

3/15/26

Faithful Gospel Proclamation

2 Corinthians 4:1–6

Read: 2 Corinthians 4:1–6

Sermon Introduction

It has been two weeks since we were last in our study of 2 Corinthians. We were blessed to hear from two of our missionaries over the past two Sundays, but now we return to the letter and it will be helpful to briefly remember where we have been.

Our time in chapter three began with Dan's sermon on the marks of effective ministry, where we saw the emphasis on God's power to bring transformation through the New Covenant inaugurated by Christ.

John Marc then preached on the glory of the New Covenant, highlighting how it brings internal transformation rather than merely external observance.

Steven followed with the final section of the chapter, showing that the effect of the New Covenant is that as we behold the glory of Christ in the gospel, we are progressively transformed into His likeness.

All of this leads directly into the passage before us this morning. Paul is still speaking about this New Covenant ministry, but here he focuses especially on faithful gospel proclamation. What motivates it? What does faithfulness look like? What obstacles stand in the way? And ultimately, what is the message we proclaim? These are the questions Paul answers in this section.

Main Point: 2 Corinthians 4:1–6 reveals three foundational components of faithful gospel proclamation that we must understand if we are to faithfully make Christ known.

I have arranged these observations under three points:

I. The Privilege of Gospel Proclamation (1–2)

II. The Problem of Gospel Proclamation (3–4)

III. The Person of Gospel Proclamation (5–6)

My prayer is that God would humble us, encourage us, and embolden us in our gospel proclamation, and that we would cling to Christ as our only means of bearing fruit in this endeavor.

I. The Privilege of Gospel Proclamation (1–2)

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Paul is still describing the New Covenant ministry that has been entrusted to him, and in these verses, he gives us a further explanation of what that ministry entails. Here he emphasizes what the privilege of gospel proclamation should produce in the life of everyone who has experienced the mercy and grace of God in the gospel.

The first thing we see is that **God’s mercy produces perseverance in gospel proclamation.**

Look with me again at verse 1 **“Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart...”**

Paul says, **“as we received mercy.”** The phrase carries the idea of receiving compassion, pity, and undeserved kindness. Because of this mercy, Paul says, **“we do not lose heart.”**

To **“lose heart”** is to become discouraged, to lose spirit or enthusiasm. It’s to grow weary or despair. It carries the idea of shrinking back from or neglecting one’s duty. It’s approaching a task half-heartedly, carelessly, or irresponsibly.

The same verb is used in...

Luke 18:1 (NASB95)

¹ **“Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart...”**

Just as Christ calls us to pray at all times and not lose heart, He also calls us to proclaim the gospel and not lose heart. Since we have the incredible privilege of receiving God’s mercy and have been entrusted with message of the gospel, we cannot take our foot off the gas in proclaiming Christ.

The mercy of God is the fuel that sustains us in ministry. Those who truly understand the mercy God has shown them are able to persevere in gospel proclamation, even amidst rejection, hostility, and hardship.

Next, Paul tells us that this perseverance in gospel proclamation manifests itself in three aspects.

First, he declares that in view of God’s mercy we do not discredit the gospel. Look at the first part of verse 2 **“but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame...”**

The word **“renounced”** means to disown or to strongly reject something. It is to distance oneself from practices that are unacceptable.

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What are, **“The things hidden because of shame”**? This refers to conduct that people hide because it is shameful. It is sinful behavior that people want to conceal. It’s actions that would bring disgrace if they were brought into the light.

This is a way of living that would discredit the gospel. The context tells us that these are deeds that are fleshly, deceptive, manipulative, or morally corrupt. These are the methods that false teachers often use to gain influence, power, and advance their own agendas.

Jesus warns in Matthew 7, to beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves (7:15). He tells us we will know them by their fruit (7:20). This kind of hypocritical behavior has no place in faithful gospel proclamation.

Paul is saying that he has decisively rejected these kinds of behaviors and refuses to be associated with them.

What this teaches us is that secret sin, fleshly tactics, and deceptive practices destroy our personal witness, and they bring reproach upon the gospel. Scripture calls to live holy and honestly before the Lord. Our lives should adorn the gospel.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, **“You all know the [harmful] effects [of water that flows through contaminated pipes]; even so the gospel itself, in flowing through [people] who are spiritually unhealthy, may [bring] to their hearers.”**

The point is that gospel proclamation and gospel ministry should be marked by integrity. The message we proclaim must not be undone by the way we live. We don’t discredit the gospel.

Second, in view of God’s mercy we do not edit the gospel. Look at the next phrase in verse 2, **“Not walking in craftiness or adulterating the Word of God.”**

The word **“craftiness”** refers to deceitful or underhanded behavior. It describes cunning, trickery, and manipulative tactics. It’s doing whatever it takes to achieve a desired outcome.

The word **“adulterating”** means to corrupt or falsify something. It does this through tampering with the message so that it becomes distorted either by adding to it or subtracting from it.

Sometimes people add to the gospel by attaching personal preferences, their personal convictions, or human traditions that Scripture itself does not place upon people.

At other times people subtract from the gospel by removing truths that may be deemed as offensive or difficult, such as sin, repentance, or the lordship of Christ.

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Paul is saying that faithful gospel proclamation refuses to handle God's Word in this way. We do not manipulate the message, reshape it, or alter it to somehow achieve "better" results. We do not try to make the gospel more appealing by changing its content.

There is always a temptation in gospel proclamation to alter the message. We want people to like us. We want approval. So, we attempt to soften the truth or change it to make it more acceptable. But that is a catastrophic error.

Listen to what Paul says in...

Galatians 1:6–10 (NASB95)

⁶ I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; ⁷ which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! ⁹ As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! ¹⁰ For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

I recently heard a pastor say, **"You have no authority to edit the message. You're just the messenger. You're just the mail man."**

Our ultimate concern is not human approval but God's approval. In view of God's mercy, we do not edit the gospel.

Third, in view of God's mercy we proclaim the whole gospel. Look at the final phrase in verse 2, **"but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."**

The phrase **"the manifestation of the truth"** means the open and clear presentation of God's Word. It's the unedited proclamation of the true gospel as revealed in Scripture. So, in contrast to hypocrisy, manipulation, or distortion, faithful gospel proclamation declares the truth plainly.

Paul then says that in doing this we are **"commending ourselves to every man's conscience."** When the truth is clearly proclaimed, it has a self-attesting power. Even when people reject it, their consciences testify to its truthfulness.

Romans 1:18–21 (NASB95)

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. ²⁰ For since

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the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. ²¹ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

When the gospel is faithfully declared, it confronts the inner moral awareness God has placed within every person. To be honest, this is one of the reasons I believe people often respond with hostility towards the gospel.

Lastly, Paul says we do this **“in the sight of God.”** Our goal is to hear from the Lord **“Well done, good and faithful servant.”**

Last week a couple who occasionally visits from the Riverside area introduced themselves to me after the service. I had never met them before, but during our conversation they shared that they had both been saved out of the Seventh-day Adventist movement.

The man told me he had grown up in it, served in leadership, and had even taught it as a professor in one of their schools. As he spoke, you could hear the weight of regret in his voice when he mentioned on how long he had been involved in teaching error.

But then his face changed when he began talking about God’s mercy. He spoke with joy about how the Lord rescued him, brought him to the knowledge of the true gospel, and has now allowed him to serve in gospel ministry for the past twenty-five years.

Listening to him reminded me that we may not all have come out of a cult, but every one of us once proclaimed error. Whether it was worldly thinking, self-reliance, false religion, or some other form of deception, we all once spoke the lies we held to.

And now, by the mercy of God, we have the privilege of proclaiming the truth. We get to proclaim the gospel. So, let’s not waste our time speaking about empty or unprofitable things. Let’s proclaim Christ.

The reality is that we all need encouragement and accountability in this area. Each week the elders have a standing item on our agenda where we share who we were able to speak to about the gospel. I have even heard that some of our Community Groups have begun doing the same.

We want to have a culture here at Cornerstone where it is normal and common for all the saints to fulfill their calling and privilege to proclaim the gospel. But in doing this, we need to be aware of the challenges...

II. The Problem of Our Gospel Proclamation (3–4)

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After explaining the privilege of our gospel proclamation, Paul now shifts in these verses to explaining the problem of our gospel proclamation. The reality is, as glorious as Christ and His gospel is, we will still find problems in people's reception of the message.

We see that we will experience rejection in our gospel proclamation. Look at verse 3–4 **“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”**

Although the gospel is glorious, and even when it is presented accurately and clearly, it will remain **veiled to those who are perishing**. As Steven mentioned in his sermon three Sunday's ago, there is a veil still over the hearts of unbelievers (3:15)

That means, the true worth and glory of Christ and the gospel will not be valued or recognized. This isn't because the gospel isn't valuable or glorious, rather it's because of their own spiritual state and the blinding activity of Satan.

The Scriptures tell us that people reject the gospel because they are spiritually **“dead in their trespasses and sins”** (Ephesians 2:1–3; Colossians 2:13). Their mind is set on the flesh and it **“does not submit to God... indeed, it cannot”** (Romans 8:7–8). The natural man **“does not accept the things of God, he is not able to [truly] understand”** (1 Corinthians 2:14).

People actively suppress the truth they know in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18–21). We love the darkness rather than the light (John 3:19–20). They are unwilling to come to Christ (John 5:40). But it is not just our fallen spiritual state that causes rejection, it is also because of Satan's activity.

Here, Satan is referred to as **“the god of this world.”** In gospel of John, Jesus refers to him as **“the ruler of this world”** (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). In Ephesians 2:2, he is called the **“prince of the power of the air.”**

He is given these titles because of the limited influence and authority God has ordained for him to exercise over unbelievers. 1 John 5:19 tells us that **“the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”** And in the book of Revelation, he is said to be the one who deceives the whole world (Revelation 12:9; 20:3).

The truth is, whether or not someone knows it, when a person does not serve Christ, they inevitably are still under the dominion of the evil one.

Even though Satan's activity of blinding is highlighted in these verses, Scripture provides us with immense encouragement. We need to understand that none of Satan's powers are final or decisive.

God's sovereign providence holds the final say in everything that happens in the universe, including Satan's activity. We will see more of this as we work through these verses.

And notice purpose of Satan's blinding. It says, **“so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”**

In other words, he works to keep people from perceiving the beauty, truth, and saving glory revealed in Christ through the gospel. As Paul says here, He is **“the image of God.”** To see Christ rightly is to see the very glory of God revealed.

Jesus said, **“He who has seen Me has seen the Father”** (John 14:9; cf. John 12:45). The writer of Hebrews declares that the Son is **“the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature”** (Hebrews 1:3).

This is why Satan works so fiercely to keep people from seeing Christ.

To behold the glory of Christ is to be saved, because you know there is no other way.

To behold the glory of Christ is to trust Christ, because you know there is no one more faithful.

To behold the glory of Christ is to love Christ, because you know there is no one more lovely.

To behold the glory of Christ is to worship Christ, because you know there is no one more worthy.

To behold the glory of Christ is to be transformed into His likeness, because you know there is no one more captivating (3:18).

Understanding the problem of our gospel proclamation should humble us in the task. We must be realistic about how people will respond to our attempts to proclaim the gospel.

We can't think that our own cleverness, or persuasiveness, or any other ability we have will have the power to bring a single soul to Christ. Salvation ultimately requires God's initiating work to open their blind eyes so that they may see.

Understanding this reality, we should be like Paul in the book of Romans and have great sorrow and unceasing grief in our hearts that lead us to pray for their salvation (Romans 9:1–2; 10:1). Our concern for the lost should lead us to pray faithfully and biblically for them.

We must ask God to do what only He can do. We ask Him to open blind eyes (2 Corinthians 4:6; Acts 26:18), to give a new heart and a new spirit (Ezekiel 36:26), to cause them to be born

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again by the Spirit (John 3:3–8), to wash them through the regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5), to bring them from death to life (Ephesians 2:4–5), to grant them repentance that leads to the knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 2:25), and to give them the gift of faith to believe in Christ (Ephesians 2:8; Philippians 1:29).

The reality of Satan’s activity should not cause us to lose heart or withdraw from proclaiming the gospel. Rather, it should strengthen our resolve. The enemy may blind minds, but God is infinitely more powerful. Knowing this should motivate us to labor diligently and faithfully so that more people might come to the knowledge of Christ.

This is part of what makes Christ so glorious. Even though Satan actively blinds unbelievers, Christ powerfully removes that blindness and brings sinners into the light.

This weekend I was in Santa Barbara spending some time with my brother and his wife as they were celebrating her birthday. While we were at a park, my brother and I noticed a pair of Mormon missionaries sitting on a bench nearby.

My brother asked me if I was going to go talk with them. At first, I made an excuse (it looked like they might be on a break) but the more I thought about it, the more I felt compelled to go and speak with them.

The young men were polite and respectful. I took a moment to ask them about themselves and what led them to become Mormon missionaries. Then I asked them what they believed about the gospel, about Christ, and about salvation. After listening carefully to their answers, I shared my concern for their souls and explained the true gospel to them.

When the conversation ended, I walked away thinking of several things I wished I had said more clearly. I also wished I had my Bible in my hand so I could have pointed them to more Scripture. But after thanking God for the opportunity and reflecting on what I had learned, I said to my brother, “Let’s pray for them.”

One of the great comforts I have in evangelism is knowing that, by God’s grace, I know the God of the universe, and prayer to Him is real. Brothers and sisters, let us be encouraged, because of two truths, we are never truly at a disadvantage when we share the gospel.

This leads to our last point...

III. The Person of Our Proclamation (5–6)

We have seen in this passage the privilege of our gospel proclamation and the problem of our gospel proclamation. Now we come to the pinnacle of the passage, the person of our proclamation.

First, we see that we do not proclaim ourselves, but Christ. Look at verse 5 **“For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bondservants for Jesus’ sake.”**

Those who have truly been transformed by the gospel understand that the message is not about them. It is not about drawing attention to ourselves or building a following around our personality. The gospel is about Christ. We are not saviors. We cannot rescue anyone from sin or produce spiritual life in the human heart.

To preach ourselves would be to make self the goal of ministry. It would be to seek people’s admiration, loyalty, or dependence on us. But Paul says we reject that approach. Our aim was to preach **“Christ Jesus as Lord.”**

The goal of faithful gospel proclamation is that people would see Christ, recognize His lordship, and bow before Him.

This reality should humble every one of us. Our role is not to elevate ourselves but to serve others for Jesus’ sake. Just as it reads, we are **“bondservants for Jesus’ sake.”** We are just servants who gladly spend ourselves so that others might see the glory of Christ.

So faithful gospel proclamation, faithful gospel ministry, continually points people away from ourselves and toward Christ.

This has become even clearer to me through the ministry of biblical counseling. I do not have the ability to produce spiritual life in anyone. I cannot change a heart. Because of that, my goal is not to elevate myself or to position myself as the one who can solve all their problems. I cannot do that.

My aim is not to make people dependent on me. It is not to make them dependent on a particular pastor, teacher, author, or theologian. Nor is it to make them dependent on some secular system or therapy. My goal is to point them to their all-sufficient Savior.

Jesus is everything they need. He is the Good Shepherd who supplies all their needs so that they shall not want. He is the One who leads them in green pastures and beside still waters. He is the One who restores their souls and guides them in paths of righteousness.

He is the One whose presence comforts all their fears, even in the valley of the shadow of death. He is the One who prepares a table before them in the midst of turmoil and hostility. And He is the One who surrounds their lives with goodness and lovingkindness all their days.

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I can't do that. Not even for one second. No man can do this. Only Christ is the Good Shepherd. And He is real. And that is why we proclaim Him.

Lastly, in verse 6 we see that we are to trust God's power in our gospel proclamation. Look at verse 6 **“For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”**

Paul deliberately takes us back to creation. In Genesis 1, when the world was covered in darkness, God spoke and light burst into existence. We touched on this in last Sunday's sermon when we looked at Genesis 1:1–2.

In the same way, salvation requires a divine act of creation. The human heart is spiritually dark and blind, but when God saves a sinner, He speaks light into that darkness.

God shines into the heart so that a person can finally see **“the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”** Salvation happens when God opens blind eyes to behold the glory of Christ.

I had Darin read Colossians 1:13–20 this morning because it declares that glory. In Jesus Christ, all of the character and attributes and glory of God are revealed in absolute perfection.

When God the Father rescued us and freed us from the domain of darkness, He transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son. Christ was the only One worthy to receive the kingdom of creation and we have an inheritance in it because of Him.

It's only in Christ that we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins through His blood shed on the cross. He bore the penalty for our sins, and He was the only One who could make the full payment for our sins so that we could be redeemed.

Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. The God whom no one has seen, is perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ. To see Christ is to see the glory of God. All of His character, all of His perfections, all of His beauty and heart. All perfectly revealed in Christ.

He is the firstborn over all creation, not in any way meaning He was created, but rather meaning firstborn in the Hebrew sense, the preeminent One, worthy of the full inheritance. He is the One who holds supreme authority over everything that exists.

For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. Every throne, every ruler, every power in the universe exists through Him and for Him.

He existed before all things, and even now all things hold together in Him. The universe itself is sustained by His power.

He is also the head of the church, the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him God reconciles sinners to Himself through the blood of His cross.

Now in times past, God overlooked the times of people's ignorance, but now He is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through Jesus whom He has appointed, and He has given proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.

And if you are here this morning and you do not yet know the Person of our gospel proclamation, the glorious Lord and Savior offers His salvation to you today. The One who created you, the One who sustains your life even now, the One who died and rose again, calls you to come to Him.

If you are still in darkness, turn from your sin. Turn from trusting in yourself. Look to Christ. Believe in Him as Lord and Savior. There is no other way for you to be saved. No amount of good works can make up for your sin or reconcile you to God.

But all who come to Christ in repentance and faith will receive what He purchased through His cross: the forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and eternal life in His kingdom.

Let's pray.

Benediction:

Romans 16:25–27 (NASB95)

²⁵ Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, ²⁶ but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, *leading* to obedience of faith; ²⁷ to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen.