

## The Same Spirit of Faith (2 Corinthians 4:1–18)

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### Introduction

1. Second Corinthians 4 begins with a “*therefore*,” drawing a conclusion from the arguments posed in the previous chapters.

First, Paul explains what he said about his suffering in the first chapter (1:8–10).

Second, his main argument is that not *he* but *God* called and equipped him for his ministry among the Gentiles and particularly with the church in Corinth.

This understanding led him to avoid the approach his critics took in ministry. He stated he was not like some who were *peddlers* of God’s Word (2:17).

2. True believers are already victorious and, thus, triumphant in Christ. However, here is a conundrum. This victory is through defeat. The redeemed children of God are also seen as vanquished enemies of the victor led in the humiliating victory parade (2:14a). This explains Paul’s use of the term *mercy* in 4:1.

The also explains Paul’s speaking of having his ministry by the mercy of God. Mercy relates to wretchedness and misery, which describes the kind of creatures God uses to minister the gospel. Mercy qualifies the unqualified. Grace gives them the opportunity and mercy sustains them in it (1 Timothy 1:12, 13, 16).

3. Therefore, in Chapter 3 Paul argues that His confidence rests in God’s making him a competent minister of the new covenant (3:6). In the text before us, Paul elaborates on the work of God in both the minister and the sinner.

### I. The Gospel’s Effect on the Unregenerate (4:1–6)

1. This chapter is sandwiched between two declarations of “*we do not lose heart*” (vv. 1 and 16). No matter how difficult the path is, we are not discouraged, spiritless, worn out, and utterly hopeless. The reason is that we are wholly in the hands of God with respect to (1) the success of the gospel in the salvation of sinners, and (2) the consequences of gospel with respect to its rejection. God chose to put the gospel treasure in jars of clay (v. 7).
  - a. Paul understood that nothing he said or did could bring true success in the work of the gospel. He was just a servant, literally, a slave of God. Paul’s confidence in the success of his work rested not in himself but in the *mercy* God granted. Thus, he renounced prideful attempts to manipulate others with cunning devices that tamper with (Gk., “to handle deceitfully”) the Word of God.
  - b. Success in ministry was judged by open and honest proclamation of the truth commending the preacher to the conscience of the hearer. Adulteration of the truth in attempting to be successful reproaches God as if His truth was inadvisably harmful to the church. God have the truth, let it fall as He wills it.
2. Paul’s competency also rested in the lordship of Jesus, not his own ability. Only God can truly grant sinners repentance to acknowledge the truth, as Paul reminded Timothy (2 Timothy 2:24–26). God measures success by different standards than humans tend to use. Supposed failure in gospel work was not due to one’s lack of ability or credentials, but the spiritual blindness of the perishing.
  - a. Why would not everyone want to become a Christian if the gospel is so powerful and clear? The problem is not the gospel. The unbeliever’s rejection of it is not due to any fault in the truth, but to

the spiritual blindness of the hearer. This veiling is the work of the god of this world, Satan (Ephesians 2:2, 3), who has blinded them, preventing them from seeing the light of the gospel.

- b. Thus, Paul concluded, “*We proclaim not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake*” (v. 5). Only by humble submission to His lordship do they give evidence of “*the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*” (v. 6). As God spoke light into existence in the beginning, so only He can shine the light of truth into a sin-darkened heart.

## II. The Gospel’s Effect on Its Ministers (4:7–12)

1. Gospel work is demanding and difficult. It is impossible for anyone to persuade any sinner to be saved. Indeed, the mere presentation of the gospel creates opposition. God wants it this way so that the surpassing *power* (Gk, *dunamis*, effectual working) belongs to God and not to the preacher.
2. Paul was (1) *afflicted* (*thilbo*, put into a tight, restricted, and narrow place) in every way, but not crushed in it. He was (2) *perplexed* (at a loss and doubtful), but not driven to despair (to be utterly destitute of measures or resources, to renounce all hope). He was (3) *persecuted* (literally, to be put to flight—chased like a hunted animal), but not *forsaken* by God. (4) He was *struck down*, but not *destroyed*.
3. What and why? For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

What was his hope then? Paul had “*the same spirit of faith*” as David, who wrote: “*I believed, and so I spoke*” (Psalm 116:10), so Paul believed and spoke, not fearing any consequences but trusting that if he died in the process, God who raised the Lord Jesus would also raise him with Jesus and bring him along with the Corinthian believers into His eternal presence.

## Conclusion

So, Paul concluded, as we must also “*We do not lose heart*” (see Psalm 27:13,14: “*I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD*”).

1. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.
2. This affliction is both light and temporary, but it is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,
3. We are to focus our attention, not on temporary things in our immediate purview, but on the unseen things that have glorious and eternal value, because the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.