

Lesson Four

(4:1-15)

4 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. 2 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 every man's conscience in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only 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 likeness of God. 5 For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ our Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For it is the God who said, "Let light 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 Christ.

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but

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not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body of the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 11 For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you.

13 Since we have the same spirit of faith as he had who wrote, "I believed, and so I spoke," we too believe, and so we speak, 14 knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. 15 For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

Chapter 4 — Paul began a discussion of his general ministry back in 2:14-17 as compared with an unnamed number who had made claims, etc. Progressing through chapter 3, the ministry of the apostle(s) was what it was because of the nature of the covenant under which he labored (since the covenant was glorious, so was his ministry — and by extension, that service which every Christian could render). Now, chapter 4 continues to develop (note the "therefore" in v. 1) this idea, especially about the greatness of the message, though the instruments of the message are somewhat insignificant; but this is so in order that the fact may be evident to all that God is the power in the message, and he alone makes the messenger sufficient. Our text will then treat the points: why some don't believe and how God cares for the apostle(s) in his ministry. Paul then led into the final glorification which God had yet to give: a heavenly home (4:16 — 5:10).

Of course, in some senses, the principles of sufficiency and honesty, the message/messenger relationship, etc. are applicable to any who bear the good news, since the same general things will need to be recognized, and are even today yet true.

V. 1 — **therefore** — Indicates a conclusion from the preceding thought(s), which actually extends back to 2:17.

ministry — The Greek term *διακονία*. In the text, probably best taken as referring to the apostle (and the other apostles as well) since the whole discussion revolved around Paul's relationship as an apostle/preacher to the Corinthian brethren. Indirectly, the "preacher" and his special task is in mind, so, many principles Paul mentioned will apply to "preachers." See I Corinthians 7:25; I Timothy 1:13, 16; II Timothy 1:7, where Paul described himself as receiving his "ministry" through God's mercy.

do not lose heart — Recall here the opening chapter, and the discussion there. Note also the idea in 3:16-18. The text in vs. 7-15 helps reinforce the idea by pointing out just how God keeps sustaining Paul

in such ways as can be recognized by Paul. (You should note that v. 16 repeats the idea here, and uses the same words.) Often the most discouraging point is the rejection of the message; but the charge is not to get results, but to proclaim. The harvest is God's.

V. 2 — Christianity, at its best, is to produce just such results as Paul lists in this verse. It is at times true that Christians (even apostles) are not at their best (i.e., God has not finished his work in them yet, Phil. 1:6). However, Paul has renounced such things, attempting to be honest and irreproachable in every man's sight. Doubtless, the goal was not attained, but he was attempting to do so (i.e., present himself as commendable to every person). He does not imply that he had previously preached in such ways.

disgraceful, underhanded — See Paul's advice in Ephesians 5:3-15. Recall John 3:18-21.

veiled — The figure now is shifted from the Mosaic law and applied to the gospel message. The reason was evident: some were not seeing as they should, and if the law (chapter 3) wasn't the reason, then v. 4 states what was the reason. Note here I Corinthians 1:18ff, and I Thessalonians 2:1-12, where somewhat the same ideas are expressed.

those who are perishing — The emphasis, as in 2:15, is on what was then true, and happening in the lives of some. Of course, a change of mind (i.e., repentance) could make the matter different, but only if the change took place. Note v. 4, where the "perishing" are unbelievers.

There seemed to have been a great problem in Corinth with this issue of "will the real apostle(s) please stand up." Here Paul asserted that he was presenting the truth, and if anyone could not so agree, then the reason could not be blamed upon Paul's message (which, by the way, was the basis for his ministerial/apostolic claim) but rather upon another reason. Reference also Acts 28:23-28; John 5:39-44.

V. 4 — **god of this world** — Some take this to mean that Paul called Satan a god. To some extent, people were worshipping Satan, though perhaps not knowingly so. This is one of the difficulties of being "under sin" (Rom. 3:9): we may not perceive that we are worshipping Satan. Certain it is that, if not Christian, one is a slave to sin (Rom. 6:16) because to whom one yields and is thus overcome, to that is one brought into bondage (II Pet. 2:19).

It may be that Satan did/does not have the quality of deity that would actually establish him as a "god being" but to many blinded by him, he was anyway. Paul said in I Corinthians 8:5 that there were many "gods" and "lords" then, and so it has ever been.

light of the gospel — John 3:18-21 depicted the reason many would not come — they loved darkness. . . . As remarked above, Paul

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attributed the blindness of the people to Satan — but it is also evident that one's will is involved in any such circumstance, since unbelief is a matter of the will. One yields oneself to obey; blindness is one result of yielding to the wrong master. In the case of those opposing Paul, they were slandering him, and opposing him on false grounds. Hence, they had a moral problem, and Satan "had" them. In the Jews' case, religion was the problem; and in the Gentiles' case, the "god of this world." So it is yet today: religion and/or the world keeps people from being Christians.

likeness of God — The Greek word is normally translated as "image" as in Romans 1:23; 8:29; I Corinthians 11:7; 15:49; Colossians 3:10. The word in Hebrews 1:3 is transliterated into our word "character."

V. 5 — One of the reasons Paul gave to lend credence to the indictment in v. 3 and 4 is found here — he asserted that Christ preached and believed did not make one blind but rather brought sight. The "preaching" of anything but Christ would do the contrary however. It was likewise true that if Christ was not accepted, the resultant state would be like blindness (cf. Acts 28:23ff).

Christ Jesus our lord — Many in the Corinthians' society were "lords" of some sort, since many had servants and were therefore masters. Some tried to "lord it over" the flock as did Diotrephes, III John 9; and which Paul did not intend to do, 1:24.

Servants — Every effort was being made to establish the fact that Paul did not preach himself in any fashion except to assert he had been called by God to the apostleship, and was a servant of Christ. If one was only a servant, no great claims could be made about oneself; yet to be an apostle involved certain distinct claims to be presented as credentials — hence, Paul's position was not easy to maintain, and certainly subject to criticism by those who didn't accept the same things he did.

As an observation, it is a hard thing not to preach "self" even if the words are of Christ. So much of the world is in us all, its methods, thinking, motivation. But what a horribly poor thing to preach: self!!

V. 6 — This verse enunciates the absolute base for what Paul was as an apostle: God had chosen him, the same God of Genesis 1, etc. Hence, he was under God's authority, and served because of that fact; yet it was also true that he served those whom Christ had redeemed, but served only because of Christ, not otherwise.

light of the knowledge — We are "back" in 3:18, where that which we behold brings about the transformation of life, and all that is done through God; whose nature remains ever the same, in distinction to man.

V. 7 — **treasure** — Referred to the message in its totality, and

presented again the reality that whatever greatness abounded, it was not in the messengers. Again, a slap at any who presented imposing credentials and not the message of Christ. Here is reflected God's wisdom: if the message is placed in anything except an earthen vessel, some glory would doubtless need to go to the vessel; but in God's good wisdom, the glory belongs to the message alone (at least in reality!).

V. 8 — This verse, through v. 11, is but a way to describe the vast chasm between the message which was all-important and the vessel (which brought the message) which was comparatively of no value. However, God's care of the vessel was a sign of his love, and that even if the vessel was used hard. This section will help us see how "earthly" the vessel really was, and how divine the message.

V. 10 — **life of Jesus** — Jesus was the supreme example of the vessel through which God brought the message, yet was used hard. If this was so, lesser vessels could hardly expect anything else, since the servant would not be greater than the Lord, John 15:20. One who served God had to lose his life daily, take up the cross and follow-daily, be willing to spend and be spent.

V. 12 — **death/life** — Herein lies a great glorious paradox: out of death life came to all, first in Christ, and then through the lives of those crucified with Christ who preached the message about Christ, who was the life. The real nature of the gospel message is seen in such characterizations. These preceding verses give an unencumbered view of a body in subjection to the spirit within. May it be true of all who read!

V. 13 — The quote is Psalm 116:10 in the Hebrew text, 115:1 in the LXX, which is the text Paul quotes exactly.

The point is, that faith must and will find expression and cannot be silent, perhaps in spite of such things as were just mentioned in vs. 8-11, and actually on the basis of God's abiding care even unto the point of death, v. 14. So, Paul was speaking, even if the message was not met with faith on the part of some who were hearing, Hebrews 4:2. Yet, we notice that Paul never treated the congregation as less than Christian, even if many weaknesses were present.

V. 14 — **knowing** — So often faith is predicated upon knowledge, of God, of Christ, etc. Note how often knowledge has been mentioned in this epistle. Knowledge, rightly used, does not puff up (I Cor. 8:1) but rather becomes the basis for commitment and service. Christianity is essentially, and eternally, a religion directed to rationality, based upon reception of information that proves trustworthy, thus generating trust.

We notice a difference here between this text and I Thessalonians

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4:13ff. However, many aspects of Jesus' coming are unclear, so it is best to accept what is written and let God take care of the details himself.

V. 15 — **it is for your sake** — The idea of v. 5 and 1:11 repeated, with the additional idea that as the circle of saved who give thanks grows, so does the circle of those who give glory to God.

QUESTIONS:

29. How were the Corinthians a better commendation than a letter on paper?
30. How did Paul contrast the new covenant and the old covenant?
31. What was the end result of the new covenant for Paul as an apostle?
32. What does v. 18 say happens to the Christian throughout life?
33. What was the "essence" of Paul's preaching?
34. In what ways did Paul describe himself in this section?
35. Does faith always express itself?