

## 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

### The Ministry of Light

Paul is currently in the middle of his defense of His apostolic calling as a minister of the New Covenant, which began in **2:14-17** (READ). The primary method he has chosen to use in this defense is to display the radical contrast between his ministry in the New Covenant versus his opponents ministry of the continuation of the Old Covenant. While Paul's opponents, the Judaizers, correctly see the continuity between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant by means of promise and fulfillment, they do not see the discontinuity between the two covenants. The Judaizers have placed their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior. However, they continue to hold on to the Mosaic Law as if it still directly applies to the New Covenant church. Paul has no problem with former Jews wanting to continue many of the practices under the Old Covenant. However, Paul is unyielding against any thought of imposing the Mosaic Law upon the new Gentile believer either as a means of justification or sanctification. To do so is to continue to place a burdensome yoke upon the new believer that not even the Jews were able to bear.

The Judaizers continue to impose the letter of the Law upon the New Covenant people of God. Paul says, "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." Moses served God's people under a ministry of death carved in letters on stone. Because that covenant was unable to produce righteousness, the Covenant of Moses became a covenant of condemnation and would ultimately fade away in light of the surpassing glory of the New Covenant. The New Covenant is a ministry of life and righteousness. It exceeds the glory of the Old Covenant in that it gives what it promises and it is the permanent possession of the people of God.

One of the accusations the Judaizers are laying at Paul's feet is that he is manipulating and truncating the true gospel in order to dishonestly gain new converts to his ministry. The Judaizers believed that salvation came through faith in Jesus Christ plus keeping the Law of Moses. In other words, faith alone in Jesus Christ was not enough. All the followers of Jesus Christ, including Gentile believers, must place themselves under the Law of Moses and keep it if they are to have life.

But Paul saw this as contradictory to the Gospel, which says the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone saves us and grants us eternal life. In **chap. 2:17** Paul stresses the fact that he has always preached the gospel out of sincerity knowing that he has been called by God and is always performing the ministry before the face of God. Paul would never cut the gospel short or preach something else other than what Christ called him to preach because he knows that he is constantly being watched and examined by the all-omniscient eye of God.

It is this fact alone that produces confidence and boldness in Paul's ministry (**3:4, 12**). In **v. 1 of chap. 4**, Paul also points to the mercy of God as the foundation of his lack of discouragement in the ministry. Paul links the mercy of God with his being given the ministry. Paul looks back to his conversion experience on the road to Damascus where he was confronted by blinding light, the voice from heaven and his call into service. It was by God's mercy that God not only included Paul into the family of God but gave him the ministry of life. Paul was forever changed by the Damascus road meeting with Christ that he not only had boldness in his preaching but he could be completely forthright in proclaiming the message that forever changed him (**Phil. 3:7-14**).

Knowing that God has called him and given him the ministry of the gospel, Paul has confidence and boldness in proclaiming the ministry of permanent glory. Rather than cutting the gospel short, Paul boldly proclaims the full gospel to every man knowing that he is preaching the true gospel, which is the power of God to salvation. Paul doesn't have to fear whether or not God's people will receive the gospel because ultimately God is the one who has called him and given him the true gospel of salvation.

However, Paul's enemies are actually the ones who have corrupted the true gospel of faith alone in Christ alone. It is out of fear of what the Jews in Jerusalem would think that they have added the Law of Moses to simple faith in Christ. Paul calls them "peddlers of God's word" (**2:17**). In contrast to Paul's sincerity, the Judaizers

are using “disgraceful and underhanded ways.” They do use “cunning” and “tamper with God’s word.” Each of these characteristics describe the nature of Satan as he tries to deceive God’s people in calling into question the authority of God. It was Satan’s tactic to be cunning and to tamper with God’s word when he deceived Eve in the Garden.

Paul has the true gospel and he doesn’t have to use such tactics in order to see people come to faith in the message of life. He doesn’t have to manipulate people in order for them to believe his preaching. He is assured that for those who have been chosen by God, that it is a fragrance from life to life. But to those who are rejected by God it is a fragrance from death to death. God has ordained both those who will be saved and the message by which they will be saved. Therefore, since it is all of God’s providential work there is no need to tamper with the message.

So Paul tells us in **v. 2** then that he can be completely open and forthright with the gospel of grace. There is no need for Paul to defend himself by personally commending his ministry. All he needs to do is preach the gospel of Christ and the gospel itself commends his ministry. Again, Paul is faithful in doing this because he is always aware that God is watching and weighing his ministry.

The Judaizers accused Paul of obscuring the true gospel. He changed the message making it difficult for others to see how anyone could be saved. Well, Paul is willing to admit the charge that the gospel is veiled to some. For those who want to earn their way to heaven or to gain eternal life through the works of the Law, they cannot understand how someone can truly be saved through Paul’s gospel. This was one of the problem the Roman Catholic Church struggle with in Luther and Calvin’s day. The Reformers were saying that God justifies the wicked. For any Roman Catholic this doctrine was anathema. What they heard the Reformers say was that a holy God who is just in all his ways simply declares a sinner to be just and holy before him. But God said he would never justify the wicked. How then could the Reformers say that God is both holy and just and at the same time that he justifies the wicked? This is why the gospel is veiled for so many.

The answer to the age-old question is found in the “divine-exchange” or what Luther liked to call “alien righteousness.” It is true that God justifies those who still remain in their sin but he does so based upon the work of another. Jesus Christ, God’s only true Son, placed himself under God’s Law to perfectly obey all that God required so that he merited perfect righteousness before God (Active Obedience). Then Jesus Christ willingly laid down His own life upon the cross as our substitution to atone for our sins whereby he would cover our sin and satisfy the wrath of God. As our substitute, Jesus Christ received our sin and died in our place to atone for it that we might have full forgiveness of sin. But through faith alone we have been united to Jesus Christ so that His perfect righteousness is now considered truly ours. Therefore, Jesus Christ took our sin and we received His righteousness (the divine exchange) and God looks upon us (even though we are still sinners) as perfectly righteous in his eyes.

Now to those who are perishing (are headed for perdition) (**1 Cor. 1:18; Phil. 1:28; 3:19; 2 Thess. 2:10**) this gospel is both weak and foolish. We have already seen Paul use this phrase in **2:15** to speak of those whom God has rejected. In theology we refer to these as God’s reprobate whom God is pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will and for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, He actively passives over them and ordains them to eternal destruction to the praise of His glorious justice. In **chap. 3:14** we are told that they are perishing because God has hardened their hearts so that they cannot believe the gospel. They do not turn to the gospel to be saved. In **v. 4 of chap. 4** we are further told that they cannot see the gospel because the god of this world, Satan, has blinded them. In **11:13-15** Paul will warn:

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds.

Satan has blinded the reprobate of this world from seeing the gospel by disguising himself as an angel of light. In his deception, Satan sets himself up as a tempting substitute for Jesus Christ and for those who are perishing they are blinded by the substitute light, which is really a false light.

We should see not tension between what Paul says here in **v. 4** and what he said in **3:14**. Satan is the god of this age because God has sovereignly appointed him to be the god of this age. But remember that this age is passing away with the Mosaic order. Satan is trying to thwart God's ministry through deception and trickery, but Satan is God's devil; God's servant and he does only what God has ordained for him to do.

This gives Paul even greater assurance in the face of the threat of the Judaizers. They are only serving their god, the god of this age, by trying to manipulate God's elect and deceive them by disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. They may in fact be able to deceive many, but they will only be deceiving those who are perishing and who are already blinded by the god of this age. And all of this is under God's absolute sovereign decree who has already reprobated those who are perishing because God has sent Satan to blind and deceive them by disguising himself as an angel of light.

Therefore, Paul has no need of trying to manipulate the message. Rather, he can be completely open and forthright knowing that the God of all mercy is ultimately behind the ministry of the gospel. Therefore, the Judaizers are completely wrong in their criticisms of Paul. It's not Paul who has changed the message but in fact it is the Judaizers who have tampered with God's word and who are keeping many from seeing the true light of the gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ, who is the image of God.

These last two verses pick up the theme of Moses fellowshiping with God. Israel could never look upon God's face because she could never gain the needed righteousness through the Law that was necessary to enter into God's holy presence. However, we can now enter into God's presence the way Moses did through Jesus Christ. We can now have face to face fellowship with God who dwells in unapproachable light because we are entering in through the perfect, alien righteousness of Jesus Christ.

If we want to see the face of God the way Moses did, then we must look upon him through the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ (**Eph. 3:7-11**). Jesus is the perfect image of God and when we have seen one we have seen the other.

Therefore, in **v. 5** Paul can assure us that he is not proclaiming himself, but Jesus Christ as Lord (**Gal. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:23; Phil. 1:15-18** – preach Jesus Christ alone). This comes from the first confession of faith where Jesus is confessed to be the true sovereign one, which is ultimately a reference to Jesus as being God (**Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11; Col. 2:6**). This is another way of saying that Jesus is the express image of God. All the fullness of deity dwells in Him. Rather, than proclaim himself, Paul rightly sees himself as a slave of Jesus Christ who has been called by His name to serve him in life or in death.

This Jesus is the light of the first and second creation (**Isa. 49:6** “light of the nations”). If we want to see the glorious face of God, which is the longing of every one of God's creatures, then we must look not through Moses who glory is fading away and in reality does not exist, but we must look only through Jesus Christ who is the exact image of God.

**Amen!**

**-SDG-**