

## 2 CORINTHIANS 4

# The Believer's Glory

Student Guides

### Daily Bible Reading

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*It is a wonderful reality to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Even more, how incredibly satisfying to serve the Savior Who died for us! In the New Testament, a sense exists in which every Christian is a minister (cp. 3:6). Our ministry primarily focuses on bringing others to the Jesus we have come to know. In chapter three, Paul spoke of the glory of God and His Gospel of grace. Now he reveals the glory of the Christian believer. And, according to Paul, the glory in the believer's life stems chiefly from his or her activity in bringing others to Christ. Later, after acknowledging his knowledge of the terrifying judgment awaiting people without Christ, Paul writes, "we persuade men" (5:11). If Christians are to display glory in their lives, they must learn to "persuade men" of the Gospel of Jesus.*

### 1. The Obligation We Possess: Service to God (vv. 1-2)

Paul begins chapter four by rehearsing the believer's obligation after coming to Christ (vv. 1-2). In order to experience the glory of the Christian life in our service, we must be entirely honest with ourselves, our fellow men, but especially honest toward God.

Honesty involves, first of all, an examination of our *motives*. Paul says we have "received mercy." In other words, we became objects of mercy when we came to Christ. We did not come to Christ because we deserved Christ. Believers never receive what they deserve. If we received what we deserved, we would all be sent to hell! Instead we received what we did not deserve—mercy. No one deserves mercy. Mercy is something given to the undeserving; justice is something given to the deserving (cp. Eph. 2:4; 1 Tim.1:11-16).

In addition, Paul says the believer has, "renounced the hidden things of dishonesty" which includes "craftiness" and "deceitfully" handling Holy Scripture. Dishonesty requires things performed in secret, secrecy which includes a hidden agenda or what some call "ulterior motives." There is absolutely no room for tricky dealing or underhanded play in God's Kingdom. Honesty further involves an examination of our *message*. The Apostle speaks of the "manifestation of truth." Our obligation is to make the Word of God clear. Though the truth of God has tremendous power in and of itself, there are many aspects to the faith that may get complicated. Glory results when Christian truth is so clearly presented a child may understand its meaning. Nothing pleases the Father more than our making plain the Word of God to those who do not yet understand.

### 2. The Obstacle We Face: Satan and his Army (vv. 3-6)

Our obligation is clear: we are saved to serve God. And, know the obstacles we face are just as clear (vv. 3-4). Just because we have an obligation to serve our Lord does not mean we will not face hindrances to our service. Paul does not begin with the tangible but with the intangible. He begins in the spirit world. Why do more people not believe the Gospel when we share it? Why is it when a person fully understands the consequences of judgment to come, he or she nonetheless refuses to believe? What is Paul's answer? He says if people do not believe, it is because the "god of this world has blinded the minds of them that believe not" (cp. John 14:30; 16:11; 1 John 5:19). There is an invisible obstacle producing visible results; his name is Satan! And, just what can Satan do?

According to the Apostle, Satan *hides* the Gospel—"hid to them that are lost." The hiddenness of the Gospel stems from

the refusal to believe. Again, the Apostle emphasizes the Gospel is hid to “them which believe not.” In addition, Paul explains how Satan hides the Gospel—he hides the Gospel by blinding their minds. Those who believe not are blind to the goodness of God.

Next, Satan blinds unbelievers to his or her personal *spiritual* condition. The Bible teaches from Genesis to Revelation that, apart from Jesus Christ, all people are poor, lost, helpless, condemned, and blind. No hope exists apart from Christ. And, the most horrible thing of all is, people do not even know they are blind. Satan further blinds people to the *only way of salvation*. A thousand and one religions exist today promising adherents connection to God. If they would but obey their rules, they would gain entrance to God’s presence. However, Jesus bluntly says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” ( John 14:6). In essence, Jesus was saying without the way, there is no going; without the truth, there is no knowing; without the life, there is no living. And, He remains the substance of them all! Christianity is utterly exclusive in this sense—no other way to be saved exists apart from Jesus Christ.

Finally, Satan not only *hides* the Gospel, he *hinders* the Gospel. Paul affirms Satan covers over the Gospel message “lest the light... should shine unto them.” He does not want you or me to believe the Gospel. Why? Those who believe are saved in that very moment ( John 3:16). At the moment of regeneration, a person is transferred from spiritual death to eternal life ( John 5:24).

### **3. The Objective We Gain: Salvation for Eternity (vv. 7-18)**

Paul first revealed our obligation—to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. He then explained our obligation to serve God by no means implies God’s obligation to shield us from all difficulties. In fact, Scripture repeatedly warns Christians about obstacles we all inevitably face, obstacles which include the arch-adversary himself, Satan. However, we must not lose hope but stand strong. Why? The goal we seek—the objective we gain—is nothing less than eternal salvation! (v. 7). The metaphor Paul employs comes from the potter’s house (cp. Jer. 18). The reason could not be more clear. It’s all about God, not about us. He is Lord over us. He decides our destiny, our duty, our development. His strength surpasses our weakness. Therefore, when He shows up in our weakness, His power alone gives us incredible victory (vv. 8-10).

Moving from the image of the potter’s clay, Paul takes us to the bloody battlefield. In the paradox, while the Christian is pictured as a surrounded warrior in hand- to-hand combat, he nevertheless escapes death. He is hit by the enemy but rises and walks. At every point, victory reigns over what otherwise is considered certain defeat. In addition, Paul offers the victorious believer a glimpse behind the heavenly curtain, a glimpse into the unseen world (vv. 11-12).

Paul then speaks of a world unseen (vv. 13-18). At the end, he writes, “...but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day.

First, Paul speaks of our *proclamation* (vv. 13-15). We proclaim the faith we embrace and upon which we firmly stand (v. 13).

Second, he speaks of our *transformation* (v. 16). We are daily “renewed.” Our physical bodies continue to decay. Each and every day—whether or not we can see it with the naked eye—our bodies are dying.

Third, Paul speaks of our *anticipation* (vv. 17-18). For the “moment,” we experience “light affliction.” However, in the end, we expect a “far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory.” Our troubles—even the obstacle of Satan himself, whom we discussed earlier,—work for us instead of against us. Truly, Paul’s magnificent promise elsewhere applies, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Only eternity itself bears out the privileges awaiting the child of God!

### **Wrap Up**

*We are saved by grace. No truth is so clear in the Bible. However, we are saved not to sit, but we are saved to serve. In other words, our allegiance to the Lordship of Christ obliges us to His service, not in order to be saved but because we are saved. Moreover, the service we give to Him possesses an obstacle—namely, Satan and his innumerable army from hell. The last thing the devil desires is for our service to the Lord to succeed. Hence, he makes an all-out assault on the servants of God. Nonetheless, the child of God can stand with confidence in the power of God. Our objective—our ultimate goal—will not fail; we will gain eternal salvation. Our omnipotent God promises it!*