

2 Corinthians 4:1-6 **Why Can't You See This?**

Summary: The purpose of Christian ministry is to emphasize Christ yet it is often resisted by the spiritually blind.

This morning as we continue our study of Scripture, we find the Apostle Paul explaining what good ministry looks like: it makes a big deal about Jesus, presenting Him plainly and clearly to anyone and everyone. And yet, even when you're crystal clear in your communication, people often will not understand what you're saying.

If you've ever been part of a conversation about God or Jesus or spiritual things that seemed to go round and round and one or more people just didn't get it, this morning's passage should be helpful for you in understanding what happened.

Read with me, and see if you can notice why Paul says, some people don't understand the gospel message no matter how clearly you present it.

2 Corinthians 4:1 Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. **2** But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, 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. **3** But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, **4** whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. **5** For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. **6** For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Did you catch that? Here's what Paul is saying – we preach the gospel clearly, we make a big deal about Jesus and not about ourselves, and yet, some people still resist because the devil has blinded them to the message. We'll dig into all that in a few minutes, but first let's take the time to notice Paul's attitude about resistance and rejection.

I want you to notice that Paul says he **does not lose heart** even while people resist the gospel. I think that's important for every Christian to understand. There's no promise that everyone you know and love will respond well to the gospel even if you communicate clearly.

You have an obligation to share your love for God, through both your words and the example of your life, but you don't have any guarantee that people will understand it and respond the way you hope they will. It's OK to be sad about that. I think you should be sad. But, [we do not lose heart](#). The sadness doesn't wipe us out.

Parents, you should work, labor, in prayer and in conversation for the salvation of your children. But if they are resistant, if they seem to wander, if they seem ambivalent, [do not lose heart](#). When they come to Christ it's not going to be because you found the perfect parenting technique or program, it's going to be because the blinders were finally removed from their heart, mind, and soul, and they were able to see the light. Never forget: salvation is supernatural and it can't be forced by technique.

So, present Christ plainly with your both your lips and your life and pray for God to shine [the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ](#) into the life of your son or daughter.

Those of you wish to see a roommate, teammate, coworker, or neighbor saved the same is true for you – present the gospel plainly and pray, and [do not lose heart](#) if they are slow to respond.

There have been seasons of revival in the history of the church, times when it seemed like people were extraordinarily receptive to the gospel, and there have been seasons when it seemed like people were more generally apathetic and resistant. There is no doubt we are going through a season like that today. They are hard times, spiritually dark times, but they're also the kind of times that revivals come out of. You never know when hearts will begin to soften and open and people will respond to the call to repent. So, [do not lose heart](#).

And, think about who is saying this. Paul of all people, had reason [to lose heart](#). Some of you know the story of his life, you know what he's been through - relational friction, emotional turmoil, physical danger, the man has walked through some pretty rough times, and yet *he* says, [we do not lose heart](#).

Would you let that minister to you? Think of what you know of this man's life and ministry, think of all the reasons he has to throw in the towel and walk away and say forget this! Think of all the reasons he has to go into a cave of depression and frustration. Think of all the reasons he has to raise his voice and kick something. And yet he says, [we do not lose heart](#).

Why? Because, he says [we have received mercy](#). In other words, remembering what God has already done for me, helps me endure what I'm facing right now.

Paul remembered who he was before Jesus and who he would be without Jesus. Paul had been on a murderous rampage before his salvation; he was actually on his way to Damascus to arrest and persecute Christians when Christ stopped him in his tracks and radically changed his life. He went from being an enemy of God to a servant of God in a moment's time. And, Paul knew *if God could do that for him, God could do it for anyone.*

Christian, when you are tempted to give up – whatever your challenge is, think of who you would be without Jesus. He reached into your life and saved you. He turned you around. Think of all that *He has kept you from* and **do not lose heart**. And, remember, if He has done that for you, and Paul, and billions of other people across the history of the world, He can do it for that person you're trying to minister to as well.

We can turn all of this into one simple, practical step to fight discouragement and disappointment, so here's your homework: when you feel like complaining about what you don't have or what hasn't happened or everything that's going wrong in your life, remember what you do have, what you've already experienced, what you've seen. Cultivate an attitude of gratitude. Remember the **mercy** you've received, give thanks, rejoice and **do not lose heart**.

Well, now look at what Paul has to say about his approach to life and ministry. He says even though he went through some rough times, even though he didn't see the responses he hoped to see, he didn't manipulate his message, he didn't use slick techniques. And, he wasn't trying to build his platform, gain followers, or make a name for himself. His message put all the attention on Jesus.

So let's talk for a minute about his message and his method.

First, notice his message. In verse 5 Paul says **we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake.**

If you turn with me over to 1 Corinthians 15 we find a summary of his message:

1 Corinthians 15:1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you— unless you believed in vain.

3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: 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, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that He was seen by James, then by all

the apostles. 8 Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

9 For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was with me*. 11 Therefore, whether *it was* I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

This is the simple gospel that Paul preached which people resisted back then and still resist today.

People resist the plain and clear message that there is a holy God who created this world and everything in it, that we are meant to seek Him, serve Him, live according to His directions, but instead we resist and rebel and make what we want of our time on earth. As a result, we deserve to be judged like any rule breaker or rebel and punished appropriately – that is justice. But, in mercy, God sent His Son to take that judgment and punishment for us, and offers us salvation instead, if we will turn away from our rebellion and follow Him. This is true even for someone like Paul who was, in his own words, **not worthy to be called an apostle**.

This is the gospel, the core of the Christian message and it is what people resist.

So, why? Why do people resist this message? Why resist the idea of a loving God who demonstrates both justice and mercy? Why resist Jesus who Scripture presents as a Friend who sticks closer than a brother, a Warrior-King who will fight for you and with you and bring you freedom and victory from the things that entrap you, a Bridegroom who will truly love you? Why resist this life-transforming Jesus and the gospel of what He has done?

Well, we'll answer that question in a moment.

First though, let's talk about Paul's method for presenting his message of the gospel – notice, he says we don't misrepresent, maneuver, or manipulate. We make open, honest, direct appeals to the **conscience** of anyone who would listen.

Those of you who know your Bibles can think of Paul making his case before King Agrippa in Caesarea (Acts 26) – you remember how he shared his testimony and pressed his case for the king to accept the gospel and the king said, 'Paul, you almost convince me to become a Christian.' And Paul said, 'I would that you had everything I do, except these chains.'

Paul had nothing to hide when it came to presenting the gospel and encouraging people to accept it.

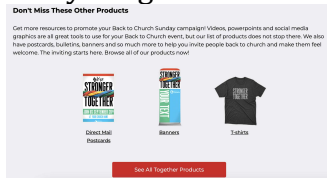
And, he didn't think it was necessary to use any smooth-talking tricks or marketing schemes to compel people to accept it.

Unfortunately, some people do. There are churches out there today constantly trying to find new ways to reach people. And listen, I want to say, that's a good ambition. But, sometimes, in their desire to do something good they make really bad choices. They water things down or try to spice things up in the hope to make church fun or easy and to feel less foreign to people.

So, they do a series of relatable sermons based on the latest Marvel movies and lessons you can learn about God from things that happen in the films. Or they have a slick production team that transforms the sanctuary to look like a set or a stage that supports some theme for their preaching. Someone once told me about how the church they were visiting set things up to make it all look like a casino – maybe the sermon series was about the dangers of 'gambling with your eternity,' I don't know.



I do know there are “Christian” marketing firms that will sell us a slick set of tools for an upcoming sermon series. We could purchase the whole package – including customizable sermon outlines – all the pastor has to do is add their own personal illustrations and they give you prompts for when and how to do that. They also give you a high-quality graphics packages to go with it, so everything looks smooth and polished, all for just \$49.99.



We could even get a bunch of swag and have direct mail pieces to send out as invitations, banners to put in the hallways, T-shirts for volunteers, and pre-designed graphics to post on social media. It's all there.

But is this what the church needs? Does the church need smooth marketing and media packages? Is that what's keeping people from coming? Do we just need better ad campaigns and then we would see wide-spread revival? No. Paul says right here, we **renounce** crafty methods, creating hype, or starting a 'movement.' Paul says we're not tracking our metrics in an attempt to go viral for Jesus. We're just preaching Him, simply and plainly.

Paul's message was, *look at Jesus*. Look at who He is and what He has done for you and repent – stop resisting God, and submit to Him instead. Accept the fact that you

make a terrible king or queen for your life and accept God's leadership instead.

And here's the thing, when you present the gospel clearly like that, people understand.

They don't resist or reject the gospel because they can't comprehend it, they resist the gospel because they don't want it. It doesn't seem appealing. They think they have something better. Think back to the Garden of Eden, what was the first sin? Reaching out to something that seemed more appealing than obeying God. That's always the motive for sin. We think we've got, or we can get, something better than what's on offer with God.

Jesus explained it like this:

John 3:19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

Some people honestly feel like they're having more fun doing their own thing. And for a season, they might be right – sin is always fun, for a season. If it wasn't it wouldn't be so tempting. But there always comes a moment of conviction. A time when you know what you're doing is wrong, or that should stop this. That's your conscience speaking. And you can either cultivate your conscience or you can tell it to be quiet.

If you cultivate it, if you turn towards it, the light of the gospel begins to shine in and you discover the call toward change and realize it's possible and necessary. But if you tell your conscience to be quiet, if you shut it out, if you argue against it, you turn into the darkness and the veil gets a little tighter around your eyes.

Listen to this from a sermon preached from this passage almost 100 years ago by Henry Ironside at Moody Church in Chicago:

If any man says, "There are things in the Bible that I cannot believe," I can tell him why. It is because there are things in his life that the Bible condemns, of which he does not wish to repent. There are sins that mean more to him than Christ. He would rather indulge in them than be delivered from them. The moment a man comes to the place where he desires God's will above all else, and says, "I am ready to renounce my sin, to be freed from it," that man will not have any trouble believing the gospel... Face your sins before God, and there will be no difficulty about believing.

But that is exactly the problem, people are not willing to call their sin, sin. They make excuses for it, explain it away, rationalize it, anything but agree, confess, and repent of it. And so, they are not saved because they don't want to be saved.

Of course, they're not the only one involved in that process. For all of recorded human history, people have known and understood that there are forces of evil at work in the world. Scripture refers to the leader of those powers as Satan or the Devil. Three times Jesus refers to him as the prince of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Paul calls him the prince of the power of the air (Eph 2:2) and some people translate the end of the Lord's prayer as "deliver us from the evil one" (Matt 6:13). He actively opposes God's intentions and designs and interferes with people choosing to follow Him.

Jesus spoke of his activity in the parable of the sower – that's someone who sows a field, planting seeds, not sewing a dress. Jesus said that as the sower casts the seed around his field, some is immediately eaten by birds, some falls on rocky soil and seemed to spring up quickly, but it was scorched when the heat came because it's roots weren't deep enough. Other seeds tried to grow up but they were choked out by weeds. And then finally, there were some seeds that fell on good soil, grew, and produced a bunch of fruit.

Later, He explained that story like this: the seed that produced fruit is like those who hear and receive the gospel and their lives are transformed. Others hear the gospel and it sounds good, but they're still focused on all the cares of this world and they're not ready to pull some weeds out of their life which stunts their growth. A third group hears the gospel, and it sounds so good, they're really enthusiastic but then some difficulty comes along in life – the scorching sun shows up, and because they don't have deep roots to endure the pain, they shrivel. And finally, there are those where the seed never even germinates, but the birds come along and eat it before it can sprout in the soil. Jesus says, these are those who (Mark 4:15) **When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.**

Church, we have to know this is real. That people we know and love and want to see come to Christ and change, are sometimes being actively opposed, sabotaged, in that process by a very real spiritual enemy who wants to destroy their soul. And that can look ugly – a life that is completely out of control, or it can look like apathy, a life that just doesn't have time for or interest in spiritual things. Either path leads to damnation.

Listen, you don't have to read Scripture to know evil and forces of darkness exist, many of you have seen it, experienced it, felt it, been near it, even in the 21st century with electric cars and 5G we know there is something evil around us as times at well. What we don't always know and understand is that this evil is actually opposing us. Keeping us from the good things that God has for us. Meddling, subverting, and sabotaging gospel efforts. In fact, what are the chances that some of the ideologies, the groups, and the agendas floating around today, are actually motivated by, coached by, inspired by, forces of darkness that lead people away

from God?

So how do we respond? Well, like Paul, we seek to make the gospel plain with our lives and with our lips. We don't look for slick marketing tricks or programs. We present truth plainly and ask God to do what only He can do – to shine light into the darkness and help people to see, and we pray that as He does so, people will respond. That when the life of Jesus comes into their lives they won't turn their head and cover their eyes and yell "turn that light off!"

Instead, we hope and pray they will bask in the light like they're on vacation at the beach – laying in it, soaking it in, absorbing as much light as possible – which can be terrible if we're talking about UV rays but glorious if it's Jesus, the light of the world.

Again, those of you who know your Bible might remember how personal this metaphor is for Paul who during what were the very darkest days of his life was knocked to the ground by a blinding light on the way to Damascus. He was on his way to go arrest people for being Christians, when he had a radical encounter with Christ and became one himself.

Paul still remembers that; how could he forget? And this is what gives him confidence in the gospel. This is why he presents it plainly. This is why he puts no faith in slick presentations or marketing plans. He knows what God did to him and for him when he wasn't even looking for it, and he's forever grateful for that mercy and the change it made in his life. As a result, he didn't see any reason to make a big deal about himself, but he wanted to tell everyone who would listen about Jesus.

That was his message, anchored in the mercy he had personally received, and it's a pattern I hope we at City Gates continue to follow: to make a big deal about Jesus and not about ourselves. To spread the gospel with both our lips and our lives. To be sun-soaked by the light of the glory of Jesus.

Some people will reject what we have to say. They'll either dismiss it casually and say "Well, I'm glad that works for you." Others may be hostile in their response. There's no need to be ugly back. Instead, have sympathy on their souls, realize that they love the darkness more than the light. Realize the enemy of their soul is blinding them, stealing the gospel before it can take root. So ask God to continue to pour out His mercy on them, to continue calling them to Him. Ask Him to do for them what He has already done for people like Paul, like me, like you, interrupting our lives and transforming them forever by grace. Because, what we all need, more than anything, is for God to [\[shine\] in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.](#)

So let's pray and ask for that now.

Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

2 Corinthians 3 The New Covenant

Summary: Would you rather have a list of religious rules to keep or a relationship with God?

- Have you ever tried to share the gospel or answer someone's spiritual question and they just couldn't get it no matter how many ways you tried? How did you handle it?
- Have you ever experienced a radical "ah-ha!" moment where you suddenly really understood something you thought you had known all along? What's the difference before and after?
- How do you think the way Paul received his call to ministry affects his approach to that ministry?
- How does, or could, reflecting on the mercy you have received help keep you from losing heart?
- Have you seen a church or ministry or person use tricks and techniques to make their message more 'appealing?' Did it work? What are some good reasons to try things like this? What are some dangers?
- Review the parable of the sower in Mark chapter four. Where have you seen each of the four outcomes listed?
- What can we learn from Mark 4 and 2 Corinthians 4 about the dynamics involved in sharing your faith?
 - What should be the main subject when we present the gospel?
 - What do you learn about the way people respond when you share? What can be/should be done about that?
- Review John 1:1-9; 3:16-21 and Hebrews 1:2f – what do you learn about Jesus as light?
- Paul said he presents himself as 'your bondservant for Christ Jesus' sake.' How are you a servant in your ministry context (at home, work,

school, or church)?