

Lesson 7: II Corinthians 4:1-6

1) Introduction

- a) The first six verses of Chapter 4 are a continuation of Paul's discussion about his ministry and self-commendation.
- b) Key words in this section are the same as those in Chapter 3: ministry, commend, veiled, minds, glory, likeness, Lord, hearts, and face.
- c) A new element in this section is Paul's discussion of the light that shines forth from Christ's gospel.

2) **1 Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;**

- a) In verse 1, Paul moves from the general experience of all Christians in 3:18 to his own particular experience as an apostle. The word "therefore" links this verse to the preceding verse that speaks of each Christian reflecting the Lord's glory and being transformed into Christ's likeness.
 - i) **2 Corinthians 3:18** But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.
- b) From the context, we can determine that the "we" in verse 1 is not the same group as the "we all" in 3:18.
 - i) Verse 18 applies to every Christian, but starting in verse 1 Paul focuses on himself and his coworkers, and especially on himself. He makes similar statements about his apostolic calling elsewhere:
 - (1) 1 Timothy 1:13-16 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. 14 And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. 15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. 16 Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.
- c) God has made him sufficient for a ministry like that of Moses who conveyed God's laws to human beings, but unlike Moses, Paul's ministry writes these laws spiritually on people's hearts.
 - i) God took the blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent man (1 Timothy 1:13) and

turned him into a devoted apostle and humble servant of Christ.

- ii) Paul's language here shows that he regards his ministry as a gift from God rather than some personal achievement. But with this gift comes the formidable responsibility to spread the Gospel faithfully and to speak the truth forthrightly.
 - iii) The reference to mercy also reminds his readers that God showed mercy to him by delivering him from deadly persecution and giving him the strength to carry on his ministry.
- d) The verb translated "we faint not" or "we do not lose heart" can have a variety of meanings.
- i) It can mean to become discouraged, and in the next section Paul lists plenty of reasons why he might lose heart in this sense of the word. The constant threat of persecution, so fierce at times that it caused him to despair of his own life, and the backstabbing of fellow Christians would quickly demoralize almost anyone.
 - ii) Others contend that the verb means to become weary, and in particular spiritual weariness or spiritual depression.
 - iii) If we allow the context to help ascertain the meaning of the verb, the translation "to be cowardly or timid" is best. Verse 1 then parallels 3:12 ("Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech.").
 - iv) Paul is not fainthearted. One commentator said such faintheartedness "takes refuge in silence and inactivity in order to escape criticism and therefore is the opposite of the verb used here."
 - v) Corinth was a difficult place to be bold and courageous! It was surrounded without by a sea of sin and encompassed within by a sea of troubles. Paul faced harsh criticism from some of those who had been led to Christ through his own evangelistic efforts.
 - vi) There have always been people in the church (usually a small group) who are largely inactive except when they are unleashing barrages of criticism at those in the church who are largely active, and Corinth seems to have been no exception. The only way to escape criticism from such people is to join them, but Paul would have none of that. He had received mercy; he fainted not!
- e) Paul fainted not -- what an understatement! Paul was bold and courageous in the face of the fiercest opposition. He faced every type of persecution, including physical persecution that left him near death and eventually led to his martyrdom. He faced assaults from within the church and from without the church. He fought

with false teachers who followed him around trying to undo everything that he was doing.

- i) Why was Paul so bold? Because of the gospel. Our boldness in proclaiming the gospel should come from the gospel itself. We can be bold in our proclamation because what we proclaim is not from ourselves -- we proclaim the word of God. Boldness follows naturally when what we say begins with "Thus saith the Lord."
- ii) Spurgeon: "The preacher should either speak in God's name or hold his tongue. My brother, if the Lord has not sent you with a message, go to bed, or to school, or mind your farm; for what does it matter what you have to say of your own? If heaven has given you a message, speak it out as he ought to speak who is called to be the mouth of God."

3) 2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

- a) In this verse, Paul list three practices he repudiates and then states what he does instead.
- b) First, he affirms that we have renounced secret and shameful ways (literally "the hidden things of shame").
 - i) Other translations vary: "all shameful secrecy," "secret and shameful ways," "the shameful things that one hides," "deeds that people hide for very shame," and "secret things of which people are ashamed."
 - ii) While Paul does not explain the shameful deeds that he and his coworkers have repudiated, he most likely is alluding again to the peddlers mentioned in 2:17.

(1) 2 Corinthians 2:17 For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.
 - iii) When Paul says he renounces such shameful practices he does not imply that he use to engage in them. He never did resort to them.
 - iv) The phrase contrasts his own boldness with those who attempt to cover up their true intentions. Those who act honorably as Paul does do not need to cloak their deeds in secrecy but are open to the view of the entire world Christian and non-Christian.
 - v) **Ephesians 5:11-13** And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of

darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.

c) Second, Paul repudiates all deception.

- i) The noun "deception" translates a Greek word that literally means "the readiness to do anything." When used in a bad sense it applies to someone who is sly, crafty, deceitful, and tricky. Such persons will stoop to any ruse to accomplish their dishonorable purposes and they usually resort to secret plots and intrigues.**
- ii) Some preachers would do well to pay particular attention here. They serve large congregation with a "liberal" group and a "conservative" group, and they choose their words carefully to avoid offending either group. They deliberately choose words that they hope will mean one thing to the first group and something else to the second group. What is that if it is not deception?**
- iii) In 11:3, Paul connects such cunning to Satan who beguiled Eve. (2 Corinthians 11:3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.)**
- iv) The word also occurs in 1 Corinthians 3:19 where Paul cites Job 5:13 ("He catches the wise in their craftiness") to denounce the foolish wisdom of this world that thinks it can outfox God. Worldly shrewdness offers only fleeting success and will eventually ensnare the clever in their own tangled web of deceit.**
- v) Although we will see in 12:16 that some had apparently charged Paul with trickery, trickery is an attribute of the devil, not of the apostles. Satan deceived people from the first book in the Bible to the last:
 - (1) Genesis 3:13 And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."**
 - (2) Revelation 12:9 So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.****
- vi) It is also possible to deceive ourselves. (1 John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.)**
- vii) The deceiver is the opposite of someone who is candid and forthright. As servants of God, we must maintain the very highest standards of honesty and integrity and never engage in deception (either of ourselves or others) -- and**

that applies not just to our leaders, but to every Christian.

viii) Deception is the work of Satan! The truth is on our side.

d) Third, Paul repudiates any misuse of the word of God.

i) Only here in the New Testament do we find the expression "falsifying the word of God." Again he is likely pointing back to the statement in 2:17 where he contrasts himself with those who peddle the word of God.

ii) Paul's Jewish opponents had accused him of watering down the demands of the law with respect to the Gentile converts. (Acts 21:21)

iii) But Paul insists that unlike the con men and peddlers, he did not adjust, water down, or tamper with the gospel to stroke his listeners egos or to avoid ruffling their feathers. He is not a flatterer using God's Word only to delight the audience and fill them with enchanting interpretations that never question their conduct or character.

(1) Jeremiah 5:30-31 An astonishing and horrible thing Has been committed in the land: 31 The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule by their own power; And My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?

(2) Truth may be scarce, but the supply has always exceeded the demand!

iv) Note that verses 2-3 give us three synonyms: word of God, truth, and gospel. When Paul says "the word of God" is he speaking of the Old Testament or the Gospel? Likely, both because the gospel is in both. Paul preached the Old Testament as fulfilled in Jesus Christ, but he also recognized that his own letters were the word of God (1 Cor. 14:37). Peter referred to Paul's letters as Scripture in 2 Peter 3:16.

e) Finally Paul lays out what he does do: he sets forth the truth plainly.

i) This last phrase again relates to his bold speech in chapters 10-13. He defends himself as one who has the truth of Christ in 11:10, who speaks the truth even when it can be dismissed as foolish boasting 12:6, and who does nothing against the truth but only for the truth in 13:8.

ii) Paul never compromised the truth of the gospel even when the odds against him seemed overwhelming. He proclaimed it boldly, and he proclaimed it plainly.

f) The last part of this verse is very telling, for it reveals that Paul entrusts himself to every man's conscience provided that conscience is "in the sight of God" -- that

is, provided it is guided by God.

- i) We noted earlier that "conscience" refers to the human faculty that recognizes right and wrong, the norms of moral conduct.
 - ii) A conscience guided by God can properly evaluate good and evil, can properly examine the conduct of self and others, and will obey authorities instituted by God. Like the needle of a compass pointing north, a conscience in the sight of God will invariably point to God. Humans can examine what Paul says, and, if Satan has not blinded their minds, they can see its truth.
 - iii) Paul thus invites everyone to appraise his work with a conscience that is accountable to God. Unlike the peddlers, Paul has nothing to fear from judgment by such a human conscience. If that human judgment goes against Paul, it condemns not Paul but the one whose conscience is not guided by God.
- g) The phrase "commending ourselves" in the Greek and Roman world should not be understood as something negative.
- i) The Corinthians would not have criticized Paul for commending himself to them since that was the normal way to establish relationships in the ancient world. Paul only emphasizes here how the way he has commended himself to the Corinthians and to others differs from the ways some others have commended themselves, by means of letters.
 - ii) Paul's commendation depends entirely on whether he upholds the truth of the gospel. His straightforward proclamation of the truth of the gospel is the only thing they can commend him as a preacher of the gospel.

4) 3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

- a) What Paul refers to here as "our gospel" is what he refers to as "Christ's gospel" in 2:12. It is the gospel proclaimed by the apostles and their representatives.
- b) Paul's adversaries must have accused him of presenting a gospel that was veiled and ineffective. By contrast, they no doubt claimed their gospel was open and popular --- they met the needs of their audience; they gave people what they wanted to hear; they proclaimed a health and wealth gospel.
 - i) Paul's gospel, they complained, was hidden. And Paul does not reject their accusation totally, as evidenced by the beginning words in verse 3 -- "but if" or "but even if." There is some sense in which the gospel is hidden as Paul will now explain, but it has not been hidden by God or by the apostles and it is not hidden to everyone.
 - ii) The cause for the hiding of the gospel lay not in the gospel itself, which is

clear and simple, nor in Christ himself, who commissioned the apostles, but in the hearers who rejected the gospel.

- c) Paul returns here to the theme that the gospel is an odor of death to those who were perishing (2:15-16).
 - i) One commentator discussed the crisis of decision that is always presented by the gospel. He said what is at stake in the question of faith is an either-or. God or Satan. There is not a third thing between. No one is neutral in this war.
- d) That some reject the gospel in no way discredits Paul's ministry. The gospel is veiled only to those who are lost.
 - i) As one commentator put it, the reason or cause of this fact was not to be sought either in the nature of the gospel or the mode of its exhibition but in the state of character of those who rejected it. The sun does not cease to be the sun although the blind do not see it.
 - ii) In the previous section Paul used the veil metaphorically as a symbol of the people's hard heartedness. If the gospel is veiled to some, it is because of the sad state of their own hearts.
- e) What veils his gospel is that which Paul absolutely refuses to compromise: the scandal of the cross.
 - i) The veiling has nothing to do with the particular way Paul communicates the gospel. It has to do instead with the fundamental nature of the gospel that strikes Greeks as foolishness and Jews as scandalous.
 - ii) The Messiah that God sent to save Israel was not a figure of glory the deposed Israel's pagan oppressors and restored her fortunes in the world. Instead he suffered and died on the cross and such a fate made a mockery of Jewish expectations and became a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense that remains so to this very day.
 - iii) Even today the cross is an offense to many, even to some who call themselves Christians. The Christian gospel offends those who want a more tasteful gospel, one with less blood and no cross to carry.
- f) Paul had suffered from the same blindness that darkened the vision of some in Israel. His zealous campaign to be a good Jew kept him from being what God intended him to become -- an apostle of Christ to the Gentiles.
 - i) "Only after Christ captured him did he submit to God's righteousness and recognize God's glory in Christ. When the divine light was caused to shine in his heart, all pride and boasting vanished. In his profound humiliation and

shame, he could see God's compelling glory in Christ. By identifying with Christ who endured the humiliation of death on the cross, Paul's pride and boasting were abolished and so was the veil that hid God's glory in Christ."

g) Paul's own sufferings also veiled his gospel because people do not want a suffering apostle who looks like a prisoner of war led in chains any more than they want a suffering Messiah who invites them to take up their cross and follow him.

i) The Corinthians looked at Paul and saw nothing glorious at all.

ii) Many fancy worldly triumph, success, and preeminence that comes at minimal cost and exertion. They want something for nothing, and such an attitude makes them easy prey for the unscrupulous peddler who panders to their selfish aspirations.

h) As Christians are now being transformed into the image of the glory of Christ so those who reject Christ, the image of God, are now being malformed into the image of the god of this age, whom they serve.

i) That god, however, wreaks only blindness, death, and destruction. The evidence of this false god's work in their lives is unmistakable in their moral deformity and spiritual collapse. See Romans 1:18-32.

ii) Spurgeon well says, "According to the text, he that believes not on Jesus Christ is a lost man. God has lost you; you are not his servant. The church has lost you; you are not working for the truth. The world has lost you really; you yield no lasting service to it. You have lost yourself to right, to joy, to heaven. You are lost, lost, lost . . . It is not only that you will be lost, but that you are lost . . . lost even now."

5) 4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

a) Paul tells us in verse 4 that the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers.

i) The phrase "god of this age" occurs only here in the New Testament and most understand it as a reference to Satan.

ii) Some however object that the monotheist Paul would not attribute a divinity to an evil spirit. In 1 Corinthians 8:5, Paul dismisses them as "the so-called gods."

(1) 1 Corinthians 8:5-6 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), 6 yet for us

there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.

- iii)** Some of the very earliest theological innovators seized on Verse 4 to foist their errors on others.
- (1)** In the first few centuries of the Christian age, Gnosticism promulgated its doctrine that not God but an evil god had created and now controlled the world. Marcion used this text to make his case for an inferior creator God and a supreme savior God.
- (2)** Opposing this false doctrine, many theologians wanted to deprive Satan of the title "god" and ascribe it only to God. Thus, Tertullian argued that the god of this age in verse 4 is God himself, translating the verse "to those unbelievers of this age whose minds God has blinded."
- (a)** But before we dismiss the translation out of hand, we should consider a similar statement Paul made elsewhere:
- (i)** 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.
- (b)** But most commentators argue that the Greek word order in verse 4 will not support such a translation.
- (i)** Also, we know from 2 Peter 3:9 that "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."
- (ii)** Further, if Paul was referring to God here, it is strange that he does not characterize him as the God of all ages rather than simply the God of this age.
- (iii)** Also, the reference to "their god is their stomach" in Philippians 3:19 shows that Paul can use the term "god" for something other than God. Thus, calling Satan "god" in this context does not mean that Satan is a real god any more than our stomachs are a real god.
- (iv)** Calvin: "The devil is called the god of this age in no other way than Baal was called the god of those who worshipped him or the dog the god of Egypt."
- iv)** Paul must be referring to Satan as the god of this age. He classifies Satan as

a "god" because he has a dominion, however limited by the one true God, and he has subjects, who are "unbelievers."

- (1)** In Luke 4:6-7, Satan said to Jesus, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours." And Jesus did not correct him. In fact, if Satan was unable to deliver what he promised in verse 7, then how was this a temptation?
 - (2)** Jesus calls Satan the prince of this world in John 12:31, 14:30, and 16:11. Paul calls Satan the prince of the power of the air in Ephesians 2:2. Here Paul calls Satan the god of this world.
 - (3)** Who could deny that Satan is the popularly elected ruler of this present world?
- v)** Whatever he is called, Satan is the adversary of God and his people, and he has the world as an armory.
- (1)** Satan is capable of transforming himself into an angel of light (11:14) to deceive people. Through counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders, he employs his evil schemes to deceive those who are perishing (2 Thess 2:9). He prowls around like a roaring lion searching for prey to devour (1 Peter 5:8).
 - (2)** Verse 4 affirms that Satan's dominion, which consists of lawlessness, darkness, unbelief, the worship of idols, and moral defilement (6:14-7:1) is fundamentally incongruous with the kingdom of light ruled by God's beloved son. (Colossians 1:13)
 - (3)** It also reminds us that Satan rules only this age, which in any case is judged and fallen and coming to nothing. (Gal. 1:4; 1 Cor. 2:6)
 - (4)** Paul was fully confident that the God of peace would soon crush Satan under their feet. (Romans 16:20)
- vi)** Satan has been defeated by the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:15). In his death throes, however, Satan still has the strength to beseige human minds and to incite them to embrace and exalt evil rather than God.
- (1)** He continues to try to blind people to his defeat by leading them to disdain the scandal of the cross and to look for glory elsewhere.
 - (2)** The contrast is striking: Preachers drive away the darkness of the world with Christ's illuminating gospel. Satan strikes unbelievers with blindness so that their minds are unable to see the light of the gospel.

(3) The mind is the chief object of Satan's ploys. Humans make themselves susceptible to his devices with their preoccupation with the transient, unspiritual, earthly realm. The mind blinded by Satan cannot think straight, and it rebels against God's truth.

(a) **Ephesians 2:1-3** And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh **and of the mind**, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

(4) It is the minds of the unbelieving which have been blinded. Of course, Satan also works on the heart and the emotions of the lost, but his main battleground is the mind. Can't we see a strategy of Satan in working hard to make people think less and learn less and use their minds less? This also is why God has chosen the word to transmit the gospel, because the word touches our minds, and can touch minds the god of this age has blinded. No one who discounts words is doing the work of God. Satan would love nothing better than to replace the word of God in our minds with visual images and motion pictures.

(5) When Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion* came out, someone said I should see it because afterward I would never partake of the Lord's Supper the same way again. That is exactly why I did **NOT** see the movie! I do not want to have my mind filled with a motion picture when I should be thinking about Christ!

vii) We can see Satan blinding unbelievers all around us.

(1) He blinds people with worldliness.

(2) He blinds people with technology and self sufficiency.

(3) He blinds people with politics and humanism.

(4) He blinds people with false religion.

(a) Islam, for example, is casting a veil over much of the world -- both literally and figuratively!

(5) Our mission is to shine the light of the gospel on those who are being blinded by Satan.

viii) Notice that those who are blinded are unbelievers. They are not innocent victims of Satan's blinding work. Satan's work upon them is not the only reason they are blinded.

- (1) John 3:19 says, "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."
 - (2) Matthew 6:23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!
 - (3) Though men love the darkness, and choose the darkness, Satan still works hard to keep them blinded to the glorious gospel of light and salvation in Jesus. Satan wants them to remain in the dark until that day when both he and they will be cast into outer darkness.
 - (a) Matthew 8:12 But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."
- ix) The word translated as "light" in verse 4 occurs only here in the New Testament and may have a more active meaning -- "an enlightenment that enlightens."
- (1) What the spiritually blinded are prevented from seeing is the glory of Christ who is the image of God.
 - (2) Christ is "the brightness of his glory and the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:3). Through Jesus Christ, the Father's glory is made visible to mankind (John 1:14, 14:9). In Jesus dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9). He is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15).
 - (3) In Paul's world an image was not considered something distinct from the object it represented as if it were only a facsimile or reproduction. As the image of God, Christ brings clarity to our hazy notions of the immortal, invisible God who lives in unapproachable light. (1 Timothy 1:17; 6:16)
 - (4) In John 14:9, Jesus said "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father." It is a very comforting thought to know that in God the Father there is no Christ unlikeness!
 - (5) How different is the one true God from the so-called god of this fallen world!
- 6) 5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.**
- a) What did Paul preach?
 - i) 1 Corinthians 1:23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a

stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

- ii) 1 Corinthians 2:2 For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.
 - iii) 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:
- b) Paul writes in verse 3 about our gospel being veiled, and such a statement shows how closely he identifies himself with the gospel that he was set apart to preach. But he knows full well that the gospel is not about him. "We do not preach ourselves."
- i) Paul despised the partisan spirit among the Corinthians because he desired no honor for himself. As John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said in John 3:30, "He must increase, but I must decrease," so Paul states "we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord."
 - ii) We have all likely had the misfortune of hearing sermons at the conclusion of which we have learned more about the preacher than about the Lord. We learn what the preacher thinks, but not what God thinks. We learn what the preacher has done, but not what God has done. We learn what the preacher likes and dislikes, but not what God likes and dislikes.
 - iii) "Not every speaker is a preacher, for many orators in the pulpit present eloquence but not the Word of God. They preach themselves instead of the Lord Jesus Christ. As such, they have become entertainers who draw a crowd to tell them what their itching ears want to hear (2 Tim 4:3). But such orators are not endowed with the authority of the Scriptures, for they never say "This is what the Bible says." A preacher must not only know the Word of God, he must proclaim it, must be utterly convinced of it, and must live it."
 - iv) Amos 8:11 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. (And sadly that famine has struck in most modern day "churches.")
 - v) Ezekiel 23:35 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thou hast forgotten me, and cast me behind thy back, therefore bear thou also thy lewdness and thy whoredoms.
- c) Paul's ministry may be far more glorious than that of Moses but it is not about his own personal glorification. What follows in Chapter 4 makes this reality clear. The gospel is not about Paul and his strength and virtue. It is about Christ, who imparts strength and virtue to frail, weak human beings and delivers them from

Satan's bondage.

- d) Paul's assertion that he does not preach himself was likely intended to take a swipe at his rivals, whom he believed did preach themselves. They had infiltrated the church with a self promoting swagger and boastfulness and twisted the gospel to serve their own selfish ends.
- e) No one is immune from the temptation to manipulate the ministry to build a following rather than to build up the congregation or to exploit the Gospel's drama for the purpose of glorifying the speaker.
 - i) Jonathan Edwards was one of the most famous theologians in American history. Although he died at 55, he had a great influence on the religious sensibilities of the nation, becoming a major force in bringing about the revival in the 1740's known as "The Great Awakening." One his most famous sermons was entitled "Sinners in the hands of an angry God."
 - ii) Jonathan Edwards read his sermons in a monotone voice, rarely looking at his audience, fearing that his personality would interfere with the message that was being presented. He did want to reach people with clever and orchestrated psychological manipulations. He sought to convince the people of their lost spiritual condition because of the truth of the message being presented, rather than the hype of emotion and sentiment.
 - iii) The gospel is the power of God and it does not need the gimmicks of men.
- f) The temptation to preach ourselves is fed by congregations who are prone to like to be entertained and to enjoy a minister's self exhibition and are prone to indulge in personality cult.
 - i) Clearly Corinth was such a congregation. They may have encouraged Paul's rivals in their boasting and berated him for his failure to display more dramatically his apostolic prowess.
- g) Paul has used "seeing" imagery throughout the section, but the truth of the gospel can only be appropriated through hearing the preached word.
 - i) It is not blinded eyes that do not see, but blinded minds that do not hear and submit. Paul saw the risen Christ on the road to Damascus but it was God's message through Ananias that redirected his life and guided him along the path of loving service and obedience.
 - ii) Paul was not converted on that road to Damascus. He was converted in the city of Damascus when Ananias preached the gospel to him. Acts 22:16 leaves no doubt that Paul remained in his sins following his meeting with Christ in Acts 9.

- h)** Consequently Paul preaches two things: Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus's sake.
- i)** The first item is not surprising: Jesus Christ is Lord.
- (1)** Christless preaching quickly degenerates into vapid moralism.
 - (2)** “To make the end of preaching the inculcation of virtue, to render men honest, sober, benevolent and faithful, is part and parcel of that wisdom of the world that is foolishness with God. It is attempting to raise fruit without trees. When a man is brought to recognize Jesus Christ as Lord, and to love and worship him as such, then he becomes like Christ. What more can the moralist want?” (Hodge)
 - (3)** Paul's statement that he preaches Christ as Lord indicates that the two ideas, Jesus Christ crucified and Jesus Christ as Lord, are identical. Humility goes together with Lordship.
 - (4)** Although his glory is veiled to the many whose hearts are too hardened to comprehend it, the crucified Christ is the Lord of glory. (1 Corinthians 2:8)
- ii)** The second component of Paul's preaching is more surprising: ourselves as your slaves.
- (1)** Only here does Paul speak of himself as the slave of his converts. His qualification "because of Christ" makes it clear however that he is not the slave of two masters. Being the slave of Christ who died for them makes him their slave as well.
 - (2)** To be a slave of Christ means that all of one's possessions, aspirations, time, and labor belong completely to him. It also means that if Christ is Lord, then those who proclaim his Lordship cannot be Lords themselves. If Christ took the form of a slave, then those who follow down must be willing to give themselves over to serve others.
 - (3)** Paul's depiction of himself as their slave for Jesus's sake prepares for the catalog of suffering that follows. The glory of God is manifested in the ministry of Paul in the same way it was manifested in the cross of Christ: paradoxically, in self emptying humility and in sacrificial service.
 - (4)** The reason his critics cannot see the sufficiency of Paul's ministry is that their eyes have been blinded by the same veil that blinds Israel -- the veil of pride and self exaltation. This veil is woven from a culture that is given over to egocentrism and boasting. The boasting might differ in particulars from Paul's former strutting before God as a zealous Pharisee, but all boasting is rooted in the same foolish, human pride that led to man's fall in

the beginning.

7) 6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

- a) The word "for" introduces Paul's explanation of why he proclaims Christ as Lord and has become his obedient servant: God has shined a light in the darkest reaches of his heart.
 - i) The God of light acts quite differently from the god of this world, who blinds people, flings them into utter darkness, and hardens their hearts.
- b) Paul most likely alludes here to the creation account in Genesis 1, where God said "Let there be light."
 - i) The key terms God, said, light, and darkness occur in both contexts.
 - ii) Paul would attest that the same God who created light in the midst of chaos at the beginning of creation beamed that supernatural light into his own heart.
 - iii) **1 John 1:5** God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.
 - iv) While Satan prevents illumination, God provides it.
 - v) The Genesis backdrop explains how Paul understands conversion as an act of God's new creation. (5:17)
- c) The image of light shining also reminds us of the account of Paul on the road to Damascus.
 - i) What Paul makes clear here is that the external reality on that road became an internal reality in his heart.
 - ii) Jesus told Paul that his mission was turn people from darkness to light:
 - (1) **Acts 26:16-18** But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; 17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, 18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.
- d) Some have suggested that the parallel is not with Genesis 1 or Acts 9 but is with

Isaiah 9:2, which is quoted in Matthew 4:16 and applied to Christ.

- i) Isaiah 9:2 The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined.
 - ii) The use of the future tense in the Greek ("the God who said out of darkness light will shine") may provide support for this view.
- e) Paul began this section by asking who is sufficient for the task. No one is; but God, who is the only source of light, wisdom, and strength made him sufficient and gave him a ministry more glorious than that of Moses whose face was alight with the reflected glory of God.
- f) Paul concludes this section by affirming that his ministry reflects the light of the new age, the new creation, and the glory of Christ who is the image of God.
- g) Paul must next explain how this glorious ministry can be incarnated in weakness and suffering because some in Corinth seen no glory about him at all.
- h) Paul does not try to cover up his bodily frailty but insists that through it God is better able to convey the true comfort and glory of the gospel.
- i) Our sufferings are the canvas upon which God displays his glory. Only in a fallen world among needy, lonely, sick people can God show himself to be merciful, comforting, and healing. In our sufferings God displays his character.
- i) **2 Corinthians 12:7-10** And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.
- ii) **Isaiah 40:28-31** Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. 29 He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might He increases strength. 30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall, 31 But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.