

2 Cor 4:1-5:19

Corinthians, Session Thirteen

The Gospel We Share (4:1-6)

There are a lot of Christian ministries today. Some are scams. Some are of the kingdom. How do we know which ones are to be trusted and supported?

Two things Paul considers secret and shameful in terms of ministry: deception and distortion. Where do we see these “peddlers of God’s word” (2 Cor 3:17) behaviors today?

The word translated as “deception” or “practice cunning” is a word that means a “readiness to do anything.” There are no limits to one who chooses this route! The word for “distortion” or “to tamper with” is also associated with adulterating medicine or wine.

“I think the temptation to tamper with the gospel will always be with us. And every time we try to be clever or add something to it or take something away from it, we empty the gospel of its power and our witness and ministry of its effectiveness” (Chafin, 228).

What is the veil? What is the light?

Louis Brandeis (Supreme Court Justice 1916-1939) wrote, “Sunshine is said to be the best of disinfectants. And electric light the best policeman.” He was referencing James Bryce who wrote in *The American Commonwealth* (1888), “Selfishness, injustice, cruelty, tricks and jobs of all sorts shun the light; to expose them is to defeat them.” See what Jesus said, John 3:19-21.

Paul says again “we do not preach ourselves.” Apparently, the super-apostles were doing that. The message is to not lose heart (v. 1)—even if the veil remains for some, the ministry of the new covenant is triumphant because Jesus is at the center.

The Unconquerable (4:7-18)

“But” (v. 7) sets up a contrast between this all-surpassing treasure and the everyday clay jar vessel in which it resides. “Who would think to look *there*?” The point: it’s of God, not us (3:5).

Paul is weak but He is given an all-surpassing _____ that is the death and life of Jesus.

“If we read carefully what he has written, we hear the note of celebration that even though life had knocked him down, it had not knocked him out; he was still functioning” (Chafin, 231).

How does v. 12 follow in the way of Jesus and the cross?

Verse 13 cites Ps. 116:10. See how central the death and resurrection of Jesus is to Paul. “God will present us, Paul says, together with you in his presence. With these words, he returns to his main concern. It doesn’t really matter what happens to him. What matters is the eternal destiny of the Corinthians. All this—the afflictions, the persecutions, even if necessary, death for the sake of the gospel is for your benefit” (Valleskey, 71).

How to keep from becoming discouraged?

- 1) Acknowledge it! Keep it in perspective.
- 2) Compare it to the coming, eternal glory.

Looking at Life after Death (5:1-11)

Jars of clay break. Tents wear out. We die. Yet we have a house built by God. Paul is upfront about death. Do you talk about death or do you tend to avoid mentioning it?

This may help explain v. 2-3. “While the Greek world tended to look upon the body as a _____ for the soul and death as an escape, the Jews thought of their bodies as _____ for the person. The body was what made contact and communication with other possible. To them the death of the body deprived them of everything which meant being a person; it was being unclothed or naked. It was this fear that made them want to go directly from this life to the resurrection life without experiencing death” (Chafin, 236).

“Further clothed” (v. 4) means?

Are we the away team or the home team?

Verse 10 brings to the fore the importance of works (whether good or evil) that are taken into account and judged. It reminds me of the end of the Athanasian Creed. “And those who have done good will enter into eternal life, and those who have done evil into eternal fire.” Since justification is done on account of faith in Christ, what’s the purpose of judging works?

The Motive for Ministry (5:12-21)

What’s the best way to persuade someone (v. 11)?

In light of v. 13, keep in mind there was a time when Jesus’ own family thought he was crazy.

Paul opens his heart and reveals the secret that drove him to spend his life the way he did: “the love of Christ controls us.” He had come to love them as Christ did. “But Paul saw more in Christ’s death than a way to feel about persons. He believed that on the cross sinful humanity had at least in principle been destroyed and that ‘in Christ’ a new humanity was being created...Paul had seen in God’s action by Christ’s death and resurrection a clue concerning the end and this awareness gave him great confidence” (Chafin, 239).

All have died in Christ. God is looking for people who are willing and eager to live for Him, instead of themselves. “Christians, who with Christ have died and risen to a brand new life, thus live a ‘_____ life” (Valleskey, 88).

Why is the promise “the old has gone, the new has come” especially good news for Corinth?

What is our message? “If you believe God, will not charge your sins against you.” – OR – “In Christ, what needs to be done has been done. God no longer charges your sins against you. Believe.”