

From The Pulpit Of



The Gospel of the Glory of Christ

No. 10
Series: 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 4:1-6

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Text

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

Introduction

We've been in 2 Corinthians on Sundays lately. 2 Corinthians is a very personal letter from the Apostle Paul. He is defending himself and his ministry from accusations and attacks instigated by these 'super apostles' that have infiltrated the church in Corinth, causing some in the church he helped plant to question his authenticity. It's been a complicated relationship; not smooth and easy.

And these same types of people are still around today. One of you alerted me to a YouTuber named Aaron Abke recently who has some videos trying to make the case that Paul was a false prophet that Jesus warned about who came in and distorted Jesus' message. I read a little bit on Aaron Abke's own page about his life story. He grew up as the son of an evangelical pastor, went to a Christian college, and started working at a church afterwards. But then he got disillusioned with orthodox Christianity and left it, and left his wife, and went on a spiritual journey of what he calls enlightenment. Now he says – "My mission is to awaken this planet to the awareness of our oneness and collective destiny, which is called '4th Density Consciousness'. This is Unity Consciousness; the awareness of Love and Oneness as the Highest Truth of the Universe. I teach my students how to integrate and embody this Truth in their Being, rather than merely learning about it. My aim is to provide humanity with the tools, knowledge, and practices needed to ascend our consciousness to the 4th Density Level." You can attend retreats with him, take classes taught by him, or get 1:1 mentoring with him... for a significant fee, of course.

This is a representative story. There are many like it. Just like in Paul's day, still today there are many people who reject Christianity, oppose it, come up with their own alternatives, and even influence others to do the same.

Now, if you're a Christian, does this get tiresome, frustrating, discouraging, disheartening sometimes? There are so many people out there who don't believe the gospel. They don't care. They don't find it compelling. And it can be depressing, even doubt-inducing.

Do you have friends or family members that refuse to accept Christ and will choose to believe even the most absurd ideas instead of what Scripture says? Why? Have you ever looked around and gotten down at so many people who don't seem to see what you see – the beauty, the glory, the consistency of the Christian message? They just don't get it. It's so obvious to you. Like C.S. Lewis, you "believe in Christianity as [you] believe that the Sun has risen, not only because [you] see it, but because by it [you] see everything else."¹ But you try to explain it clearly to others, you patiently love them, you've given a lot of time and energy to evangelism and discipleship, and yet there are still many who it's not clicking for, or they aren't interested, or they're even antagonistic. How do you keep going – keep believing yourself, but also keep calling others to repentance and faith? It's easy to lose heart, isn't it?

Paul felt that. He understood that pull. He had to work through those moments when it felt like – "C'mon, why is this so hard! I'm giving my life to help others find eternal life in Christ, and I'm getting belittled, betrayed, beaten. And even in the churches that I've poured myself out for I'm facing suspicion, opposition; false converts that fall away. It's not a triumphal procession of victory, that's for sure. It's hard! It's like everywhere I go I get ridiculed from all angles and look like a loser." Paul understood the tendency to lose heart, to want to give up or slow down, stop trying so hard.

But he didn't. He kept pushing on, undeterred. And he wants us to too. In this passage he explains how he deals with discouragement in his ministry. And in so doing he gives us a framework for understanding Christian ministry and a model of forging ahead with hope. He says, "We do not lose heart." The old King James has "we faint not." As one person has put it – Paul "does not shrink from the duties [ministry] lays upon him, but discharges them with frankness, alacrity and courage."² Frankness, alacrity, and courage. I like that. I want to be like that as a pastor.

But I am assuming that if you're a member of this church, then you also are in ministry, in a sense. You're seeking to share the gospel with unbelievers and build up believers in the body with it. So how do we not lose heart, when sometimes we feel we're not getting anywhere? In short, what we're going to see from this text today is just this: **keep stating it, even if people aren't seeing it, because God can shine into anyone's heart.**

Let's pray... I pray "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened" (Eph. 1:17-18).

Keep Stating It (vv. 1-2)

You should know that what we do every week is just walk through the text of Scripture. So have that open on your laps and keep looking at it as I'm talking. I don't have anything to say, really, except what is here.

You can see that Paul picks up from what we saw him saying last Sunday – “Therefore, having this ministry...” What ministry is he talking about? Look at the text above. He’s talking about having the ministry of the New Covenant. Not the ministry of the Old Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant. Not the ministry of death, the ministry of condemnation. But the ministry of the Spirit, the ministry of righteousness. This is a ministry that doesn’t just tell people what to do, but tells them what Christ has done for people who couldn’t do it. It is glorious!

And as we’ve seen the last couple weeks, this New Covenant ministry operates with the power of the Holy Spirit, a power that gets down all the way into the inner man, the very core of a person’s being, and gives new life and brings about deep transformation. Christian ministry is not playing about on the surface, trying to effect some superficial behavioral change. It’s not a natural phenomenon that deals with the basic elemental principles of psychology and sociology and even spirituality. It’s a ministry that has the power to completely remake someone from the inside out.

I re-read the famous sermon by Jonathan Edwards this week with the shortened title – “A Divine and Supernatural Light” – where he shows that “[t]here is such a thing, as a spiritual and divine light [that can be] immediately imparted to the soul by God, of a different nature from any that is obtained by natural means.”³ What does it do? It gives “a real sense of the excellency of God, and Jesus Christ, and of the work of redemption, and the ways and works of God revealed in the gospel.... [Those who have received this by the Holy Spirit] don’t merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but [they have] a sense of the gloriousness of God in [their] hearts. There is not only a rational belief that God is holy, and that holiness is a good thing; but there is a sense of the loveliness of God’s holiness. There is not only a speculatively judging that God is gracious, but a sense how amiable God is upon that account; or a sense of the beauty of this divine attribute.... Thus there is a difference between having an opinion that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness.”⁴

This kind of stuff, that inner relish or savor of God, is the stuff of the New Covenant. It’s the work of the Holy Spirit. And when you’ve tasted it yourself and seen how the Spirit can give spiritual taste buds to others, you don’t lose heart, ultimately. The Spirit won’t let you, even if many people refuse to open up and eat. Having this kind of ministry – a New Covenant ministry that carries with it the power of the Holy Spirit, we do not lose heart, we keep on sharing the good news with others.

But don’t miss that little phrase snuck in there in the middle of this sentence – “by the mercy of God.” Did you catch that? “Therefore, having this ministry *by the mercy of God*, we do not lose heart.” Paul never got over the fact that he had no right, in himself to be in the New Covenant and a minister of it. He did not deserve it. It was not due him. His ministry was completely a result of unmerited mercy.

He reflected with gratitude in 1 Timothy 1:12 and 13 at the wonder that Jesus appointed him to his service, “though formerly [he] was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But [he] received mercy.” Remember: Paul had been on his way to Damascus to kill Christians, his mind was so darkened. But at midday a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, arrested him. Jesus intercepted him. And instead of striking him dead, as he fully deserved, he granted him mercy and told him he was

sending him on a ministry “to open [other people’s] eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they [too] may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in [Jesus]” (Acts 26:18).

When you see your sin and then see how great a salvation you’ve been granted by Christ dying for your sins and giving you his righteousness and bringing you into his service when you were his enemy, then no matter what you might face, you can keep going, keep speaking, and not lose heart. It’s when you feel entitled to something that obstacles and hardships seem unfair and overwhelm and dissuade you. But if you’re a recipient of mind-boggling mercy from Almighty God... you can’t stop telling others about it!

Instead of shutting up in discouragement or feeling some need to tweak the message or update it or find some way to help it, v. 2 reveals that Paul just kept stating it, straight up, unadulterated. He says, “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.” Paul was not a spiritual entrepreneur trying to find the formula for going viral. He was simply a messenger with a mandate. He didn’t make it up. He wouldn’t dream of altering it. He refused to hide aspects of it that might offend people while over-emphasizing aspects that might be more palatable. He wasn’t trying to trick people. He just told it like it is. Do you ever feel ashamed of the gospel?

Christianity wasn’t a private opinion for Paul, but a public truth that must be proclaimed everywhere and to everyone. And it wasn’t something inconsequential, something that people could just take or leave. He sought to impress the weight of it into people’s consciences. He lived *coram deo*, before the face of God. And he sought to help others see that they too were accountable to their Creator. Paul was unintimidated, unflappable, unstoppable. And we should be too.

We should not grow weary of sharing the gospel with the world. We should not be shy. We should not try to be slick. We shouldn’t try to manipulate. We shouldn’t get impatient with a lack of results and try to improve, edit, or update the message to make it appeal to more people. We should just state it plainly. **Keep on stating it... even if people aren’t seeing it.**

Even If People Aren’t Seeing It (vv. 3-4)

This is what vv. 3-4 are about. Some people just don’t seem to get it. Paul says, “And even if our gospel [the gospel that Paul and Timothy preached, that had birthed the Corinthian church, that was held in common with other churches throughout Judea and Samaria and the Mediterranean world] is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.”

The image of a veil comes from what Paul was talking about in last week’s text, the end of ch. 3. There is a veil that lies over people’s hearts that gets in the way of them perceiving spiritual things clearly. It’s part of our fallen nature, the noetic effects of sin, clouding our minds and hearts, preventing proper apprehension. It’s like trying to see out your hotel window without pulling back that thin drape; everything is fuzzy, distorted, eclipsed. For everyone apart from the veil being taken away it’s like they are looking at the gospel through a shroud and it just doesn’t make sense to them.

Who are those people here to whom the gospel is veiled? Those who are perishing. Paul used that word – perishing – back in ch. 2, v. 15 to talk about how he was like a sweet aroma to those who are being saved, but a fragrance of death to those who are perishing? He said something similar in 1 Corinthians 1:18 – “[T]he word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

So who are the perishing? Everyone. Everyone who is not being saved from their state of perishing. All humanity is separated from God from conception, is alienated from him, and like a cut flower is perishing, headed for the trash... that is, apart from being saved, being grafted in to Jesus, brought to life. And to all humanity in their natural state, with a fundamental orientation away from God towards self and sin, the gospel is perceived, falsely(!), to be unnecessary, unappealing, illogical, offensive, scandalous, foolish, dismissible... So in our sinful state of rebellion we look at the gospel and say, “I don’t see it. I don’t get what’s the big deal. Doesn’t sound that good to me,” because we don’t love God, we want to be free of him, we want to be our own gods. That’s our darkened and depraved mindset.

Furthermore, not only are we plagued by our own sin, there is a spiritual Enemy – Satan – who is also at work to obscure the glory of Christ. Verse 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.” Paul ends that sentence with “a characteristically splendid verbal sequence which rings with the thrill of personal experience.”⁵ Paul now saw “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” and was wowed. But “[l]arge numbers have entirely failed to perceive its superlative glory of which he has spoken with such enthusiasm,” as Philip Hughes points out. And “[t]his Paul concedes. [It’s true that many don’t think the gospel is glorious.] The fault, however, is not in the gospel, but in those who have failed to discern its glory.”⁶

The gospel is objectively true. Jesus is indeed real, alive, and absolutely lovely. In fact, Jesus is the only thing that is archetypally beautiful. So why don’t people just immediately accept him as their Savior when presented with the gospel? Because a veil lies over the eyes of their sinful hearts. And also because Satan, the deceiver, “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2), has blinded their minds. It’s like he has cast a spell over humanity so that they can’t see the brilliant light that is there, radiating from the God, through Christ, in the gospel.

Again, it’s not like the gospel is dull. It’s dazzling. But “light is not the same as sight.”⁷ Charles Hodge, in the 1800s, said, “The sun does not cease to be sun although the blind do not see it.”⁸ John Calvin said it similarly in the 1500s – “The blindness of unbelievers in no way detracts from the clearness of [the] gospel, for the sun is no less resplendent because the blind do not perceive its light.”⁹ Humans are under the sway of Satan and in a state of spiritual blindness, obliviousness.

The “god of this world” could seem like a bit of an odd way of describing Satan. We know that there is but one God. That’s why it’s translated with a lower-case ‘g’. But Satan has tried to set himself up as God. And humanity has turned away from God towards all kinds of idols, false gods. And Satan stands behind all of them (cf. Dt. 32:17; 1Cor. 10:19-20). Jesus called him the “ruler of this world” (Jn. 12:31, 14:30). 1 John 5:19 says that “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” Satan has been

allowed to have great authority in this world. It's how he could offer all the kingdoms of this world to Jesus in his temptation (Mt. 4:8).

But the phrase "god of this world" is literally, "god of this age." And I prefer that translation, because it reminds us that this age is not all there is. There is an age to come – the kingdom of God. And in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus the age to come has invaded, penetrated backwards into this age. And so Satan's power is crumbling. God has begun to undue his work of deception. People are being picked off, right and left, from Satan's kingdom as the Holy Spirit is zapping people and giving them vision, eyes to see, so they jump off the destruction line and turn around and follow the Light.

God Can Shine into Anyone's Heart (vv. 5-6)

Which brings us to our third and final section. Verses 1-2 – **Keep stating it.** Verses 3-4 – **Even if people aren't seeing it.** Verses 5-6 – **Because God can shine into anyone's heart.**

Paul says, "For what we proclaim is not ourselves." What a great reminder for all of us. It's not about us! We should not be inserting ourselves into message. We often do. It's a temptation. How often do you see ministries that seem to be all about one person – their picture and name is plastered everywhere? As one person has asked, "How often is that which is hailed as a successful ministry little more than success in winning a personal following!"¹⁰ We must guard against worshipping a person or letting our personality come too much into the equation. But to remember that we do not preach ourselves can actually be really freeing. If that's the case then rejection is not personal. And the results are not up to us – our smarts or skills or sweat.

What does Paul say we should do? "[W]hat we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord." We preach Christ. Not just about him, but him. We hold out Jesus and say, "Look at him." We don't hold out ourselves as somehow some great person and say, "Be like me." We hold out Christ as a great Savior and say, "Behold him! The One who has eternally existed, the One who 'is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and [who] upholds the universe by the word of his power. [And the One who a]fter making purification for sins... sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high," the One who is infinitely superior to anything or anyone else, who is pure power and pure love, who is pure righteousness and pure grace, who is seated on high and always near, who is a lion and a lamb, who is incomprehensible and yet has made his heart known, who is tough and tender, who is completely trustworthy, who died for sinners, who is coming again to bring this age to an end and set all things to right."

He is the Lord, the rightful, sovereign, ruler over all! There is no one remotely like him in status, no Pharaoh, no Caesar, no Emperor, no King, no Czar, no Kaiser, no Shah, no Shogun, no Chief, no Führer, no Prime Minister or President. And there is no one like him who forgives, who gives grace, who gave his life for his enemies, who calls his servants his friends, and who is humble enough to be a baby, ride a donkey, carry a cross, and allow himself to be nailed to it in our place to preserve his justice and extend mercy. You can search for all eternity long and find there is none like him!

And those of us who know him want to make him known. We don't want to draw attention to ourselves, but to Jesus. We are willing to endure anything, sacrifice

anything. Paul says – “[W]hat we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.” We are willing to become all things to all people, that we might save some. We do not lose heart in this New Covenant ministry. We **keep stating it, even if people aren’t seeing it, because God can shine into anyone’s heart** through this simple, plain preaching of the gospel.

Verse 6 is there to give us great confidence. “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.” Wow! The same God who, when “darkness was over the face of the deep” (Gen. 1:2), simply spoke – “‘Let there be light,’ and there was light...” is the God who can cause a new creation to come into existence in the hearts of those who have been darkened in their understanding by sin (cf. Rom. 1:21; Eph. 4:18). His grace is greater than all our sin. He is more powerful than Satan. The Holy Spirit can take away the veil and give a new heart. Jesus has the ability to heal blind eyes. He can make us see his face clearly and not recoil in disgust, not hide in shame, but look him straight in the eye and know that we won’t die since Christ died for us, and just enjoy his smile, lock eyes and know that we are the apple of his eye, study his countenance and delight in his beauty.

God can shine into anyone’s heart and give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. Anyone! Even the most hardened, confused, ignorant, resistant person. Like Paul. Like me. Like you. Like John Newton, the slave trader, who wrote in the 1700s:

*Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.*

I think of this stanza from Charles Wesley’s hymn, also from the 1700s:

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
fast bound in sin and nature’s night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.*

That is the divine and supernatural light immediately imparted to the soul by the Spirit of God. It’s like the lights flip on for the first time.

Conclusion

If you’ve had that happen to you, then praise God. Give him thanks. “‘Tis mercy all!” It’s not due to anything in you.

And then “proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1Pe. 2:9). Tell other about him, straight up, you don’t have to jazz it up. It’s dazzlingly beautiful on its own. If people reject it, it’s due to their own blindness. But God is able to remedy that. And he does it. So don’t panic, don’t think

you know better and try to assist. Just **keep stating it, even if people aren't seeing it, because God can shine into anyone's heart.**

If you're not a Christian, look to Christ! Behold the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. He can forgive you, for all your sins, even the sin of willful obtuseness, of denigrating and scoffing at him in your unbelief, whatever you've done, whatever you've said, whatever you've thought or felt... he is more than willing and capable of forgiving you and bringing you into fellowship with him. Don't come to the Lord's Table right yet, but come to Christ in your hearts right now. Turn to the Lord.

The Lord's Table

If you are a believer, and you've been baptized and you've joined this church (or are a member of another church and find yourself here this morning), then I present the same to you – look to Jesus!

And one of the ways that he's given us to do that is the Lord's Table, where we see with our physical eyes the bread and the wine and have our spiritual eyes focused on the body and blood of Christ, given for us. And be amazed at such mercy.

I think of the lines from the Isaac Watts hymn from the 1700s:

*While all our hearts and all our songs
join to admire the feast,
each of us cries, with thankful tongue,
“Lord, why was I a guest?”*

*“Why was I made to hear Thy voice,
and enter while there's room,
when thousands make a wretched choice
and rather starve than come?”*

*‘Twas the same love that spread the feast
that sweetly drew us in;
else we had still refused to taste,
and perished in our sin*

...

“Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good” (Ps. 34:8).

Benediction

“[M]ay [you] be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:9-14).

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Immanuel Baptist Church, Chicago, Illinois, by Pastor Nathan Carter on Sunday morning, August 9, 2026. It is not meant to be a polished essay, but was written to be delivered orally. The mission of Immanuel is to be a multiplying community that enjoys and proclaims the Good News of Christ in the great city of Chicago.

End Notes:

¹ C.S. Lewis, “Is Theology Poetry?” in Walter Hopper, ed., *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: Touchstone, 1996 [1949]), 106.

² R.V.G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974 [1958]), 69.

³ Jonathan Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul By the Spirit of God, Shown to Be Both a Scriptural, and Rational Doctrine,” in Wilson H. Kimnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney, eds., *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999 [1734]), 123

⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁵ Philip E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 129.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁷ Michael Reeves, *Preaching: A God-Centered Vision* (Bridgend, Wales: Union Publishing, 2024), 41.

⁸ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994 [1859]), 84.

⁹ Qtd. in Hughes, 125.

¹⁰ C.E.B. Cranfield, “Minister and Congregation in the Light of II Corinthians 4:5-7,” *Interpretation* 19 (1965), 163-64.