

2 Corinthians

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Chapter Four

2Cor 4:1 “Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart,

2Cor 4:2 but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

2Cor 4:3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,

2Cor 4:4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

2Cor 4:5 For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.

2Cor 4:6 For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

The word “therefore” refers to the new covenant discussed in the previous chapter. Paul is a minister of Jesus Christ solely by the mercy of God. Since he knows that he received such mercy even when he was persecuting the church and, of course Jesus Christ, he can never become discouraged regardless of the worldly obstacles. Paul has renounced his former life of persecution of Jesus. The word for shame means disgraceful actions that result in disgrace and embarrassment. Since he has been forgiven and cleansed of these sins they are now hidden but probably the false teachers were accusing him of those actions in attempts to discredit him. He proclaims that he has renounced those deeds and is not trying to pretend that he did not do them. The false teachers were not presenting the true Gospel message but were pretending that they had secret knowledge not available to everyone. They adulterated the word of God to glorify themselves and to make themselves seem important so that they could get material support from the people. Paul was bringing forth only the Gospel and depending upon God for his clear conscience in ministering to the people. The truth of the message was enough to commend him to the conscience of the church also.

The false teachers taught that only select people could understand and receive the entire message of God but Paul said that the gospel is veiled, but only to those who would not receive eternal life. Many churches today present a visitor-friendly message and environment rather than teaching the truth about the state of people outside of the family of God:

John 3:36 “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

Paul proclaimed the clear message of salvation only through Jesus Christ but the message could only be heard and acted upon by those spiritually alive:

1Cor 2:12 “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God,

1Cor 2:13 which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words.

1Cor 2:14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”

People reject the Word of God because they love the darkness more:

John 3:19 “And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil.”

Satan is at war with God and he controls the world’s views against Jesus and he is the world’s ruler:

John 12:31 “Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world shall be cast out.”

Paul clearly recognized that the real battle was in the spiritual realm:

*2Cor 10:3 “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh,
2Cor 10:4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.”*

Contrary to the false teachers, Paul was not elevating himself but only pointing people to Jesus Christ. He also proclaimed that he was a bond-servant of Jesus for the purpose of helping the churches be discipled. Those clearly serving Jesus will be self-abasing rather than self-elevating. Once we clearly see ourselves in the light of Holy God we can never again lift ourselves up as anything important except as a servant of Him. The same God who let light first shine on the earth (Gen 1:3) is the same God who lets us see the light of the gospel. Our justification is totally of Him and we should forever praise Him and let our light shine in the world.

2Cor 4:7 “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves;

2Cor 4:8 we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing;

2Cor 4:9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

2Cor 4:10 always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.”

Even though we are working under the power of God and dependent upon Him for our wisdom and strength for proclaiming the Word, we are still in human bodies and subject to all the illness and deterioration of those bodies. But God uses our frailness so that the true power of God may be manifest rather than the superiority of us. Many persecutions will be visited upon God’s servants but they will remain true to the Word because of His support. The word for “earthen vessels” Paul used described cheap clay pots that were used in everyday life for even though they would easily break they were inexpensive to replace. Paul considered himself to be one of the base things of the world as he described below:

*1Cor 1:27 “but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,
1Cor 1:28 and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are,
1Cor 1:29 that no man should boast before God.”*

The purpose of a minister of God is to point to God. The false teachers may have been much more charismatic and talented orators than Paul but their message was about themselves. We will read more about the sufferings that Paul endured for the gospel later and we also know the burden he carried for the churches. But despite all of these sufferings he was not crushed, despairing, forsaken, or destroyed. Suffering was a way of life for Paul and he did it for the glory of Jesus Christ. The false teachers taught that Paul was suffering as a consequence of his sins but Paul has clearly stated that his past is gone before God and he now serves Jesus. Paul viewed his marks of sufferings as badges of honor and certainly not marks of discipline:

Gal 6:17 From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus.”

Phil 3:8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ,

Phil 3:9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

Phil 3:10 that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

Col 1:24 “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions.”

Paul knew that his daily suffering and the process of physically dying every day (the word he used for dying means the process rather than a fact or event) was part of his message to the redeemed.

1Cor 15:31 “I protest, brethren, by the boasting in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.”

Gal 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.”

Paul proclaimed the full gospel message of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and such was even partly proclaimed by his sufferings. We all are to present our bodies as a sacrifice to Him:

Romans 12:1 "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."

2Cor 4:11 "For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

2Cor 4:12 So death works in us, but life in you."

"We who live" refers to the redeemed people of God who are hated by the world and will be constantly persecuted for the message of Jesus Christ. The purpose of our sacrifice is that the power of God will be unleashed in our lives. Paul was willing to let the constant threat of death be present in his life and a constant source of possible stress because of his love for Jesus and for His chosen people. He worked for God so that He might bring forth spiritual life in more people. He reiterated his choice of suffering in his ministry several times:

Phil 2:17 "But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all."

Col 1:24 "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions."

2Tim 2:10 "For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory."

2Cor 4:13 "But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed, therefore I spoke," we also believe, therefore also we speak;

2Cor 4:14 knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you.

2Cor 4:15 For all things are for your sakes, that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God."

The faith that God gave Paul was always sufficient so that he could preach and teach the Word of God. All of us who are chosen for a teaching profession can agree with Paul that we must teach.

Rom 1:15 Thus, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

1Cor 9:16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.

We can share the knowledge with Paul that just as the Father raised Jesus from the dead by the work of the Holy Spirit, He will also raise us:

Rom 8:11 "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you."

Paul knew that one day he would be present with the Lord so there was no fear of death.

2Cor 5:6 "Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord--

2Cor 5:7 for we walk by faith, not by sight--

2Cor 5:8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."

Paul stated that he selflessly worked for them because his ultimate goal was for God go be glorified as more people joined the kingdom of God. Just as Daniel said, there will be much glory for those who lead people to righteousness:

Dan 12:3 "And those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever."

Paul's motives were pure and he was building a fortune in heaven:

Matt 6:20 "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;"

2Cor 4:16 "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

2Cor 4:17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

2Cor 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."

We must never despair even though we have many tribulations in the world as a result of our devotion for Jesus:

John 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

Rom 5:3 "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance;"

Rom 12:12 "rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,"

Our inner being is our spirit that was created by God:

Eph 4:24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."

That inner being is being constantly renewed each day:

1 Peter 5:10 “And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.”

Verse 17 gives Paul’s insight into living in a world where he often faced severe tribulation. His momentary and light afflictions were horrendous from a worldly perspective but his focus on Jesus helped him endure. He made a similar statement in his letter to the Romans:

Rom 8:18 “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

It certainly helps our perspective to understand that our time here is infinitesimally short compared to our life in eternity. James said such very well:

James 4:14 “Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.”

We should then put most of our focus on doing work that lasts forever rather than for rewards that are momentary and cannot be taken with us.

1 John 2:17 “And the world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.”

Verse 18 is the definition of reality that I used. From it I obtain my positional and functional reality. My positional reality is rooted in that verse and is used in attempts to obtain the perspective of God in the world. My functional reality is that other things have a temporary reality, but still I can sit in a chair and I can throw a ball for they do have reality, although only temporary. We should then keep our focus on Jesus and seek only the things belonging to the positional reality.

Col 3:1 “If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Col 3:2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.”

Heb 12:1 “Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

Heb 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”