

The Book of 2nd Corinthians

Chapter 4:1-18

January 3, 1999

- **Outline of 2nd Corinthians:**
 - Chapter 1 God equips His people through trial, comfort and perseverance.
 - Chapter 2 Restore fellowship to the repentant; One aroma, two response.
 - Chapter 3 The glorious covenants
 - Chapter 4 The Light of the Glory of Christ
- **Review & Introduction**

Paul begins this section with a new argument based on the principles established in the previous section. The glory of the new covenant was so surpassing that it was as if the old covenant had no glory at all. Even though the OT was glorious, (that is, it was a means by which God manifested the attributes of His nature) the NT was immeasurably more. In this context, it was to this surpassingly glorious covenant that Paul was made a minister. Although later Paul will be much more direct and sharp in his attack on those who are seeking to discredit him, here he builds his case to obviate their accusations.

- **Exposition of 2nd Corinthians 4:1 - 18**

Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart.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 the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

- Twice in this section Paul affirms that because of the surpassing glory of the covenant of which he was made a minister, he does not lose heart. Some might wonder why there would be a temptation to lose heart with such a glorious ministry. The answer is that there is a difference between the glory of the covenant and the various circumstances that God brings for His purposes. Because of our flesh, we are tempted to lose heart, but the glory of the covenant is a basis for strength in resisting the genuine temptations
- The way out of the difficult circumstances is not shameful or crafty behavior. Given the context, it appears that Paul is making a number of back-handed rhetorical criticisms of his enemies. Paul had avoided being deceitful or crafty as opposed to his enemies who apparently had employed such techniques.
- Paul gives us a wonderful pattern for our lives in that Christians should live in such a manner that their enemies cannot oppose them without their conscience bothering them. This means that we vigorously strive for truth and honesty in both small and large dealings .

3 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.

- Unlike the covenant under which Moses ministered, the new covenant glory was not fading but instead its glory was permanent. Paul did not need to veil himself or the covenant because its glory would endure. But the covenant is indirectly veiled because the hearts and minds of the unbelieving world are blinded and therefore are unable to see the glory. Otherwise the light of the gospel, which is the glory of Christ, would efficaciously shine on them.
- Historically, there has been much debate over the term "god of this age". The most common confusion comes from trying to interpret whether the phrase describes God Himself or whether Paul is speaking of Satan. This confusion comes from looking at what Paul says the "god of this age" is doing—blinding minds of those who are perishing. The first response is usually to dismiss that this could be God Himself for this "blinding" would violate free will of unbelievers. But blinding hearts and minds is something that a righteous, sovereign God may do without any indictment from us. The answer is not found in the action of the "god of this age" but rather in the phrase "...of this age". Satan was clearly a god of the world (not in a dualistic sense) and is clearly not the god of the ages to come, therefore this phrase is referring to a work of Satan under the sovereignty of God.

5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake.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's purpose in ministry was not to champion his favorite causes or to further himself but rather to advance the kingdom of God for the sake of Jesus. Paul teaches that it was God who brought him out of darkness and gave him the understanding of spiritual things. To promote himself would be completely inappropriate because without the mercy of God, Paul would still be in darkness and confounded by spiritual things.

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—¹⁰ always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.¹¹ For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.¹² So then death is working in us, but life in you.

- It appears that Paul again makes an allusion to a Roman triumphal return from battle where the plunder of gold and jewels was put in large clay jars and paraded through the streets. The treasure is the "glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" and the earthen vessel is the church. God's glory is the treasure and we are the pot—and yet God is glorified by both.
- If Paul's purpose in ministry was to further himself, then he was a dismal failure because of the severe persecution that his efforts brought upon himself. Notice that persecutions and strife are consistent with a glorious covenant. Some might be tempted to question why such a glorious covenant would come with such persecution. But the glory of the covenant is *further* revealed, not in the lack of strife, but in the comfort, protection and encouragement afforded by the covenant.
- Paul makes a very sharp point as a reply to the calumnious remarks of his enemies. The weakness of his flesh (not weakness toward sin but rather meekness) is a testimony of humanity of Christ and simultaneously demonstrating the power of God in the resurrection by the fact that we are not crushed, forsaken or perplexed.

13 And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak,¹⁴ knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.¹⁵ For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

- Paul teaches that we have the same spirit of faith as David who wrote Psalm 116 which Paul quotes. Notice that Paul quotes this Psalm because its context is the same as his own situation—deliverance from strife and affliction. Even though we carry around this glorious treasure in pots that are easily afflicted, beaten or persecuted, the final demonstration of God's glorious deliverance will be the resurrection. The distress that Paul endured was worth suffering because through it God's grace abounded to many causing thanksgiving to be given and God's name to be glorified.

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,¹⁸ while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. NKJV

- Again, Paul teaches that he does not lose heart because of the glorious covenant for which he has been made a minister. Even though we live in this flesh which is dying outwardly, inwardly the kindness and mercy of God is transforming us in to the image of Christ. Therefore, the afflictions are severe but when compared with the eternal glory that God is working in us, the afflictions appear to be light and momentary.
- Paul is correcting the thinking of the Corinthians who were probably being led astray by Paul's enemies who might have been questioning the effectiveness of Paul's ministry because of the persecutions and afflictions that he faced. However, these afflictions were to manifest the glory of God and to unite us with Christ.