

SECOND CORINTHIANS

Chapter Four

Introduction

You have family and friends who are unbelievers. Your heart aches for them as you realize that they are lost and perishing. You've shared Jesus Christ with them and His offer of the forgiveness of their sins and eternal life. Yet they remain in their unbelief. How could they be so blind?

They are not blind; they are ***being blinded!*** You read in verse four that Satan has "blinded" their minds to the "light of the gospel of the glory of God." The word for "blinded" means to *obscure*. It is from a root word that means *opaque* or *smoky*. You get the same idea in verse three where you are told that the gospel is "veiled to those who are perishing." Veiled means to *cover-up*, to *hide*, to *conceal*. Satan, the god of this world, is working in the lives of your unbelieving loved ones and all unbelievers to cover-up, hide, and conceal Jesus Christ from them. They are being blinded to the light of the gospel of the glory of God so that Jesus seems obscure, opaque, and smoky.

Their situation is not hopeless. According to verse six, God sends you to blinded unbelievers "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The veil *can* be removed; those blinded *can* see the light.

Once you are encouraged about evangelising those who are perishing, these verses give you a picture of how to do so more effectively. In verse five you are pictured as a "bondservant." In verse six you are the bondservant who brings light to unbelievers. But in verse seven there is a slight change in the picture. There you are a clay pot. The picture is this: You are a bondservant who is sent with the light of the gospel to those who are being blinded... but you are also a clay pot that covers the light and must be broken before the light can be revealed!

Bondservants who are **broken vessels** are who God sends out among those who are blinded to reveal the light of the gospel.

#1 The Light Of The Gospel Is Revealed To
The Blinded When You Are A Bondservant
(v1-6)

Under the Jewish law a slave who was to be set free could instead choose indefinite slavery. The ceremony at such a time is interesting:

Exodus 21:6 "Then his master shall bring him unto the judges, and shall bring him to the door, or unto the door-post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever"

The master would pierce the ear of the slave who chose to remain. A pierced ear probably symbolized voluntary obedience to the master's voice. This servant whose ear had been pierced was called a bondservant.

In verses one through six you are pictured as a bondservant of Jesus Christ. He sets you free from the slavery of Satan and sin, but you choose indefinite slavery with a spiritually pierced ear that is ready to obey your Master's voice.

The ministry of a bondservant is to be God's messenger and to deliver God's message.

2 Corinthians 4:1 Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart.

The "**ministry**" Paul is referring to is the ministry he just finished discussing in chapter three of revealing Jesus Christ to unbelievers. Since you have "received mercy" and been saved, you should not "lose heart" sharing with others. You were once blinded just as they are, but the light of the gospel was revealed and you were saved.

2 Corinthians 4:2 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.

Your **message** is the word of God. Throughout this letter Paul reminds you to be simple and straightforward in presenting the "word

of God.” You are to “manifest the truth” of God’s word without “craftiness” or “handling” it “deceitfully.”

As a **messenger** you are to deliver God’s message in a way that is “commendable” before both man and God.

You will not always meet with success as a bondservant. There are spiritual forces at work to hinder the effectiveness of the gospel.

2 Corinthians 4:3 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,
2 Corinthians 4:4 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.

Satan is “the god of this age.” After God created the earth, He gave Adam and Eve dominion over it. They forfeited their dominion to Satan when they sinned. He became the god of this world and of this age. For example: When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, and offered to give Him all the kingdoms of the world if He would bow and worship Satan, the Lord did not dispute Satan’s authority over those kingdoms.

On the cross Jesus redeemed mankind and creation back from Satan. When He returns in His Second Coming He will rule and reign on the earth. In-between Christ’s victory on the cross and His return we still have Satan to deal with. “Unbelievers” are “perishing” because Satan has “blinded” them and is keeping “the light of the gospel” “veiled” from them.

That’s where you come in:

2 Corinthians 4:5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake.

You are the Lord’s “bondservants.” The Lord sends you to serve others; thus you are His bondservants *and* you are their bondservants for His sake.

This is an intense spiritual battle. It must be fought using spiritual weapons. “We do not preach ourselves.” There is nothing you can discover or offer apart from “Christ Jesus the Lord” that can be of any help to those who are perishing.

It's your ministry to be the messenger who delivers His message:

2 Corinthians 4:6 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.

There is a comparison in this verse worthy of its own separate study. God created the heavens and the earth and “commanded light to shine out of darkness” in His original creation. Creation was plunged into spiritual darkness when Adam and Eve sinned. But God now “shines in your hearts” to make *you* His *new creation!*

If you are a Christian, His light has shone in your heart. In chapter three you learned that you go on “beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord” and are slowly but certainly “being transformed into the same image.” You see Jesus in God’s word and are becoming more like Him. You then reflect and radiate His face to unbelievers.

You must settle in your heart once-for-all that you are His bondservant. Having been set free, you choose a life of voluntary service. You have your ear spiritually pierced and obey your Master’s voice.

1. You are His minister. If you are His minister, then you minister to others for His sake and in His place.
2. You are His messenger. Your life must be commendable before both man and God, with nothing to bring a reproach upon your Master.
3. You share His message. The simple, straightforward gospel should be your theme. You must not become crafty, or use deceit; you must not preach yourself.

Bondservants make the most effective evangelists. But not just any bondservants. You must also be broken.

#2 The Light Of The Gospel Is Revealed To The Blinded When You Are A Broken Vessel (v7-18)

Paul enlarges upon the picture. You are the bondservant bringing the light to unbelievers. But you are also a clay pot that covers the light and must be broken before the light can be revealed!

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

“Earthen vessels,” clay pots, jars of clay. The idea here is that the light is hidden within the clay pot. Almost all Bible commentators believe Paul is thinking about the Old Testament story of Gideon and his victory over the Midianites, recorded in Judges chapter seven. Outnumbered by about 450 to 1, Gideon’s army nevertheless prevailed. Each of Gideon’s men had only a trumpet and a clay pot with torches hidden inside the pots. But when they blew the trumpets and broke the pots so that the torches could shine, the Midianite army was routed.

You must be broken in order to reveal the light of the gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ. These remaining verses are about brokenness.

2 Corinthians 4:8 *We are* hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair;

2 Corinthians 4:9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed -

Paul will give more specific details regarding his troubles in chapter eleven. His point here is that the bondservant of Jesus Christ will be broken; you will be “pressed,” “perplexed,” “persecuted” and “struck down.” But as you are broken, unbelievers see that you are not “crushed,” “in despair,” “forsaken,” or “destroyed.” They see a light within you – a supernatural source of strength that can only come from God – which keeps and sustains you. In the things that break you the Person Who blesses you is revealed.

2 Corinthians 4:10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

What does Paul mean by “always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ”? The word for “dying” is a *process of*

continual dying. It is not a one time act; it continues throughout your lifetime. It is dying to yourself. It is saying “No” to things like recognition... approval... vindication. Alan Redpath writes,

“In any and every circumstance where there would normally be a reaction that reveals self, there is instead a reaction that reveals the character of Jesus Christ... If you are prepared to... [bear] about in your body the death of Jesus Christ, [then He will be revealed].”

This is exactly what Paul says in verses eleven and twelve:

2 Corinthians 4:11 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.
2 Corinthians 4:12 So then death is working in us, but life in you.

Constantly die to yourself and your selfishness and you will continually reveal the life of Jesus through your brokenness. Broken Christians who shine through their afflictions baffle the strategy of the god of this age who has blinded unbelievers. The light of the gospel gets through.

The principle of life Paul is laying down requires you to look forward by faith:

2 Corinthians 4:13 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,
2 Corinthians 4:14 knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present *us* with you.
2 Corinthians 4:15 For all things *are* for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

You must look forward by faith to your future glory in heaven with Jesus Christ when you will be “presented” by your Lord as a trophy of His grace to the Father. In the mean time, you are His bondservant and are to live not for yourself but for others, so that they, too, may be raised-up in glory as they receive the grace of salvation through Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day.

Earlier Paul described unbelievers as “perishing.” He meant that they will perish eternally; they will suffer unspeakable torment in the Lake of Fire for all eternity. By contrast, though your “outward man,” your physical body, will be broken as the Lord’s bondservant, your “inward

man,” your spirit, is constantly being renewed and refreshed... And you will never perish, but have everlasting life!

All of this leads Paul to triumphantly declare,

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory,
2 Corinthians 4:18 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.

I want to summarize these remarkable verses by using three words. The first word is **trivial**. Paul calls your brokenness “affliction.” Whatever it is, however slight or serious it is, it is always to be considered “light,” or *trivial*. The things that afflict you in this life are trivial when you look forward by faith to the Rapture or your resurrection.

The second word is **temporary**. Your trivial affliction “is but for a moment”; it is *temporary*. He uses the word in verse eighteen to lift your eyes heavenward in your brokenness.

The third word is **transforming**. Your brokenness is “working for [you] a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

An anonymous poet put it like this:

*And all through life I see a cross –
When sons of God yield up their breath;
There is no gain except by loss;
There is no life except by death;
There is no vision but by faith,
No glory but in bearing shame,
No justice but in taking blame.
And the Eternal Savior saith,
Be emptied now of right and name.*

I think you get the picture. You are the Lord’s bondservant who is sent with the light of the gospel to those who are being blinded... but you are also a clay pot that covers the light and must be broken before the light can be revealed!

Conclusion

Paul gives you a final word of counsel in verse eighteen when he says “do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.” The word for “look” means *an intense examination*. It is the word you would use if you were to pick up a telescope and try to bring something far away into view and into focus.

Spiritual strength to be a bondservant who is a broken vessel comes as you bring Jesus into focus. **He** came as a bondservant, doing only what His Father told Him to do, and saying only what His Father told Him to say. **He** was a broken vessel in every action and reaction in His life and ministry, ultimately laying down His life willingly for the sake of the human race.

If you look at Jesus in the mirror of God's word, and see Him reflected there... You will be transformed into a bondservant who is a broken vessel for the glory of God.