

Confession #3:

We've Not Depended on Christ Alone

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Text: 2 Corinthians 4

Date: May 22, 2011, 10:15am

Grace Community Bible Church

Introduction: Open your Bible this morning to **2 Corinthians 4**. We continue our series in “Confessions of an Imperfect Church. The confession from 2 Cor. 4 is “We’ve not Depended on Christ Alone”. I want to talk this morning about “Building a Ministry on Christ Alone”.

Think of a person you love that is without Jesus Christ. – Someone you’ve been praying for – perhaps a mother or father, a sibling, a child. Think of them praising God. Think of what they might be as someone lifting up their heart to God as a saved person. Now think of what it would be like for them if they were not to have the grace of God in their hearts and perish—eternally separated from God. All pass on the streets in and in the four walls of our houses are either saved or perishing.

The joy and hope that we have this morning is that the Gospel is powerful to save! The Gospel of Jesus Christ works. It is the vehicle that the Holy Spirit uses to turn the world upside down. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is powerful to transform the soul of the most hardened sinner.

Think of the person in your life right now that is the most hardened, the most far away from God, the one you would say is least likely to change their ways. The Gospel of Christ is powerful enough to change them! The Gospel works! You are here today because someone came to you and preached the Gospel, and God raised your sinful soul from the dead. You have “Christ in you, the hope of glory”.

What was Paul’s key to being an instrument of God to see so many converted. We know he had no power in himself. He relied utterly on the power of God. Consider **1 Corinthians 2:1-4**, “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

*A ministry will thrive only as much as it is commitment to the Great Commission specifically to share and apply the Gospel in *evangelism* and *discipleship*. I’m glad many Christians shared the Gospel with me. I can remember though the years many Christians witnessing to me.*

Share testimony

There is no reason I should be standing before you here today as a believer in Christ, much less a preacher of the Gospel. I was raised in a family that knew very little of the Lord Jesus Christ. I can think of more than 15 people that shared the Gospel with me before I actually came to Christ. “Some plant, some water, but God gives the increase”.

Why build a ministry on Christ alone? Because it is the only way we can be eternally effective. We can build all kinds of things with human power, but that which lasts forever is built with God’s power. Paul unpacks our responsibility as new covenant ministers in **2 Corinthians 4**.

Outline:

- The Gospel ministry is sovereignly **given** (3:18-4:1).
- The Gospel ministry should be carefully **guarded** (4:2-6).
- The Gospel ministry is powerfully **guided** (4:7).
- The Gospel ministry is eternally **glorious** (4:8-18).

I. The Gospel ministry is sovereignly given (3:18-4:1).

Paul begins by saying in **verse 1**, “Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.”

- A. **Since the Gospel ministry is sovereignly given [by God’s mercy] we should never be discouraged** (vs. 1). “we do not lose heart.”

Gospel Ministry is Humanly Impossible

I know Gospel ministry is difficult. The human heart is so hard, that sometimes we want to give up. We go out and try **evangelizing**, and it feels like **planting a harvest in the middle of the street**. But that’s why God gets all the glory. God takes out a heart of stone and puts in a heart of flesh. That’s the miracle of regeneration.

Sometimes the Great Commission seems **impossible**. I know the work of evangelism and discipleship can be extremely disappointing. You invest so much time into a person, and sometimes they fall away and do not continue.

The conversion of sinners by the power of the Gospel is God’s idea and by **His power**, not ours. If it were by our power, we **would have reason to be discouraged**. If it were dependent on our mercy, no one would be saved. Paul says there is no reason ever to be discouraged, because **God knew who you were and still chose you for the Gospel ministry**. It is given to us by the mercy of God. There is nothing in us that causes Him to choose you. **Your fitness for the Gospel ministry is based not on your goodness but on God’s grace.** You didn’t earn this ministry, so you shouldn’t be discouraged about it.

He Could Have Used Angels

He could have given the Gospel ministry to *angels*, but because He is so merciful, he gives it to *sinners* like you and me. Isn't God's mercy amazing? We should never lose heart because God's loving heart *yearns in mercy* to do an amazing work in sinners. He uses weak people like you and me, so that He will receive all the glory. If you are saved, God in mercy has given you a glorious ministry.

The Greatness of the Task

And when we look at the greatness of the task, our heart sinks. "Go into ALL the world". "Preach the Gospel to EVERY creature". It's overwhelming. It's too big. And it's true. If it's all up to you then it doesn't seem like a mercy.

Don't be overwhelmed. Don't look at the bigness of the Gospel ministry. Look at the **greatness of God**. And God has given you this ministry, because, as weak as you are, in mercy God wants to use you. God sovereignly gave you your ministry. He will sovereignly sustain you in it.

-never be discouraged.

- B. **Since the Gospel ministry is sovereignly given, we should always be mindful of what it is** (vs. 1). Paul refers to it in chapter 4:1: "Therefore, having this ministry..."

In chapter 3, Paul gives us a summary of Gospel ministry. He says:

- It's the "ministry of the new covenant
- It the "ministry of the Spirit
- It's the "ministry of righteousness / justification

It's a ministry that makes enemies of God into friends. It's a ministry that takes people ripped apart by sin and heals them. It's a transforming ministry.

When we lift up Jesus Christ for people to behold, God saves people and they are transformed. Paul says the "veil [of blindness] is removed" when someone turns to the Lord.

Here's a description of what happens:

2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV) — "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.**"

1. It's about **beholding** and **becoming**
2. It's not just about **justification**, its about **sanctification**
3. It's not just about the **death** of Christ to forgive you but the **life** of Christ to transform you.

The Gospel is the only thing that works to transform people.

Transition: We are all responsible to participate in preaching the Gospel, but we are only instruments. The Holy Spirit of God does the actual work. If this ministry is beyond your power, then God gets all the glory!!

-The Gospel ministry is sovereignly given.

II. The Gospel ministry should be carefully guarded (vs. 2-6).

How do we guard the Gospel?

A. We reject underhanded ways (vs. 2-3).

God is the author of our faith. He sovereignly draws sinner. So we ought to reject underhanded ways.

2 Corinthians 4:2a (ESV) — “But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper (*dilute*) with God’s word...”

1. We are not “to practice cunning” or trickery

No sinner ever got tricked into being born again. Conversion is a miracle wrought *not* by clever deception, but by the Spirit of Truth. And so as those who have been touched by the Spirit of Truth, we reject the old way of living and sly selling a bill of goods. We cast ourselves as Christ’s ministers on the mercy of God.

Let me say it another way, God doesn’t use underhanded ways like *gimmicks* or *manipulation* or *toying with people’s emotions*. None of those things has ever converted one soul. They just bring goats into the church. They are fair weather hearers. They’ll stay with Christ as long as everything’s going well in life and nobody offends them.

We don’t use bait and switch.

It’s easy to substitute human solutions for the Gospel to try to gain more people. We want to be liked. We want to solve everyone’s problems. The carnal thirst for prominence in all of us tempts us to invent ways other than radical conversion to attract people to the church.

We tell sinners to come to Christ because He will help their family. We promise God will give them a better financial outlook. Jesus becomes the Santa Claus that can give you “your best life now”. But what happens when their family and finances fall apart? They stop following Christ. They’ve

come to Christ **NOT** because they are sinners in need of forgiveness. They've followed Him *for what He can give them*.

2. We are not "to tamper with [dilute] God's Word..."

Definition: The word **tamper** was used of wine merchants diluting their wine. Paul would not **dilute God's word** by watering it down or changing it to suit what people want to hear.

- Churches turn to psychology instead of confronting sin problems they "blame it on the brain". We tell them it's a chemical problem. It's not their fault. We bring false comfort instead of having sinners deal with the crushing weight of their sin.
- Theological concepts of sin, divine judgement, and God's holiness are avoided. Instead sinners are made to feel comfortable in the service. Many churches are more concerned about a comfortable atmosphere than a cutting message.
- Someone wisely said, "*The Gospel is ours to proclaim, not to edit.*"¹ We are called to guard the truth – we don't need to improve upon it. It cannot be improved upon.
- We want the power of the Gospel present. It will bring people face to face with the wretchedness of sin and the holiness of God. It will leave them crushed, despairing, and brought to nothing, crying out for the mercy of Christ.

There is a temptation to water down the preaching of the Gospel so unbelievers don't feel uncomfortable and offended. Many churches are redesigning the Gospel and stripping it of its power instead of relying on the Spirit of grace to open people's eyes. Sadly, some are more interested in "**entertaining the goats rather than feeding the sheep**" (Spurgeon).

True Christians are against watering the Gospel down by making the Gospel a gimmicky, trite, "cool" faddish thing that is redesigned to fit along side the world's idols. We must not rest our ministry on what is "in" and popular and accepted, but on what is **true**.

When we water down the Gospel, the church becomes overrun with lost people, and eventually die when we water down the Gospel. We must look for true conversion. We must not let anyone into church membership just because they have prayed a prayer or given assent to a doctrinal statement. If a person shows no visible signs of faith or repentance, we should wait to see the fruit of the Spirit demonstrated in that person's life. There should be

¹ James White, Alpha and Omega Ministries.

evidences of genuine conversion.

We don't need to turn to gimmicks and watering down the Gospel. Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (**Romans 1:16**).

How do we guard the Gospel?

A. ...We **reject** underhanded ways.

B. We **use** with the truth of the Word of God (vs. 2b).

2 Corinthians 4:2 (ESV) — "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."

-We think we need to learn cross cultural studies before we can evangelize. It's helpful so we don't offend, but we are commanded to preach the Gospel to EVERY CREATURE.

Look at the appeal here. Every human being, no matter who they are has an innate knowledge of God's law. You've got to bring them to very judgment seat of God. Whether it is a complete stranger or a parent or a loved one, this is how you appeal to them. With soberness.

"Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ" (**Rom. 10:17**). I like to take a chapter from the Bible (usually Romans 3), and within a few minutes, a person is listening. I not using gimmicks. I am commending myself to their conscience. I am saying things like, "We are far more guilty than we could ever imagine". We are going to stand before God one day.

GUARD THE GOSPEL

We **reject** underhanded ways.

We **use** with the truth of the Word of God. (vs. 2b).

C. We **realize** on the main problem is an impossible one (vs. 3-4).

Verses 3-4, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. 4 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."

The problem is not crime, rape, drugs, gangs, out of wedlock children. The problem is man is blinded by the wicked one. He loves his sin.

Lost people everywhere are blinded, and they are in bondage to this world system that the devil has set up. The wicked one has his hands in the media, the educational system

We **reject** underhanded ways.

We **reason** with the Word of God. (vs. 2b).

We **resist** with the wicked one. (vs. 3-4).

...

D. We **rely on God to work** (vs. 5-6).

What is the only hope to change people's lives? –Ministry that is miraculous
Verses 5-6, “5 For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. 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.”

The issue is not how we package the Gospel, but that we preach it. All Christians pray for souls, because we know God must convert them.

1. **We do not promote ourselves.** We try to get out of the way! It is so easy to fall into a man-centered mindset and create a *celebrity culture* in Christianity. We must never *compare ourselves among ourselves*. God clearly says He will share His glory with nobody.

- What would Elijah do in some of our churches? Jeremiah would weep. Elijah would clear out the place. No one would be comfortable. Paul would be rejected and asked never to come back because he's not slick enough!
2. **Paul was not an eloquent preacher.** The Corinthian church said of him (in **2Co 10:10**), “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.” He never bragged about himself. Instead, he said “If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness” (**2Co 11:30**).
3. **We must depend on the grace of God to convert sinners.** Just as the Spirit of God hovered over the void and darkness and God said, “Let their be light”! So the same miracle takes place when one sinner comes to repentance.
 - Regeneration is described as a new creation, a resurrection, a new birth. If you notice, we are passive in all those things. God must work to bring that about. As evangelists, we must rely on the mercy and power of God to make the message clear to our audience.
 - We must not pretend that our children are saved if there is no evidence.

- We must resist the desire to save our converts ourselves. We are not the Savior. I can't save anyone. **John 6:44**, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." John 6:37, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out." Jesus is the **Author** of our faith (Heb. 12:1-2). He begins the good work in us (Phil 3:6).
- Example, my children... For months each one would ask me "Daddy can I be saved." I would spend hours with each one and carefully explain the Gospel in a way they could understand. Each time I would point them to Jesus. I would say "You need to go to Jesus for yourself. I cannot save you. You've got to go to Him and He will give you the assurance".

I cannot carry my children into heaven. They must be raised from the dead themselves.

- Ultimately, God must work! We cannot save anyone!

The Gospel ministry is sovereignly *given*
 The Gospel ministry should be carefully *guarded*
 But thirdly...

III. The Gospel ministry is powerfully guided (vs. 7).

Verse 7, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us."

What we are going to find out is that when you looked at the apostle Paul, he was just a ragged ball of weakness! Paul is dealing with the accusation made by some new teachers in the Corinthian church that his ministry was *weak* and *powerless*. Paul's response was this – "*I AM weak and powerless, but the Gospel God gave me isn't.*"

Don't you often feel WEAK as a Christ? You probably feel the weakest just after you've knocked on the stranger's door to give him the Gospel!

Paul asks in another place, "How shall they hear without a preacher?" But you say, "I'm weak". Exactly. That's why God will use you. Listen again to how Paul describes this.

Verse 7, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us."

Jars of Clay

“Jars of clay?” What does Paul mean? It has been said that the Roman Empire ran on olive oil. It was used in cooking, bathing, medicine, ceremonies, lamps, and cosmetics. For decades, olive oil from southern Spain was shipped to Rome in large clay jugs. Those jugs, not worth sending back, were discarded in a growing heap of broken shards known as Monte Testaccio. The fragments of an estimated 25 million clay pots created that man-made hill, which stands today on the bank of the Tiber River in Rome. In the ancient world, the value of those pots was not their beauty but their contents.

Because of this, the first-century followers of Christ would have clearly understood Paul’s illustration of the life of Jesus in every believer. “But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Cor. 4:7).

Our bodies, like those clay pots, are temporary, fragile, and expendable. In our modern world that highly values outward beauty; we would be wise to remember that our greatest treasure is the life of Jesus within us. By God’s grace and power, may we live so that others can see Christ in us.

We need the filling of the Holy Spirit over and over and over again so that we might be filled up and poured out with Christ. We are just the clay pots. Jesus is the true treasure within us.

The Gospel ministry is sovereignly *given*
The Gospel ministry should be carefully *guarded*
The Gospel ministry is powerfully *guided*
... The Gospel ministry is eternally *glorious*

IV. **Finally, the Gospel ministry is eternally glorious** (vs. 8-18). In verses 8-18 we have a record of Paul’s suffering.

When we die, the only thing we are going to bring with us is Gospel fruit. Remember that. After all our efforts and plans, all we can say, “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last”.

A. **Preaching the Gospel is anything but glorious on this earth** (vs. 8-15). It’s hard. Paul says, “endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” To be used of God, you’ve got to be relentless and committed – not for a reward on this earth! You are going to often receive hardship. ***You’ve got to have thick skin and a big heart to evangelize.*** And often you’ll invest large amounts of time into evangelizing people, and often, you see no visible fruit. Listen to Paul.

He says in **verses 8-9**, “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of

Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.”

Application: We often complain that it’s hard to evangelize. Paul was willing to go to any length to lift up the name of Christ.

B. Preaching the Gospel is possible by looking to future glorious fruit (vs. 16-18). He knew the eternal glory of the Gospel was worth carrying to people at all costs. It was worth it because the of the glory of Christ!!!

====Skip down to verse 16. Paul returns to the first theme of our great enthusiasm for the Gospel. We are so far from discouragement, because we know God is at work.

Verse 16, “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this **light momentary affliction** is preparing for us an **eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison**, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

Paul said he would not lose heart because he looked upon these deep grievous trials he was experiencing as a “light momentary affliction.” What is Paul talking about? Paul had every reason to want to give up. He had been beaten to an inch of his life with 39 lashes. He had been shipwrecked, stoned, and left for dead on many an occasion. Yet he never gave up. His only strength was Jesus.

Paul’s view was for the glory that follows. There was an eternal weight of glory that far outweighed all his suffering.

Paul said, in **Galatians 4:19**, “my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!” Our momentary suffering and sacrifices are worth it for the souls for whom Christ died.

Conclusion:

Propping up Lazarus illustration

Building the Gospel on anything else is as silly as going into the grave of Lazarus and propping up dead Lazarus. How silly to FAKE the resurrection of Lazarus. We need God to put life into people. Unless they are they are raised with Christ they will fall away!

We need to be engaged with evangelism and discipleship, so that our loved ones might hear the voice of the Son of God and lived.