

Study 5: Chapter 4

Introduction

Paul continues the discussion on the nature and character of the apostolic ministry, and contrasts it against “false ministry”. The contrasts are in particular directed towards the Jewish religion, and hence the Judaisers.

The passage is full of contrast and irony, as Paul parallels the suffering that he has with the glory he shares as a result of the gospel.

Body of the Study

Paul’s defence in the gospel

The veiling of the gospel

The treasure in earthen vessels

How did Paul accomplish his ministry?

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *Paul speaks of “living by faith, not by sight” (2:5:vs 4), How do we understand this in relation to what Paul says in this passage?*
- *How does our life of service to God compare to the type of life that Paul lived? What are the similarities, and what are the contrasts? Make some applications from your own life.*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 5 in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 5: Chapter 4

Introduction

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Body of the Study

Paul’s defence in the gospel

In his typical style, Paul connects his arguments from the previous chapter with the bridge “therefore”. He has shown that the apostolic ministry was far superior to the Mosaic ministry. He continues, by providing a long list of contrasts between the two. He continues the theme from 2:3:6, that of being “...*sufficient as ministers of the new covenant...*”

As ministers – in fact as *recipients* under the new covenant “...*we have received mercy...*” Such mercy would be of particular significance to Paul, because he persecuted the church. However, Paul’s sin of persecution of the church is no greater than our sin of rebellion against God. Like Paul, we need to recognise our past sin, determine not to do it again, and thank God for His mercy – that He does not inflict on us the punishment that we deserve.

It is easy for us to get discouraged – either because of our sin, and our recognition that we do not deserve God’s grace – or because we often don’t seem to be getting the results from our work. But when we recognise God’s mercy, and our role in ministry, then we should be encouraged, rather than discouraged!

In contrast to the false form of ministry practiced by the Judaisers, the things that Paul did were the true christian ministry. They are shown in the following characteristics:

- Renouncing the past former life of shameful practices,
- Not walking in craftiness,
- Not handling the word of God deceitfully,
- Presenting the truth,
- By our actions showing our commendation in the sight of God.

We can read between the lines to see that Paul’s behaviour was in direct contrast to the behaviour of the Judaisers, and see the type of characteristics that they were demonstrating.

The veiling of the gospel

As a direct contrast to the Judaisers, - who would put God behind the veil of the Temple, when He had already torn it apart – the gospel that Paul revealed, and the God about whom the revelation was made, is plain and clearly seen. As christians we can clearly see God revealed in the gospel (perhaps not as clearly as we might like to see Him, but compared to how He is revealed in the Old Testament, it is as of we are standing in brilliant sunshine, whilst the picture from the Old Testament is like moonlight). To want to restore the veil of the Temple, is to put a veil on the gospel. It is only those who would perish that would consider such a thing.

Paul pursues the contrast of light a little further. The Judaisers have had their minds blinded by the light – perhaps in exactly the same way that Paul was blinded by the light on the road to Damascus. They have closed their minds, lest they might see – *truly understand* – the glory of Christ.

The problem did not lie in the nature of the gospel. The gospel is light, just as God is light (1 Jn 1:5). The problem comes from those (the Judaisers in this case) who would put a veil over the gospel so that it remains hidden. Paul inextricably links the thought to the veil of the Temple and the Jewish religion.

The Judaisers would try to pin the blame on Paul – that he was the one who was veiling – *concealing* – the truth. The Corinthians only had to look at what the message that Paul preached, and his behaviour to see where the truth of the matter lies. “...*For we do not preach ourselves... (as the Judaisers were) ...but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves as servants... (again in contrast to the Judaisers who wanted to make the Corinthians their servants!)...*” (2:4:5 NKJV)

The origin of the message was none other than Jehovah God Himself. “...*For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ...*” (2:4:6 NIV). Once again, Paul brings the Corinthians right back to a question of authenticity. Was what he was teaching the pure gospel that originated from God, or was it what the Judaisers were teaching? The Corinthians needed to make a choice, and the answer was obvious.

The treasure in earthen vessels

Paul continues the contrasts by outlining a number of paradoxes. The first of these is the treasure in earthen vessels. The value of the treasure – the gospel of Christ – is immense. However it is entrusted to mere men (and specifically to the apostles in the case under consideration, but in a general sense to all of us who have the responsibility to teach the gospel). We are those *weak vessels* – vessels of clay – who are fragile and of absolutely no comparison to what lies inside.

The contrast to Paul’s own situation is obvious. He does not regard himself of being of any value (unlike the Judaisers who were promoting themselves). As far as Paul was concerned, the only thing of any value was the message of the gospel, and it’s power only comes alive and is demonstrated through human weakness “...*that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us...*” (2:4:7 NKJV)

He next commences with a further series of contrasts to show how the strength is brought out through weakness. The contrasts are partly lost in the translation from the Greek language. For example, Paul says in 2:4:9 he was “*knocked to the ground, but not permanently grounded*” :

Hard pressed	but not crushed	2:4:8
Perplexed	but not in despair	2:4:8
Persecuted	but not forsaken	2:4:9
Struck down	but not destroyed	2:4:9
Carrying about the dying of the Lord	Manifesting His life in our body	2:4:10
We who live	are delivered to death	that
The life of Jesus	might be manifested in our flesh	2:4:11
Death works in us (the apostles)	But life in you (the Corinthians)	2:4:12

How did Paul accomplish his ministry?

In the above discussion, Paul summarises his ministry as one surrounded by death. But, rather than a ministry based on the death of the Lord, of our death to sin, and our death to ourselves (all of which are true), Paul had in mind the *life* that he found and enjoyed even though he was surrounded by death (and the persecution that he faced) on every front. The whole passage is surrounded in irony and contrast.

Paul relates the reason that he is able to survive the suffering as the same one that motivated the Psalmist, and he quotes PS 116:10 “...*I believed, and therefore I spoke...*” In exactly the same way, Paul believes the things of the gospel, and is therefore compelled to speak them. Like the psalmist, Paul’s expression of thanksgiving arises from his vindicated trust in God.

The confidence that Paul has is also demonstrated in the assurance of the resurrection. We know that Jesus was raised from the dead, and therefore we have the same assurance. But the assurance of the resurrection is not limited to the apostles alone – but is also extended to all who believe (and in the case under discussion to the Corinthians) (2:4:14).

Paul wraps up his thoughts in 2:4:15 by reminding the Corinthians that all things that he suffers are for the sake of them. Paul was not doing the things that he did and suffered for his own glory, but rather he wanted to give glory to God, especially from the praises of the Corinthians.

He reiterates the thoughts that he has presented, that even in the midst of the trials that he faces when “...*our outward man is perishing...yet the inward man is being renewed...*” For this reason he “...*does not lose heart...*” (2:4:16)

In fact, Paul has a very clear picture of what is happening. On the surface, those around him (and the other apostles) see physical punishment and persecution. The Judaisers were probably saying that the persecution that Paul was getting was a sign that God was not with him, and therefore they should believe them. But Paul recognised the temporal nature of the things of this life, compared to the eternal nature of the things of the gospel.

That eternal nature ONLY came through the gospel of the Christ.