

## Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

### Introduction

Misunderstandings and criticism resulted in significant tension in Paul's relationship with the Corinthians. He was greatly disheartened by this but he did not give up.

### Summary

**In 2 Corinthians 4:1-6, Paul explains why, though greatly discouraged, he and his associates persevered in faithfully preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ in spite of many obstacles.**

#### 1. Confident Assertion vs. 1

Paul begins this section by referring to his 'having this ministry.'

There is an implicit contrast between 'this' ministry as opposed to 'that' ministry; between his service for God and the efforts of his opponents.

Paul mentions his work for God at this point because he was under attack.

This explains his use of the phrase, 'by the mercy of God'. He does not claim that he had earned the right to speak on God's behalf. Rather, it was a high privilege.

As Christians, we too have been given the opportunity to say a word for Jesus.

Let us not be proud. It, too, is only by the mercy of God.

Having noted that he had received mercy from God and also that he had a ministry to discharge, Paul makes the confident assertion: 'We do not lose heart' (**2 Cor 4:1**).

Paul's opponents questioned his stamina and perseverance. Why else would the apostle insist that he had not lost heart, that the fight had not gone out of him?

If ever a man did not deserve the accusation that he could not see a task through to the end, it was Paul (**Acts 14:19-21; 2 Cor 11:22-33**).

The authentic servant of Jesus is not a quitter.

One of the most daunting challenges which faces the believer is the challenge to keep going. Can we, like Paul, say with simple honesty, 'We do not lose heart'?

#### 2. Defended Integrity vs. 2

Paul's opponents also misrepresented him. It must have been very galling to Paul to know that rumors were circulating that he was a devious man, a charlatan.

This explains his vehement rebuttal of his critics: 'we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning' (**4:2**).

Whilst, on stage, the actor does not reveal his true self. He plays a part. It is all just a performance. Paul's opponents were just like that. By contrast, Paul was transparent. Contrary to the insinuations of his accusers, Paul did not handle the word of God deceitfully (**2 Cor 4:2**). His insistence that he could commend himself to 'everyone's

conscience in the sight of God' is a way of saying that all who knew his methods, would have to agree that he handled the truth of God with integrity. There is a great need today for preachers to bring the Word of God unmixed and unsullied, the pure message of Scripture and nothing else.

### 3. Ingrained Hostility vv. 3-4

Suppose the preacher gives his all and nothing happens, what then?

It seems that Paul was coming under pressure in this area.

His response was to remind his readers that there is a fundamental problem with all our attempts to communicate the gospel. Our message may be as plain as day, but we are dealing with people who are blind and cannot see (**2 Cor 4:3-4**).

Paul describes the Lord Jesus Christ as 'the image of God' (**2 Cor 4:4**).

Jesus represents God fully and completely (**Col. 1:15, Heb 1:3**). Preachers present Jesus to people so that they can know the living and true God through Christ.

**It is an uphill task, however, humanly speaking.** Left to themselves, people are just not convertible. What a blessing that all things are possible with God!

### 4. Proclaiming Christ vv. 5-6

What was Paul's response to the fact that his opponents had placed him in a difficult situation? By accusing him of incompetence, deviousness and self-promotion, they obliged him to defend himself, which then gave them further ammunition.

They could go on to make the claim that he was continually blowing his own trumpet!

The apostle's response was that he was not preaching himself but Christ (**4:5**). The sight of Jesus, in all his risen splendor, overwhelmed Paul.

The vision of this wonderful and glorious being filled his universe. Now he had a message to preach; a cause to promote; something for which it was worth living.

A preacher is a herald; one who proclaims the messenger of the king (**4:5**).

The message was not Paul's message but God's (**4:6**). In our evangelism, our great priority is to introduce people to our Saviour, holding up the most wonderful person in the entire universe and the one who freely offers his great salvation to them.

### 5. Concluding Applications

Like Paul, we need to learn not to 'lose heart' (**2 Cor 4:1**).

Believers, now as in Paul's day, need to ensure that we are not acting a part. An honest man will preach an honest message (**2 Cor 4:2**).

In view of the veil before men and women (**2 Cor 4:3-4**), what priority do we give to prayer for unconverted family, friend and neighbors and co-workers.

Christians have a wonderful Saviour to proclaim and the joy of seeing other people come to value and appreciate him, but it is never all about us (**2 Cor 4:5-6**).