Second Corinthians 4

Introduction:

1. Having defended his person and ministry by the church at Corinth (3:1-3) and by his commission to preach the vastly superior New Testament (3:4-18), Paul further described his methods, results, and personal faith under tribulations.
2. The purpose for this chapter is similar to the previous one – to defend and explain his ministry to both friend and foe.
3. Though the main theme is Paul's defense of his ministry, there are several indirect doctrinal and practical lessons for all.
   a. Paul will describe the methods of Christ's true ministers, and the reasons some believe and some others do not.
   b. Paul will describe the glorious gospel of Christ and the glorious gift of grace upon any that do truly believe it.
   c. Paul will describe his character and conduct under severe trials, which are an example to all saints to follow him.
   d. Paul will describe his great faith in another world, which caused him to despise the things of this life and world.

Outline of Chapter 4:

1-4 Paul's honest preaching was hid to most.
5-7 Paul had the gospel by sovereign charge.
8-12 Paul's spirit under trials proved honesty.
13-18 Paul's confidence of heaven proved honesty.

4:1 Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;

A. What is the "therefore," there for? To draw a further lesson from his New Testament ministry (3:6)!
B. The ministry Paul referred to was his commission to preach the superior New Testament (3:4-18).
C. Paul and Timothy had the ministry of the New Testament, not by personal superiority, but by mercy.
   1. Paul remembered his previous life as a persecutor of the church and saints (I Timothy 1:12-16).
   2. There is no man worthy of the office and work of preaching; it is entirely by God's mercy.
   3. Who is sufficient for these things? Who can lay claim to being worthy of God's ambassador?
   4. The esteem of the gospel and the nobility of the office caused them to labor without fainting.
   5. Though often having paltry results and enduring many trials, the honor caused them not to faint.

4:2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, 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.

A. With such a great gospel to proclaim, Paul and Timothy preached honestly without any corruption.
   1. He had already written that there were many corrupting the word of God, even at Corinth (2:17).
   2. But having this glorious gospel to preach, he and the other faithful ministers rejected such things.
   3. They preached the truth simply, plainly, and boldly to every man's conscience before God.
B. Many dishonestly preach the gospel for covert purposes of personal, sectarian, or numerical gain.
   1. There are men who use religion for personal gain (Matthew 23:14; Titus 1:10-11; II Pet 2:14-15; Jude 1:11; Isaiah 56:10-11; Jeremiah 8:10; Ezekiel 13:19; Micah 3:5,11).
   2. There are men who use religion for sectarian gain, as illustrated by the Jews, who tried to subvert the Christians back under Moses (Matthew 23:15; 22:34; Acts 15:1; 23:6-9; Gal 2:1-5).
   3. And some use religion for position and preeminence, which Paul will more carefully deny in the fifth verse of this chapter (I Timothy 6:3-5; II Tim 3:6-7; Acts 13:45; III John 1:9-10).
C. Paul and faithful ministers never use the word of God to craftily present false doctrine to win men.
   1. In both testaments are warnings against preaching smooth things (Isaiah 30:10-11; Jer 6:14; 8:11; 23:17,26-29; Ezekiel 13:7-10,22; Micah 2:11; Rom 16:17-18; II Tim 4:1-4; I John 4:1-6).
   2. God's ministers are never partial in the word of God (Malachi 2:7-9; Matt 5:21,27,33,38,43; 23:23-24; Mark 7:8-13; Luke 10:29; Acts 20:20,27).
   3. The gospel is not a cunningly devised fable, but the presentation of certain facts (II Peter 1:16).
   4. It must not be modified to make it more palatable, not even to a slight degree; for then the results are tainted with carnal professors, and God does not receive His savour (2:14-17; II Tim 4:1-4).

5. The consciences of God's elect can easily handle the truth that condemns them and exalts God!

D. Proper gospel preaching is bold, simple, and plain presentation of the truth to men's consciences.
   1. Manifestation of truth is making it clear, plain, simple, and obvious (3:12; Col 4:4; Eph 6:19).
   2. Paul did not embellish the truth of God with any of man's wisdom or methods (I Cor 2:1-5).
   3. Godly preaching lays the word of God openly before the consciences of hearers (II Tim 4:1-2).
   4. Paul despised and feared any efforts to complicate the gospel (II Cor 11:1-6; Colossians 2:8,18).
   5. There is no place for philosophy, metaphysics, scientific or theological speculation, dreams, loose connections, number schemes, hidden meanings, traditions, or anything remotely close.

E. God's ministers know they are preaching by God, for God, and before God (Hebrews 4:12-14; 5:4).

4:3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

A. Paul called it his gospel, because he was called by God to be the principal preacher of it, and it was not the other gospel of the false teachers (II Cor 11:1-4; Gal 1:6-9).

B. Here is a general rule: if the gospel does not affect a person, they prove they are perishing (2:14-17).
   1. Those who think the gospel is foolishness are not saved (I Cor 1:18,22-23; 2:14; John 8:47).
   2. Only those elect and born again will receive the gospel (I Cor 1:18,24; 2:15; John 3:3; 5:24).
   3. Paul answered objections against his preaching by transferring the problem to the hearers.
   4. Paul's simple, plain, clear, and bold methods were more than enough to convert God's elect.

C. The fault in the paltry results of gospel preaching is not the preacher, but the lost souls of hearers.
   1. If preaching is modified to attract more, the results will be professing reprobates (I Cor 2:1-5)!
   2. Paul condemned any modification of preaching methods or content for our day (II Tim 4:1-4).
   3. Jesus Christ proved by the choice of illiterate fishermen that he did not need eloquent orators!
   4. John the Baptist, a wild man if there ever was one, turned Judea upside down by bold preaching!
   5. The opinion of the lost against the gospel is no more than a deaf man's complaint against music!

D. Here is something incredible! Most men think that they can save the lost by presenting the gospel!
   1. How can you save a lost person by the gospel, if the gospel is hid from those that are lost?
   2. This is the same false reasoning that presents the kingdom to get someone born again (John 3:3)!
   3. It makes sense that a person must be saved to appreciate the gospel (I Cor 1:18,24; 2:14-15).
   4. Until God opens a heart and gives them repentance, any preaching is hopeless (II Tim 2:25-26).
   5. And God only gives such repentance to those ordained to eternal life (John 6:37-39; Acts 13:48).
   6. There is no fault with God in this situation, for man chose Satan over Him in Eden and everyday!

4:4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

A. The god of this world is Satan, called by Jesus "the prince of this world"; for he is confined to this world, has a degree of influence in it, and is worshipped by worldly men (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

B. By sin in Eden, we willingly gave ourselves to the devil, who takes men captive (II Tim 2:25-26).
   1. There is no injustice on the part of God for leaving us exposed to Satan, we chose him willingly.
   2. It is only by the pure grace and power of God that any are delivered from him by repentance.
   3. Every man chooses Satan again every day, which removes any fault or guilt from Almighty God.

C. Before regeneration, in which we were given a new heart, we willingly followed Satan (Eph 2:1-3).
   1. Jesus boldly told those that did not believe on Him that they were Satan's children (John 8:44).
   2. Idolatry and false worship is worshipping the devil, as Paul previously taught (I Cor 10:20).

D. Though the gospel is a glorious light in this world, it is totally missed by those blinded by the devil.
   1. The devil keeps men's minds dark with sin, which he sells to their sinful lusts (Luke 4:1-13).
   2. The devil keeps men blind by snatching away the gospel (Matt 13:19; Mark 4:15; Luke 8:12).
   3. The devil keeps men blind by education, science, philosophy, peer pressure, and fear of man.

E. The gospel is glorious in that it tells about Christ, who was God in the flesh (John 1:14; Heb 1:3).
   1. Satan is the archenemy of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he does all he can to deny His gospel.
   2. But Jesus of Nazareth, the promised Seed of the woman, has destroyed the devil (Gen 3:15).

4:5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

A. Explaining his rejection of false ministerial practices, Paul appealed to the Person of his preaching.
   1. Since Paul was not preaching to promote himself, there was no need for Bible corruption (4:2).
   2. Paul had no ambition for himself, because he was commissioned to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ.
   3. He returned to his original line of reasoning from 4:2, where he renounced ministerial corruption.
B. Paul's position in the whole matter was merely to be a servant of the Corinthians for Jesus Christ.
   1. There is no room in Christ's gospel for "fathers," "cardinals," "reverends," or "popes"!
   2. The greatest in the kingdom of Jesus Christ are the servants of others (Matt 18:1-4; 20:25-28).
   3. These words describe not only Paul, but Timothy and others by virtue of "we" and "ourselves."
   4. Every minister of Christ must be like John: "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

4:6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

A. Why was Paul different from all the lost, who were blinded from Christ by the devil? God's mercy!
B. How was Paul different from all the lost, who were blinded from Christ by the devil? God's power!
C. Paul here explained the origin of the ministerial gift he and Timothy had to preach Christ glorified!
   1. By nature, there is no reason for a man to be a servant of others and face persecution and trials.
   2. By nature, there is no difference in men that would cause one to preach while others were blind.
   3. God, by the kind of power He used to create light, gave the truth to Paul and Timothy (Gen 1:3).
   4. Paul taught in another place that faith in Christ is only by resurrecting power (Eph 1:19-20; 2:1).
   5. The knowledge here is ministerial knowledge, for he will continue to speak of his ministry (4:7).
   6. All believers must have God's resurrecting power to believe, but that is not the argument here.
   7. It is by the powerful grace of God that the great mystery of godliness is revealed to any man.
D. It is a disgusting shame for men to think that by innovate methods they can reveal Christ to men!
   1. They could just as soon create light out of nothing as they could help a lost man see the gospel.
   2. Abraham mocked the rich man's idea to send Lazarus to preach to his brothers (Luke 16:31).

4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

A. What is the treasure? The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!
B. What are earthen vessels? Paul and Timothy's sinful, weak, and merely human bodies and minds.
   1. While iron or stone might be able to endure some hardships, clay vessels are easily broken.
   2. The fragility and humanity of the preachers is always visible to give greater glory to God.
   3. The next you are at a funeral, squeeze the corpse's hand; you will know about earthen vessels!
C. What is the point? Souls converted from Satan's darkness to gospel light are by God's power only!
   1. Paul did not embellish the gospel in order to keep it strictly subject to God's power (I Cor 2:1-5).
   2. The only power able to regenerate and convert souls to the truth is the Spirit of God (II Cor 3:3).
   3. Unless God draws a soul to believe on Jesus Christ, they will never come to Him (John 6:44,65).
D. What is the point? Ministerial preservation proves the powerful care God supplies for His ministers.
   1. Paul will pursue this aspect of his ministry for the remainder of the chapter. See 4:10-11,16.
   2. The grace and power of God is perfectly displayed to men only through weakness (II Cor 12:9).

E. God has arranged gospel preaching to make a great difference among men, even though the men used to preach it are susceptible to trials, tribulations, and weaknesses of men (I Cor 1:18-24; 2:1-5).
   1. Though Peter was very impulsive and presumptuous, Jesus used him mightily (Luke 22:31-32).
   2. Paul was weak in several physical respects and confessed to all manner of concupiscence, yet he was the greatest of the apostles (Rom 7:8; I Cor 15:10; II Cor 10:10; 11:5,29; Gal 4:14-15).

4:8 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

A. They were troubled by those outside and inside; by Greeks, Jews, and Barbarians; by devils and men; by duties and responsibilities; by the care of the churches; by fears and facts; and they were troubled spiritually, physically, and circumstantially.
   1. They were not distressed in any destructive or overwhelming way by these troubles, but they kept on preaching.
   2. **Distress**. To subject to severe strain or pressure; to put to sore straits, to embarrass. To crush in battle, overwhelm, coerce. To constrain by force or infliction of suffering. To cause pain, suffering, agony, or anxiety to; to afflict, vex, make miserable.
   3. Paul described being pressed out of measure, above strength, but it did not take his faith (1:8-10).
B. They were perplexed at times to know the best choice of action, but they did not despair by it.
   1. **Perplex**. To fill with uncertainty as to the nature or treatment of a thing by reason of its involved or intricate character; to trouble with doubt; to distract, confuse, bewilder, puzzle.
   2. **Despair**. A state of mind in which there is entire want of hope; hopelessness.
   3. Though Paul and Timothy were perplexed by complex situations, they did not lose hope in God.
   4. Though David was perplexed and discouraged, he still put his hope in God (Ps 42:5,11; 43:5).

4:9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;

A. Persecution is not evidence of perdition, but of salvation by Jesus Christ (Phil 1:28-30; II Tim 3:12).
B. Though persecuted, Jesus Christ had not forsaken them by His Spirit or His power or His grace.
C. They were cast down and discouraged at times, but they were not destroyed to hopelessness.
D. David provides a glorious commentary on maintaining hope in discouragement (Ps 42:5,11; 43:5).

4:10 Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

A. The earthen vessels Paul described earlier – their bodies – were the objects of death and life.
B. Paul was always facing physical persecution and death (II Cor 1:5; 11:23-27; 6:9; I Cor 15:30-31; Gal 6:17; Acts 14:19; Phil 3:10-11; Col 1:24).
C. They showed the death of Christ in their sufferings; and they showed His life by their perseverance.
D. The resurrected Jesus, whom Paul and Timothy preached, sustained them by the power of His Spirit.
E. While suffering is evidence of a future resurrection, it here refers more to God's providence to them.

4:11 For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

A. Though Paul and Timothy were alive, they were always in fear of death and ready to die for Him.
B. They showed the death of Christ by suffering for Him, and His sustaining strength proved His life.

4:12 So then death worketh in us, but life in you.

A. Preaching was for Paul and Timothy a cause for constant death, but the same preaching brought gospel blessings for the Corinthians (Phil 2:17).
B. The hearers of the apostles reaped great benefits from the apostles' selfless and sacrificial ministries.

4:13 We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak;

A. Paul and Timothy had the spirit of faith, as did David when he was in great affliction (Ps 116:10).
B. Their preaching was based on total confidence in the certainty of what they believed, in spite of all the afflictions that would ordinarily take men off any false pretense.
C. Consider the following verse, which is connected to this one, which introduces the resurrection.

4:14 Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.

A. Our confidence in preaching to you is based on our certain resurrection with you at the last day.
B. It is the confidence of the resurrection that causes saints to do great things in faith and works.
C. Our confident perseverance in sore tribulation is evidence of the resurrection (I Cor 15:30-32).

4:15 For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.

A. God's grace in salvation and the sacrificial sufferings by the apostles in preaching the gospel to them were altogether for the profit of the Corinthian saints.
B. Paul here defends against an accusation that he was an apostle for personal advantage.
C. Paul and ministers like him are willing to suffer most anything to increase the praise and thanksgiving to God by the conversions of many.
D. Redounding glory is abounding glory, an abundant supply that is plentiful or overflowing

4:16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

A. For the reason just stated, the greater glory of God through the conversion of men, Paul did not faint.
B. Though Paul's earthen vessel – his body – was weak and sorely persecuted, yet God sustained him daily with grace and strength by the Spirit of God (Eph 3:16; Is 40:31).

4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

A. How could Paul call II Cor 11:23-27 a light affliction? Or how can you call your's heavy affliction?
B. Delight in the glorious contrast between light and weight, and moment and eternal! Glory!
C. Eternal life is shown by willingness to suffer for Christ (Phil 3:10-11; II Tim 2:12; Rev 2:7,11; etc.).
D. Delight in the glorious contrast indicated by the comparative words "far," "more," and "exceeding."

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.

A. What are you looking at? If your eyes can see things, then you should not be looking at them.
B. Whatever your senses can detect, they will all disappear and amount to nothing: they are temporal.
C. All that is in the world and the lusts for those things will pass away and disappear (I John 2:15-17).
D. But the eye of faith is able to look far beyond this world to another world that crushes this world.
E. Moses saw invisible things by the eye of faith looking beyond these foolish things (Heb 11:24-27).
F. Abraham and his sons did the same thing – looked at something not visible (Hebrews 11:8-16).

Conclusion:

1. What did you learn? Did you see Paul's lesson to the church at Corinth and also the Spirit's lessons for you?
2. Do you delight in the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, Who is the image of God, and your unnatural faith in it?
3. Do you grasp the nature of true preaching, which is void of corruption, and plainly manifests the truth?
4. Do you follow the apostle's holy example of how and why we may face afflictions with faith and hope?
5. Do you have the faith of the apostle in another world that makes the vanity and vexation of this one obvious?

For Further Study:

1. The sermon outline, "The Stronger Man," describes the defeat of the devil by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Stronger Man.
2. The sermon outline, "Why Preach the Gospel?" provides greater detail of why the gospel cannot save the lost.
3. The sermon outline, "Why No Invitation?" reviews the origin, fallacies, and heresies of invitational salvation.