

## **Let the Light Shine 2 Corinthians 4:1-7**

### **Introduction**

Yesterday and in the days leading up to it, we have been celebrating the incarnation of Christ the light of the world.

Isaiah 9:2

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

John 1:4-5

<sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 8:12

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

2 Corinthians 4:6

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5:8-10

<sup>8</sup> For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of

light <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), <sup>10</sup> and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

Verses like these raise a question well suited for the day after celebrating the birth of Jesus the Messiah: what is pleasing to the Lord? If we are children of light because the light of Christ has shone into our hearts, how do we live from here on out?

The apostle Paul answers this way in 2 Corinthians 4:1-7:

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. <sup>2</sup> But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. <sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup> For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

<sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

1. Let the light shine in your hope-filled courage (1).
2. Let the light shine in your truth-proclaiming integrity (2-4).
3. Let the light shine in your Christ-exalting service (5).
4. Let the light shine in your God-given power (7).

**1. Let the light shine in your hope-filled courage (1).**

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.

Jesus the light came into a world of darkness. The darkness of ignorance, of wickedness, of deceit, death, and despair. Outside of Jesus the world is still that way. Those who shine as lights in the world do so in the face of deep darkness. It is their ministry to do so.

Ministry—work we get deacon from; the apostles' favorite term for describing their relationship to people. Used of all believers' service to one another.

Ephesians 4:12

To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

Paul's heartbeat was to share the light of the gospel, but his doing so pitted him against enemies of the truth and those blind to it. He suffered rejection, ridicule, and mistreatment. He talks about much that he endured in the verses that follow. The resistance and persecution would continue throughout his life right to the very end, when he was beheaded for Christ.

In spite of all this he says, "We do not lose heart"—to give into evil; to lose courage  
*So how could he keep going in the face of so much opposition? How could he keep sharing the good news when so many refused it? When the darkness seems so strong, how do we keep on shining the light?*

Easy to be discouraged, cynical, frustrated and fuming over the state of our world, the abundance of lies, the defection and betrayals, along with the common woes of human existence—the illnesses, calamities, funerals of those we dearly love.

Paul's answer: he had received his ministry as a gift by the mercy of God toward him. He once hated Jesus and His followers. He once hunted them down, imprisoned them, and had them executed. But Jesus stopped him in his tracks, turned his life around, and made him an advocate for the faith he once

persecuted. He was once part of the darkness, but Jesus made him light in the Lord.

1 Timothy 1:15-16

**15** The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. **16** But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

If there could be hope for an enemy of the gospel like Paul, then we will not lose heart in spreading the good news of Jesus no matter what opposition we encounter and what disappointments we face.

As members of the body of Christ, we each have gifts designed for our service to our brothers and sisters in Christ for their benefit. Whether you're talking about serving those trusting in Jesus or those who have not yet done so, ministry can be messy and discouraging.

The secret to not losing heart is to keep in mind what a gracious privilege and merciful gift it is to belong to Jesus and to be serving in His name, knowing that eternal reward awaits us. If it were just up to us, we would

still be serving Satan, who deceives, abuses, and destroys his slaves; dominated by our flesh and our sin, which brings forth death and the eternal wrath of God.

Paul suffered, but he considered it worth it. Satan's servants suffer too, but in the end it only gets worse. God's servants suffer, but what they suffer does not hold a candle to the infinite reward of their inheritance in Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:16-17

<sup>16</sup> So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

In a world full of darkness, despair, death, we shine the light of Jesus when we keep serving Christ with hope-filled courage. Hebrews—persevere by looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. Romans—do not lose heart, for we are children and thus heirs of an eternal inheritance.

## **2. Let the light shine in your truth-proclaiming integrity (2-4).**

<sup>2</sup> But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would

commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

“Disgraceful, underhanded ways”—lit, the hidden things of shame

“To practice cunning”—readiness to do anything, in the negative sense of pragmatism, end justifies the means—craftiness, trickery

“To tamper with God’s Word”—to use it deceitfully—like using bait to deceive a fish; falsifying, corrupting the Word of God; making it say what it does not say

“Open statement of the truth”—open, clear, openly revealed

“Commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience”—nothing we say or do that would call someone to conscientiously question our motives or methods

There is no reason to tamper with God’s word, or to use tricky techniques to win people over—their blindness to truth comes from unbelief supercharged by Satan’s blinding them, not from inadequate techniques, nor from failure to adapt the message enough to whatever is current in worldly philosophies, popular opinions, or prevailing trends.

*Throughout history, Christians have often succumbed to the pressure to conform the gospel to the dominate ideas of the times— Jewish legalism of the first century, pagan gnosticism of the centuries that followed, sacerdotalism (priestcraft), ceremonialism, and asceticism of the middle ages, syncretism of church and state, nationalism, the gospel of music style, the gospel of sexual freedom, along with a host of other corruptions of the pure gospel*

We dare not tamper with God's very word by trying to make it fit the distortions of the times or of our immediate sub-culture. Those distortions are part of Satan's effort to hide the gospel from sight.

<sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

People reject the gospel because of the blindness that is in them. The god of this world blinds their minds. The light is there, but they cannot see it.

Satan is the god of this world in that those who believe his lies treat him as their god



rather than trusting and obeying the true God. Exactly the fatal sin of Adam and Eve in the garden. They trusted the serpent instead of their Creator.

Ephesians 4:17-18

<sup>17</sup> Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. <sup>18</sup> They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.

John Calvin (quoted by Hughes, 125): “The blindness of unbelievers in no way detracts from the clearness of the gospel, for the sun is no less resplendent because the blind do not perceive its light.”

The light of the gospel is the shining splendor of Christ, who is the radiance of the image of God. The gospel shines the light of who Christ is, and He reveals who God is. *A Christ-less gospel is no gospel at all.* Beware any and every system or religion that shifts dependence on Christ to dependence on human beings—their ability and accomplishments instead of His power and perfect works; their ideas instead of His written words.

A world drowning in lies needs people of the truth whose words and ways match. Ephesians calls it "truthing in love." Truth and love are not opposites. Truth produces love, and love tells the truth. Fill your mind with truth and your life with love.

### **3. Let the light shine in your Christ-exalting service (5-6).**

<sup>5</sup> For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

True Christianity is not self-centered. Christ is Lord. No true follower of Jesus lords it over others. Nor does he seek to exalt himself. Rather, he denies himself and takes up a cross to follow Jesus. Even the apostles whom God used to write Scripture did not make themselves the center of attention. Paul confronts the congregation at Corinth for dividing over which preacher they liked most. Such practices are carnal—fleshly, that is, living as if you are still unsaved.

1 Corinthians 3:5-7

<sup>5</sup> What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. <sup>6</sup> I planted, Apollos

watered, but God gave the growth. <sup>7</sup> So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

The apostles did not preach the gospel and plant churches so that others could serve them. Rather, they served others for the glory of Christ, not themselves.

The only reason any of the apostles were believers was that God shone the light of the gospel in their hearts. It is a divine miracle like that of the first day of creation, "Let there be light." And there was light. Every person who has ever come to Christ in faith was saved in the same way. An act of Almighty God shining in their hearts, the illumination of the Spirit of God who convinced them in their heart of hearts that the things the gospel proclaims are in fact completely reliable truth.

"The face of Jesus Christ" speaks of personal relationship with Him. Jesus the Messiah made God known. The apostles closely observed His glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. And on the basis of their eyewitness testimony, we have come to share in their firsthand experience of Him (1 John 1:1-3).

Sin is by nature self-centered. Lie for yourself and you drown in darkness. Like a black hole sucking everything into it. In contrast, light

shines. It reaches out. We serve to point people to the radiant light of Jesus.

#### **4. Let the light shine in your God-given power (7).**

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

Clay pots were an inexpensive way to store things. Shaped from dirt, useful, but breakable—an apt image of human beings made from dust of the ground, ever since humanity's fall, flawed, fragile, and easily broken. The high value of human beings has always been found not in themselves alone but in their relationship to God—made in God's image; recreated in Christ.

The Holy Spirit indwells all those who have received the gospel by putting the full weight of their trust in Jesus to save them. In them is a treasury of God's good gifts because in them is God Himself!

Treasure—*thesaurus*; we use the transliteration of this term to refer to a treasury of synonyms

Surpassing power—God brings abundant, extraordinary, excessive power to our lives—we use this word as well—*hyperbole*, by which we mean exaggeration.

## 2 Corinthians 3:4-5

<sup>4</sup> Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. <sup>5</sup> Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God.

## 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

<sup>4</sup> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; <sup>5</sup> and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; <sup>6</sup> and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. <sup>7</sup> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

*Your abilities, your opportunities, and your energies to make the most of them all come from God Himself. Let your life be a chronicle of God's working in you for the good of others to the glory of Christ.*

Through Christ you have everything you need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Use the treasury God has put within you so that no one can adequately explain all you are and all without crediting God for His kind work in and through you.

## Philippians 2:13-16

<sup>13</sup> For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. <sup>14</sup> Do all things without grumbling or disputing, <sup>15</sup> that

you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, **16** holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

2 Corinthians 3:18

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

What does the image of Christ look like in us?

Galatians 5:22-23a

**22** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, self-control.

Ephesians 2:8-10

**8** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast. **10** For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

We are not self-made men and women. We are created by God in Christ Jesus. His masterpieces. Whatever is pleasing and

beneficial and good testifies to His great skill and grace and goodness, not ours.

Don't let discouragement about your flaws and weakness suffocate the light of Jesus in you. His strength is perfected in our weakness.

### **Conclusion**

Jesus has come as light into our world. We were once darkness. Now we are light in the Lord. Let the light shine!

1. Let the light shine in your hope-filled courage (1).
2. Let the light shine in your truth-proclaiming integrity (2-4).
3. Let the light shine in your Christ-exalting service (5).
4. Let the light shine in your God-given power (7).

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why would your hope-filled courage, in contrast to losing heart and giving in to the darkness, shine gospel light to others?
2. Paul says he does not lose heart because God showed him mercy in giving him the ministry he has. How does gratitude for God's mercy to you in

- giving you ministry purpose help you not lose heart?
3. Why would renouncing disgraceful, underhanded ways and refusing tricks and deceit, be crucial to gospel credibility and gospel advance?
  4. What are some pressures you've seen brought to bear on Christians over the years to modify, twist, or ignore what the Scriptures say?
  5. According to the text, what is the source of the blindness of unbelievers, and why does that fact make it all the more important to stay true to what God's Word actually says rather than conforming it to the errors of the age?
  6. What are some traps and dangers that result from trying to promote ourselves rather than turning attention to Christ?
  7. Why is willingly serving others such a hallmark of someone the gospel has transformed?
  8. What realities does having the divine treasure of the gospel in jars of clay emphasize about our lives?
  9. What are some specific ways you can let the light shine through you in the coming year?