in John 12:31, also referred to the devil as the *prince* of this world. In contrast, Paul refers to not only the “glorious gospel of Christ,” but also the fact He is the very “image of God.”

Jesus Christ is the very likeness of God for He is God incarnate. His greater point, however, is that for those with a heart veiled by unbelief, the devil will compound that hardness by blinding the mind through error. We know Satan is the god of this world that blinds the minds of those who are lost. He is the father of lies, and tells people that there is no truth in this bible stuff. Or he may say “Just put salvation off even if you intend to be saved one day. Live life to the fullest and live with gusto.” He never shows you what the life lived like that looks like until you are the one lying in the gutter or in agony over the sin that has brought shipwreck to your life.

I’ve never talked to an alcoholic that thought a simple drink would ever lead to a habit that couldn’t be broken. The Devil does not want the light of the gospel to shine in the hearts of men. Paul said he was a servant of Jesus, and that made him a servant to man.

*Mark 10:42 But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. Mark 10:43 But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: Mark 10:44 And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. Mark 10:45 For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

In verse 5, Paul made clear however that we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. He reiterates the purity of his motives. There was no self seeking in his preaching. To the contrary, he offered himself to them as their servant for Jesus’ sake. Paul noted Christ Jesus as Lord. He is Lord of all. This is often overlooked or taken lightly, but it is a fact.

*II Cor 4:6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

Paul refers back to the creation account in Genesis 1:3. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts”. Even as God ordered light to pierce the darkness at the beginning of the creative week, so He pierces the darkness of the human heart with the gospel. His

purpose in so doing is to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The Apostle then presents a wonderful thought. As the human heart turns to Jesus Christ in faith and repentance, the knowledge of the glory of God will be reflected back to us from Christ. As we turn our eyes upon Jesus, the glory of God is reflected back to us. We then begin come to understand that glorious knowledge.

The God that spoke and light came forth at the creation is the one who has shined in our hearts due to salvation. This glory that shines from within us is there to let others see that there is something special about being a Christian. The Glory of God shines through us by Christ living within us.

*Genesis 1:3 And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.*

## **II. The Power of the True Gospel Ministry**

*II Cor 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*

The glorious knowledge of a heart illuminated by the gospel is of inestimable value. That was the gain Paul sought and not his own. The treasure spoken of was the glorious gospel of Christ and the privilege to preach it (i.e., the ministry). His reference to “earthen vessels” undoubtedly was to the vessels of pottery used in ancient times. They were the common storage utensils of civilization. Paul used them as analogies of the human body.

God has committed the propagation of the gospel to such fragile humble vessels as us. The reason is simple: that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. God has committed the preeminence of the gospel to humble vessels such as us that He might receive the glory and not us. We would do well to remember that. Paul directs all glory to God and claimed none for himself.

The knowledge of the glory of God is possessed in an “earthen vessel.” This term is used to explain how the human body and human nature are at best very weak. Thank God he uses weak creatures like you and I to understand some of the greatness of God.

### **In the King James Study bible, the writers had this to say about verse 7.**

**II Cor 4:7** Reflecting on the strange, incongruous phenomenon of the indwelling Holy Spirit of God, Paul surmises that God indwells “earthen vessels,” giving His power to men, so that the excellency of His power might be magnified in otherwise weak human vessels. God’s strength displayed and made perfect through human weakness is the climactic theme of this epistle (cf. 12:1–13:5). This is the very essence of the model of ministry Paul would promote, in stark contrast to the triumphalism or self-exaltation of the false teachers, as well as to

some present-day ministerial models. God, in Paul's day as well as in our own, is looking for suffering servants, not spectacular superstars! This truth will be developed at length in the remainder of the epistle.

*II Cor 4:8 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; 10 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.*

Notwithstanding the glory of the gospel ministry, there is endless pressure and problems. *We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.* . He presents contrasting couplets of the pressure and difficulties in the ministry with the corresponding grace of God. In spite of trouble, confusion, persecution, and rejection; they were not discouraged, depressed, forsaken by God, or destroyed. Paul's greater point is that the excellency of the power to continue came from on high and not themselves. They continued by God's grace and not their ability.

Throughout his ministry, Paul had faced continual opposition, physical injury, and even death. To that degree, he bore in his body the facsimile of our Lord's death. However, it was so that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. Paul and his associates were the true messengers of the life available through Christ, therefore, able to withstand the dangers of the ministry. It was manifest through his body as he witnessed, taught, and preached.

In these verses Paul shows how weak our earthen vessels are, and yet at the same time, how wonderfully we are sustained by God's power. Paul and his friends were always in danger of being slain by their foes, just like Christ was in his earthly ministry. Yet they were on many occasions delivered by the Lord, so that they might continue to bear testimony to Him.

*Acts 23:11 And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.*

J. Vernon McGee had some excellent comments on these verses about being distressed and persecuted.

“ He was “persecuted,” pursued by enemies, but he was “not forsaken”—he was not overtaken by the enemies. When he was in prison, he could write to the Philippians, “But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places” (Phil. 1:12–13). Even when he was in prison he could always say that the Lord stood by him.

“Cast down, but not destroyed.” This is tremendous—he was smitten down;

the enemy got him down, but the enemy did not destroy or kill him. Actually, in all these phrases Paul is making a play on words which is lost in the translation into English. If I could paraphrase it in English, it would be something like this: "I am struck down, but I'm not struck out." Even at the end of his life Paul could say, "... I have *finished* my course ..." (2 Tim. 4:7, italics mine). Paul seems to be fighting a losing battle. Can't you sense that this man is very weak? And yet, in his weakness, he is *strong*. If we could have seen this little crippled, weak, sick Jew up against the mighty juggernaut of Roman power, we would have concluded that he was *nothing*. But, my friend, the fact is he brought a message that *withered* the Roman Empire. Even the historian Gibbon said that the Roman Empire could not stand up against the preaching of the gospel of Christ. (May I say that the gospel still continues to topple thrones.) Paul seemed to be so weak, and yet God delivered him again and again. He used miraculous means and He also used natural means. God will never forsake His servants.

You and I live in a day of compromise, a day of expediency, a day when we seem to measure a man by how popular he is or by how many friends he has. The late Dr. Bob Shuler, pastor in downtown Los Angeles, used to say, "I measure a man by the enemies he has." It is important to make the right kind of enemies. Jesus said that if we would love Him and follow Him, the world would hate us. Paul had the right kind of enemies. I am confident that I have the right kind of enemies also.

Like Brother McGee said, Paul was a man of weakness, yet he lived and died daily for the cause of Jesus Christ. If others are going to see Jesus today, they look to a Christian for what Christ is like.

*II Cor 4:11 For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. 12 So then death worketh in us, but life in you. 13 We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak;*

As he had written in I Corinthians 15:31, "I die daily," Paul faced constant threat of martyrdom. Nevertheless, he and his associates determined that the spiritual life in Christ would continually be made manifest through their presence as long as they lived. In other words, as long as he had breath, he was determined to witness of Christ. In verse 12, Paul concluded, "So then death worketh in us, but life in you". Though he regularly faced death, by his perseverance they had the privilege of spiritual life.

Are you and I living in such a way that others see Christ in our daily lives, or do we live to the flesh. It is not easy to live a sacrificial life that honors Jesus. Anybody can live for the devil, but it takes a special man or woman who can really live for Jesus Christ. Paul refers Psalms 116:10 when he speaks of the battle we face in the mortal flesh. But he goes on to say "We believe, and therefore speak." If we don't believe God and His word, we truly should never

speak. God's Word is true, and God never has and never will lie.

*Psalm 116:10 I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted:*

*Heb 6:18 That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:*

Paul held the same position: we also believe, and therefore speak. The context is clear of saving faith and the witnessing of thereafter. A powerful lesson remains for us to this day. That was the essence of his ministry.

*II Cor 4:14 Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. 15 For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.*

Understanding of this verse is heightened in recalling the context. Paul regularly faced death for preaching the gospel. Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus. His point is singular. The same God which raised Jesus Christ from the dead would resurrect him if it came to that.

Notwithstanding the prospect of martyrdom, Paul knew his greater destination. It was heaven and the resurrection. No one could take that from him. All of the trouble, persecution, and prospect of death he had suffered was for their sakes. But more than that, through God's grace and the thanksgiving of many, glory would abound to God. That was his ultimate goal.

Even though in the end, Paul's enemies would finally take his life, yet he has the confidence that the same God who raised up the Lord Jesus will some day likewise raise from the dead all who know Christ as Personal Savior. And Paul endured many things for the sake of the converts, that as they experience God's "abundant grace" their thanksgiving might abound to the glory of God. Paul was a man determined to serve the Lord, and perhaps no one ever suffered more for God except Christ Himself.

*2 Cor 11:18 Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also.*

*2 Cor 11:19 For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise.*

*2 Cor 11:20 For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.*

*2 Cor 11:21 I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also.*

*2 Cor 11:22 Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I.*

*2 Cor 11:23 Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more;*

*in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.*

*2 Cor 11:24 Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.*

*2 Cor 11:25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;*

*2 Cor 11:26 In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;*

*2 Cor 11:27 In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.*

*2 Cor 11:28 Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.*

*2 Cor 11:29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?*

*2 Cor 11:30 If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.*

### **III. The Hope of the True Gospel Ministry**

*II Cor 4:16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.*

Because of all of this, he wrote, “we faint not.” He is back to where he began in verse 1 of this chapter. Notwithstanding the prospect of physical death—“our outward man perish,” nevertheless, “the inward *man* is renewed day by day.” Though he faced the prospect of physical death on a regular basis; inwardly, he was renewed on a daily basis by the grace of God, the Spirit of God, and the Word of God. That prospect remains unchanged to us to this day.

The outward man that Paul is referring to is our physical man. It is full of weakness and infirmities. But we are not to live in the physical man and look to it for our strength. We are to look to God through the spiritual man to be renewed each and every day. Our inward man is of course the soul.

*Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

*II Cor 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;*

Paul sought to put it all in perspective. From the perspective of eternity, all of his trouble and persecution in comparison was but for a moment. It all was producing a far greater, eternal prospect of glory waiting someday in heaven.



We can think of our present affliction as but “light” and “for a moment” in comparison with the “Weight of Glory” that lies ahead of us in eternity. This should encourage us no matter what our situation may be. We need to learn to get our eyes off of earthly things and to look through the eye of faith to the things we can not see with our natural eye.

*II Cor 4:18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

Paul kept his perspective right. He looked “not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.” His focus was not on the prospects of physical life, but rather on the intangible blessings of spiritual things both now and forever. The simple fact remains, “the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.” The physical things of earth are temporary and short lived. The things of God (spiritual things) are eternal. The message as to our priorities is thus clear. The tangible is short-lived. The spiritual is forever.

The things we can not see are eternal.

What are these unseen things. Some of them are: Christ the Savior, God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and Heaven.

*1 Cor 2:9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*

*1 Cor 2:10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.*

*1 Cor 2:11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.*

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*Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

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**blessed.**