

2 Corinthians 4:1-6 Christ's Glorious Face Falls Ch. AM 12/1/2024

Christ spoke to Paul in a vision. Paul used to be named Saul, and in those days, he was fighting against Christ by threatening and murdering the people of Christ. But then, on the Damascus Road, Christ spoke to him. Saul became Paul.

Since then, Paul went where Christ wanted Paul to go. Paul preached what Christ wanted him to preach. Paul has not altered the Christian message at all. Paul did not make the Bible say what Paul wanted it to say. Paul did not manipulate his hearers to make them do what Paul wanted them to do. Rather, Paul as a faithful messenger of God, accurately passed on the Word of God, while respecting the integrity of Paul's hearers.

Still, there was opposition to Paul. Now in today's passage we discover the type of criticisms that the false apostles had made against the true apostle Paul. Rather than Paul abandon his ministry to the church in Corinth, Paul gave greater efforts to bless the church in Corinth. This letter is evidence of Paul's efforts. That brings us to our main point. **Paul did not lose heart, because God triumphs over Satan and renews people to see Christ's glorious face.**

1. The glory of gospel ministry prompts perseverance and openness. (v.1-2)

Verse 1, *"Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart."*

The word Therefore connected verse 1 to the preceding verse. What Paul was writing about in chapter 3:18 was being transformed. That transformation was the work of the Lord. What Paul received from God was "this ministry." It was not that Paul deserved it. Rather, it was "By the mercy of God." Okay, what about it? Well, even when Paul came under criticism from false apostles in Corinth, Paul did not lose heart, did not become discouraged. Why not? Because Paul had received this ministry from the Spirit of God. The Old Covenant continued with condemnation and death, but the new covenant continued with grace and transformation. So, Paul was going to persevere. And Paul was going to face the conflict with the false apostles by addressing his ministry to the church in Corinth through this letter. Paul's was a ministry of righteousness, of turning to the Lord, and of being transformed. Paul had freedom, and hope and boldness or openness.

Since they were accusing the absent Paul of being a quitter and depressed, then Paul addressed that by saying, we do not lose heart, showing his commitment. Paul did not keep going because of personal grit, but rather because 'this ministry' imparted forgiveness to Paul and also this ministry gave Paul the Spirit of God. Paul did not give up.

Verse 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."*

The false apostles in Corinth were saying that Paul was a dishonest and devious man. They accused Paul of declining financial support in order to have some bargaining power over them. They accused Paul of adding to or diluting the message about Christ, or of obscuring the gospel. Here Paul addressed all of that.

The accusations left Paul in a difficult position. Paul could not leave their criticisms unanswered, and yet when Paul made a reply, then they complained that Paul was ‘commending himself’ again, such as chapter 3:1.

So, verse 2 was Paul’s answer showed wisdom from God. Paul showed that the Word of God was the basis of Paul’s life. Everything Paul said and did was a display of God’s Word. Paul knew that God Himself witnesses all that Paul says and does, including Paul’s motives.

To say it negatively, Paul refused to use deception or to distort the Word of God, such as mingling the Bible with other ideas.

To say it positively, Paul set forth the truth plainly. The word of God does not need to be manipulated to make it more attractive to a modern audience. Rather, when the Bible is presented in a straightforward way, it will achieve the results for which God gave it.

2. The glory of the gospel is veiled to minds blinded by Satan. (v.3-4)

Verse 3, “*And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.*”

The focus of the teachings to which the Jews objected was Jesus. The heavenly Lord had come, as the prophet greater than Moses, and Jesus had been crucified as the Son of God, the image of God, the Lord, and the glory of God. And Jesus rose again. But the perishing Jews and the perishing Gentiles could not see the truth. Their minds were blinded, preventing them from understanding the good news about Jesus.

Paul’s way of thinking was altered when the scales fell from his eyes on the Road to Damascus. The glorious heavenly figure who appeared to Paul in a vision identified Himself as Jesus Christ. The perishing and unbelieving Saul had the veil lifted and became the believing and seeing Paul. The whole frame of reference changed for him. He used to believe that Jesus was under a curse, because Jesus was hung from a tree, but now Paul believed that Jesus was actually sent by God to bear the curse of God on sin as a substitute payment for sinners.

The gospel remained veiled to unbelievers. But it was not veiled because of the content of the gospel being defective or diluted. Rather, their minds were veiled due to Satan, whom Paul referred to as ‘the god of this world.’ Listen for it in 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.*” The blindness of mankind to the Bible’s teaching is due not to any human efforts, but to the activity of Satan. They serve Satan as if he

were their god. The problem is their minds. So, how do we reach the lost whose problem is their minds, their thinking? By preaching! The only hope for mankind is the preaching the gospel of Christ in the power of the Spirit of Christ.

3. The glory of God is known in the gospel of Jesus as Lord. (v.5-6)

Verse 5, *“For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.”*

The ministry of Paul is about preaching. It is about proclaiming. What is Paul preaching? What is Paul proclaiming? Not himself. Paul is not preaching about himself. Paul was not busy proclaiming what a good apostle he was.

Paul was assigned by Christ as a herald of Christ, to announce to Corinth and to other cities and to the whole world that Christ had come to save sinners. Paul’s job for Jesus was to bring an important announcement to a dying world full of unbelievers, whose minds were blinded and darkened by unbelief, through the disgraceful and underhanded ways of Satan.

It was vitally important that Paul not talk about himself. Apparently, the preaching of the false apostles focused on themselves, and making the Corinthians serve themselves. The false apostles wanted to be Lord over God’s people. But Paul did not proclaim himself, and did not want or expect that the people in Corinth would lift up Paul as their Lord.

Rather, Paul preached Jesus Christ as Lord.

Who was Paul? Paul was to the Corinthians not their Lord, but their servant. Why? For the sake of Jesus. Jesus had assigned Paul to serve the church in Corinth, so that is exactly what Paul was doing. Paul served them in his first arrival in Corinth to start the church, then in writing the first letter, and then another visit, and now another letter. Paul was serving them, not lording it over them. Paul was not securing his own position with Corinth, but rather Christ’s position as Lord.

The basis of Paul’s ministry is the privilege of having seen for himself the glory of God in the face of Christ, which happened during Paul’s experience on the Road to Damascus. Paul could only preach to others the Christ whom Paul had met for himself.

Paul knew what the false apostles did not know. Namely, that the message of the glorious Lord Jesus Christ is only effectively conveyed by those who have the mind of a servant and the manner of a servant. Paul knew that the one who had the privilege of preaching Christ must necessarily forget about himself.

That is how Paul ended this passage. You would think that Paul would compare the face of Moses with the face of Paul. Compare the Old Covenant spokesman with the New Covenant spokesman. But Paul did not do that. Instead, Paul compared the face of Moses with the face of Jesus Christ. Paul was forgotten. We see this so clearly in the last verse.

Verse 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.”*

Glory be to God! May the glory of God be spread. May more and more people come to know about the glory of God.

How do people get to know the glory of God? A little bit in the prophet of God named Moses. But so much more in the Son of God named Jesus.

It was God the Father who said, “let light shine out of darkness” which is a reference to days of God creating the world. Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Genesis 1:3, “And God said, ‘Let there be light’ and there was light.” The creating God can overcome darkness. The redeeming God can overcome blindness. So additionally, when Paul wrote in verse 6 this phrase about God causing light to replace darkness, it is also a reference to the days of God redeeming the world through His Son Jesus our Savior. God’s redeeming light shone in the heart of Saul the persecutor to make him Paul the apostle. God gave the light of the knowledge of His glory to the unbelievers in Corinth, causing them to see by faith the face of Jesus.

Conclusion: Are you discouraged about the darkness of this world?

Discouragement is real. Because of the glory of Christ, we do not lose heart.

The year was 1920. The scene was the examining board for selecting missionaries. Standing before the board was a young man named Oswald Smith. One dream filled his heart. He wanted to be a missionary. Over and over again, he prayed, "Lord, I want to go as a missionary for you. Open a door of service for me." On this day, at last, his prayer would be answered. However, when the examination was over, the board turned Oswald Smith down. He did not meet their qualifications. He had frail health and a delicate constitution. He failed the test. Oswald Smith had set his direction, but now God gave him a detour. What would he do? As Oswald Smith prayed, God gave him a new idea in his heart. If he could not go as a missionary, then with that single minded focus and passion for missions, he could build a church which could send out missionaries. So that is what he did. Oswald Smith pastored The People's Church in Toronto, Canada, which sent out more missionaries than any other church at that time. After he was discouraged, God transformed his detour into a main thoroughfare of service.

Are you discouraged about the darkness of this world? Discouragement is real. Does it seem that the god of this age has blinded so many minds? The work of Satan is real. Paul knew what it was like to be blind, and then to see. No one is beyond God’s power to save. Paul calls us to reflect on the great light that God has brought into the world at the First Christmas. The Light of the World is real. It was at the first Christmas that anyone first physically saw the face of Jesus Christ. He was a newborn baby, a newborn king. First Joseph and Mary, and then in Luke

chapter 2, the old man Simeon got to hold the baby Jesus in His arms and look into the face of the baby Jesus. Simeon said, “*my eyes have seen Your salvation.*” Jesus is not just a good man, but is the One who was crucified and rose for our Salvation. Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, filled with glory. As this truth is proclaimed around the world, the Spirit of God broods over all churches that preach the gospel, and brings light to dark minds, and life to dead souls. That all souls may see Christ by faith.

We keep proclaiming that Jesus has come to shine the light, and that He is Lord. We share the good news that by faith we can see the glory of the face of Jesus now, and that one day, when Jesus returns, we will see in person Christ’s Glorious face! We remain energized to worship God and serve God.

Paul did not faint under the attacks Paul endured. Neither should we. Paul could never get over the mercy of God given to him to be in God’s kingdom at all. Neither should we. Paul did not remain discouraged by the work of Satan to blind minds. Neither should we. We are called to no longer be discouraged by the darkness of the world and the blindness of minds. Instead, we are called to remain encouraged to look at Christ’s glorious face by faith, and to continue to support the preaching of Christ to the ends of the earth.

Paul remained energized for ministry by the Spirit. Consider what Paul wrote to another church in another city – the church in Thessalonica in 2 Thessalonians 2:14, that the Spirit of God “*...called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm...*”