

2 Corinthians 4:1-6 – “We Do Not Lose Heart”

1. The Power of the Gospel – 4:1

4:1 - *Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart.*

Therefore is that connecting, transitional word. It causes us to look back and see what has been said because it has weight for what’s going to be said.

What was said? In Chapter 3 Paul was dealing with the Old Covenant vs. the New Covenant. He showed how the Old Covenant brought death, but the New Covenant brings life (3:6)!

Paul then proceeds to talk about the glorious opportunity he now has: ***since we have this ministry...*** He gets to take part in leading people into the glory of the New Covenant! He gets to lift the burden off the people who were trying to live under its demands. We now have liberty and freedom in and through Jesus. We’re set free from the yoke of bondage that the law brought us under. Remember, the law is good, but it couldn’t save us.

- **Romans 3:20–21**, *"Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. ²¹ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,"*

So Paul gets to travel around and share this good news! It’s like coming to a town that’s never seen indoor plumbing before, and now you get to share with them there’s a better way.

This better way is wrapped up in the fact that ***we have received mercy...*** We’re no longer striving to earn our righteousness. We never get there is it’s based on our works. We needed grace and mercy. We needed God to overlook our sin, but our sin still needed to be judged. So God provided a way for all that to happen – it’s through His Son Jesus who died for our sins, and took the judgment of God. We deserved this death, but God gave us mercy instead.

- **Ephesians 2:4–5**, *"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),"*

So now we don't need to **lose heart**.

We're not lying awake at night wondering if I'm gonna make it. *'Have I done enough?'* You'll never be free of guilt, you'll always lack assurance if you think salvation is dependent on you.

"When asked the reason for his wealth, a multimillionaire is reported to have said, "As a young man, when I was first married I was dirt poor. Those were tough times, but being energetic, I took my last nickel and bought an apple. I spent the night polishing it until it became so shiny that it was indeed a thing of beauty. The next day, I sold it on the street corner for a dime. I took the dime and bought two apples, which I again laboriously polished. The next day, I sold those two apples for twenty cents. I took the twenty cents and bought four apples, which I polished and sold for forty cents. I took the forty cents, bought eight apples, and went on this way until I reached \$1.60. Then, my wife's dad died—and left us a million dollars."

That's just like us! We try to say, "I am rich in the things of God because of my fasting and prayer, my devotion, sacrifice, and apple polishing"—when in reality we are rich only because Jesus died and opened the floodgates of God's grace upon us." ¹

Don't lose heart, you are *in* because you are **in** Christ!

Now this would also be of great encouragement to Paul and give him confidence in the ministry knowing that God was with him, leading him, and sustaining him by His grace and mercy. He didn't need to lose heart even though he went through repeated attacks and trials. This ministry was too great to ever give up on.

- **Ephesians 3:13**, *"Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory."*

May we never flirt with losing heart. The gospel is too valuable and Jesus too awesome to ever begin to question forging ahead.

2. The Truth of the Gospel – 4:2-4

4:2 - *But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of*

¹ Courson, J. (2003). *Jon Courson's Application Commentary* (p. 732). Thomas Nelson.

the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Paul, and the other true apostles, have renounced (rejected) ***the hidden things of shame***. This word ***shame*** means, dishonest and disgraceful. He's rejected anything that is not true and honorable before God.

What were some of these ***hidden things of shame***? As Paul describes, it was those who walked in craftiness and those that used the Word of God for their own personal and deceptive gain.

- Remember he's already addressed this in **2 Corinthians 2:17**, *"For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ."*

There were those in Paul's day that were being real shysters. They were using the Word of God as a means for their own corrupt benefit.

There are people like that today who twist the Word of God to fit their own purposes.

- The Word Faith movement and Prosperity Gospel is something that comes to mind. Those that promote the kind of teaching here will always talk about how you need to give. And when you take a step of faith and give, this is like 'seed' money. It's going to grow and become a harvest of blessing in your life. Of course, to exercise this, you need someone to give to. And these prosperity preachers are more than happy to be the recipients of your seed money. And they will twist Scriptures around to make it sound like what they're saying may actually have some truth to it. But there's some serious Scripture gymnastics going on to stretch things to that conclusion.
- There are some strange and aberrant teachings out there that are very crafty. They can sound Biblical, but they are far from Biblical.

Paul on the other hand says, by manifestation of the truth, we're ***commending ourselves to every man's conscience***. His purpose was to reveal the truth of the Gospel; to make it known. How so? By *speaking* it out in truth, and *living* it out in truth.

- What are the things that your life is manifesting? Are you revealing the good news and the hope we have in Jesus? Do you say one thing, but communicate the opposite by how you live?
- Even though Paul was often criticized by the false apostles, he knew that people's conscience' would be a guide showing that he was indeed walking in integrity.

- And Paul recognized that everything that he's doing is being done in the sight of God. Others might try to pull the wool over the eyes of others, but you're never going to pull the wool over God's eyes.

4:3-4 - *But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.*

Even though the gospel is being delivered by Paul in truth, we read here that not everyone is going to receive it, and there's a reason for that: ***the god of this age has blinded*** them. The gospel becomes veiled to such people. It's not because Paul didn't deliver the goods the right way, or because he twisted things, it's because people have been blinded.

Who's the ***god of this age***? This is speaking of the devil; Satan.

You may wonder how is he the god of this age? I thought God was ruler of all. And you're right, God is still in control and Lord of all, but when man sinned, he forfeited this world over to Satan. When Satan offered up all the kingdoms to Jesus in His temptation, Jesus never opposed that claim. In fact, Jesus would call him the ruler of this world in John 12:31.

Satan is at work operating in this world to blind people from receiving the truth. He does it through distorting the truth and causing you to question the truth.

But this blindness is not something that happens against our will. People aren't perishing because Satan has overruled their chance for salvation. Rather, they're perishing because they've given themselves over to the wicked one. They've had every chance to see the light, but they've rejected the light and would rather be in darkness. And Satan does all he can to keep them in that state of darkness and blindness.

- **John 3:19–21**, *"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."*

How does Satan blind people? Through the mind. The mind is the place of understanding and reasoning. The mind however is the playground of the enemy. This is where the battles are fought.

- This is why you can talk to people and show very clearly who Jesus is and share this free gift of salvation. And you'd think who wouldn't want that!?

Yet, so many refuse. It's because their minds are blinded.

Satan not only blinds the minds of those that are perishing, but he would like to do a number on those who aren't. He puts doubts in our mind to make us think that God is not real (evolution), that He doesn't love us (tragedies), or that we're unsavable (condemnation). But we have the choice to listen to the lies, or to take those thoughts captive and to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Listen, the light is always shining. **John 1:5**, *"And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend [overcome] it."*

People may resist it. Satan may put obstacles in the way of seeing it. People sadly like to stay in the darkness rather than look to the **glory of Christ**. They know that when that glory shines on them it will expose them and leave them without excuse. Yet, like John 3 said, there are those that love darkness, they want to remain in their state of sin.

Have we allowed the **light of the gospel of the glory of Christ** to shine in on our lives? Has it illuminated our way and brought cleansing and transformation? We need to regularly be brought under the microscope of the gospel. We need to continually preach the gospel to ourselves. We're saved and forgiven through Jesus Christ, who though He was the image of God, came to us clothed in humanity to die for the forgiveness of our sins. The gospel reminds us that we have nothing to boast in of ourselves, but that our boast is solely in Jesus! It's all to the glory of Christ. And when we understand the sacrifice He made for us, He becomes all the more glorious!

3. The Glory of the Gospel – 4:5-7

4:5 - For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake.

Because of this glorious gospel and the greatness of Jesus, Paul knew that there was nothing to promote in himself.

I like what W. MacDonald said: “In this one verse we have both the poorest theme for a preacher, and the best theme. The poorest theme is **ourselves**, while the best theme is **Christ Jesus the Lord**.”²

May we be careful to never inject ourselves as the hero of our salvation story, or anyone else for that matter. Jesus is the only Hero, He’s the true Saviour. And because He is, we delight in simply serving Him. In fact, Paul says we’re **bondservants**.

- This wasn’t a nice lovely sanitized way of saying, ‘*We’re just serving our Savior.*’ To be called a bondservant was to take the lowest position as a slave.
- We don’t mind saying, *I’m just serving the Lord*. But how do you respond when someone treats you like a slave? It may be a different story right? Paul is revealing that he’s laid down his life as a slave for Jesus’ sake. And when you begin to understand the gospel more fully, laying down your life is not a burden, it’s a real joy! You’re simply serving the One who gave it all for you.
- Paul was also hinting at the way these false apostles were acting. They wanted to be served and enslave the Corinthian believers under the guise of ministry.

4:6 - For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Paul takes us back to Genesis 1 where we see God’s very first command: “*Let there be light*” (Genesis 1:3). This same God active in bringing forth light out of darkness at the beginning of time, is the same God who shines forth in our own hearts bringing forth the **light of the knowledge of the glory of God**...

Those who have been blinded miss out from seeing the greatness of God and the reality of the beauty of Jesus. Paul used to be in that place, and perhaps is drawing from his own salvation experience on the road to Damascus when he met the Lord (Acts 9:3). He saw the radiance and glory in the face of Jesus. When Ananias prayed for him *there fell from his eyes something like scales*... (Acts 9:18).

² MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (A. Farstad, Ed.; p. 1833). Thomas Nelson.

Paul was not just given physical sight but spiritual sight. He had experienced a new light that was now shining in his heart and it was to be passed on to others.

Paul was able to do this so effectively because he was so radically saved and changed.

- This is the purpose of what we receive in and through Jesus – it's meant to be passed on. And we can only pass on what we ourselves have received.
- "We can only preach to others the Christ we have met for ourselves."³

Our goal as Christians is to point others to the **glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ**. We aren't going to be able to do that if we're trying to shine the light on ourselves all the time. Self-promotion dampens the light. Promoting Jesus shines forth the light.

John 17:24, *"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."*

May we be looking unto Jesus and beholding His glory. And may we shine forth that glory for others to behold and come into the light of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:18, *"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."*

³ Kruse, C. G. (1994). 2 Corinthians. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 1196). Inter-Varsity Press.