

## Proclaim Christ 2 Corinthians 4:3-6

Unfortunately I have heard of a few church fights in the past few months. One that I am particularly aware of is one in the church where one of my siblings is a member where the minister is too bossy. Another I am aware of is related to a leadership crisis where members see meekness for weakness. One thing I am sure of is that no one really wins in a church fight. Members are injured and God is not honored.

I tell you this because our scripture is from the book of 2 Corinthians. Since Paul's first letter, the Corinthians church had been swayed by false teachers who stirred the people against Paul. They claimed he was fickle, proud, unimpressive in appearance and speech, dishonest, and unqualified as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul sent Titus to Corinth to deal with these difficulties, and when Titus returned, Paul rejoiced to hear of the Corinthians; change of heart. Paul wrote this letter to express his thanksgiving for the repentant majority and to appeal to the rebellious minority to accept his authority. Throughout 2 Corinthians Paul defends his conduct, character, and calling as an apostle of Jesus Christ. (From the Matthew Henry Study Bible, introduction to 2 Corinthians.)

In our scripture today Paul is talking about his preaching and teaching ministry. Paul has already explained that all the Jews had not received and taken to heart the teaching of Moses, one of their greatest leaders, the one that God entrusted to give them the Ten Commandments and the laws regarding the temple, worship and community living. It was said that when Moses came down from the mountain after meeting with God his face was shiny and he actually put a veil over his face. Paul said that veil separated the people from knowing God personally. But now that Jesus has come into the world and the gospel was preached there were still

people who refused to accept what God has done through Christ. Paul said here and elsewhere that he was commissioned by God to tell the Good News of Christ to the world. For him it was a glorious ministry that brings people life, salvation, and righteousness; a ministry that is able to transform people's lives. This ministry is a gift—we receive it from God. It is given to us because of God's mercy, not because of anything we are or we have done (see 1 Tim. 1:12–17).

The way we look at our ministry helps to determine how we will fulfill it. If we look on serving Christ as a burden instead of a privilege, we will be a drudge and do only what is required of us. Some people even look on service as a punishment from God. When Paul considered the fact that he was a minister of Jesus Christ, he was overwhelmed by the grace and mercy of God. His positive attitude toward the ministry had practical consequences in his life.

The false teachers had asked the Corinthian members: if Paul was such a faithful teacher of the Word, why didn't more people believe his message; after all the false teachers were successful in winning converts. Of course many people, particularly Jews (3:14-15), did not accept the gospel. To them it was veiled. But Paul would not change the gospel to make it more palatable, as his opponents had done (11:4). The gospel was rejected by people who were unable and unwilling to accept it (compare 1 Cor. 1:18; 2:14). They disbelieved and were aided in their unbelief by Satan, the god of this Age (compare Eph. 2:2) who, though defeated by Christ (Heb. 2:14), continues his hold over the present world (1 Peter 5:8; 1 John 5:19). His blinding of peoples' minds makes it impossible for them to see the light of the gospel. For them the gospel is hidden, and they find it easier to believe lies than to believe truth.

However the gospel is not obscure. In fact, if our hearts and minds are receptive we receive the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Cor. 4:3–4), revealing God the Father by His words and actions (John 1:18; 14:9).

Paul also explains that his ministry kept him from being a self promoter. The awesome fact that Paul had received this ministry from Christ kept him from being a quitter and a deceiver; and it also kept him from talking about himself (2 Cor. 4:5–6). “We do not proclaim ourselves!” (2 Cor. 4:5) Apparently the Judaizers enjoyed preaching about themselves and glorying in their achievements (2 Cor. 10:12–18). They were not servants who tried to help people; they were dictators who exploited people.

Paul was certainly a man who practiced genuine humility. He did not trust in himself (2 Cor. 1:9) or commend himself (2 Cor. 3:1–5) or preach himself (2 Cor. 4:5). His ministry was to lead people to Jesus Christ and to build them up in the faith. It would have been easy for Paul to build a “fan club” for himself and take advantage of weak people who thrive on associating with great men. The Judaizers operated in that way, but Paul rejected that kind of ministry.

For Paul Christ was the focus of his message and the object of his concern. Contrary to what Paul’s accusers suggested (v. 2), he labored to advance the cause of Christ and not his own interests. Jesus was the crucified Christ and the resurrected Lord. Since Paul served Christ, he also served the church, Christ’s body (Eph. 1:22-23). While serving the Corinthians, Paul was serving his Lord (cf. Matt. 25:40).

The reason Paul served the church and openly proclaimed the gospel was because of God’s work in his life. Much as in creating the world God acted to bring light out of darkness (Gen. 1:2-4), so in spiritual creation God brings light to the hearts of those in darkness (cf. Luke 1:78-79; Acts 26:18). This had been Paul’s experience on the Damascus Road, when “a light from heaven flashed around him” (Acts 9:3). Confronted with the risen Lord, he became a new creation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). The light in believers’ lives is the knowledge of God’s salvation,

a glory issuing from and seen in the face of Christ and reflected by Paul (cf. 3:18). When people were in the darkness of sin, they had no knowledge of God, no experience of His life and salvation (Eph. 4:18).<sup>1</sup>

In this passage Paul tells us something about himself and ourselves. Paul insists that he has proclaimed the gospel in such a way that any person with any kind of conscience at all was bound to admit its claim and its appeal. Even in spite of that some are deaf to its appeal and blind to its glory. So when we witness to others everyone will not agree. Some will think you are foolish for believing in God and accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Also all through the Bible the writers were conscious that in this world there is a power of evil. Sometimes that power is called Satan, sometimes the Devil. Even in the Lord's Prayer there is a reference to this malign power, for it is most probable that the correct translation of Matthew 6:13 is "Deliver us from *the Evil One*." We know from experience how real the evil of the world, with crime and hate and war. Those who cannot accept the good news of Christ are those who have given themselves over to the evil of the world to the point that they can no longer hear God's invitation. It is not that God has abandoned them; they by their own conduct have shut themselves off from God.

Paul has something to say about Jesus. The great thought that he drives home here is that in Jesus Christ we see what God is like. "He who has seen me," said Jesus, "has seen the Father." (John 14:9). When Paul preached he did not say, "Look at me!" He said, "Look at Jesus Christ! and there you will see the glory of God come to earth in a form that humans can understand."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:563

<sup>2</sup> Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letters to the Corinthians*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 194

So, what happens when you share Jesus Christ with lost sinners? The light begins to shine! Paul compared conversion to Creation as he quotes the Hebrews scriptures. Like the earth of Genesis 1:2, the unbeliever is formless and empty; but when one trusts Christ, we become new creations (2 Cor. 5:17). God then begins to form and fill our lives as we trust Christ, and we begin to be fruitful for the Lord. God's, "Let there be light!" makes everything new.<sup>3 4</sup>

This should encourage all of us to share the good news of Christ with everyone we meet. Amen .

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<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 2 Co 4:1

<sup>4</sup>Omanon, Roger L. ; Ellington, John: *A Handbook on Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians*. New York : United Bible Societies, 1993 (UBS Handbook Series; Helps for Translators), S. 74