

YOU: Connect. Grow. Serve. Go!
Winter 2018-19 Leader Commentary



Unit 1: You on Mission
Session 5: Time to Tell (see pp. 118-121)

The Question: What should we do about witnessing?

The Point: God established witnessing as the means for the lost to hear about Jesus.

Background Passage: 2 Corinthians 4

Focal Passage: 2 Corinthians 4:3-6, 16-18

This commentary is designed to help you think about the question, “What should we do about witnessing?” and drive home this one truth: God established witnessing as the means for the lost to hear about Jesus.

Focus on These Points

Perceive
(2 Cor. 4:3-4)

The Corinthians doubted Paul’s motives for preaching and questioned his methods. So, Paul felt the need to explain. He wanted them to realize that his was a ministry of mixed experiences. He had been blessed by God, but he had also suffered greatly for their sake.

Paul likely received an unfair share of raised eyebrows and false accusations. Was he really sharing a message that was too obscure or difficult for most folks’ comprehension? Why did his message seem “veiled” or “hidden” (GNT) (v. 3)? And, if Paul’s message really was true, why hadn’t it caught on more quickly than the messages of those who opposed him?

He claimed that if his message seemed incomprehensible or unclear there was only one explanation: the message had fallen on ears that had been deafened by the spiritual hardness of their hearts and minds. Their deafness had been induced by their lack of openness to the truth—the gospel. The gospel of Christ “is veiled to those who are perishing” (v. 3). The idea of perishing being connected with the unsaved appears earlier in Paul’s letter (2 Cor. 2:15-16). In these verses, he likens his ministry to “the fragrance of Christ” to those who respond to the Gospel. Contrarily, it is “the aroma of death” to those who reject Christ. When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he reiterated this same concept: “They perish because they did not accept the love of the truth and so be saved” (2 Thess. 2:10). Whether we accept or reject the Gospel isn’t a matter of intellect. It’s a reflection of one’s spiritual condition.

“The god of this age has blinded the minds of the unbelievers” (v. 4). Satan was (and still is) a deceiver. During Paul’s time, Satan caused people to be drawn to the false teachers’ messages. He made lies seem more attractive. He made distorted Scriptures appealing.

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When the gospel is presented by preachers who don't handle God's Word with care, deception and confusion occur. However, when they minister the whole truth and plainly proclaim the gospel (by maintaining their focus on Christ—His birth, death, resurrection, kingdom, and glory), the issue is with the hearer. Neither the minister nor the gospel is to blame. The unbeliever simply can't see "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (v. 4). But believers can perceive unbelievers' needs, recognize their deception, and share Christ with them. Believers only need to be obedient to what God has called us to do—witness.

The "god of this age" (v. 4) who causes spiritual blindness is mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. In these Scriptures it always refers to Satan. The term implies that the being is worshiped by some, as if it were divine. Still, he is not God our Creator.

Proclaim **(2 Cor. 4:5-6)**

Paul's God-given assignment was defined in verse 5: he would serve God through his service to others, and most importantly, he would proclaim "Jesus Christ as Lord." In the process he would deflect attention away from himself. Self-promoters draw attention to themselves. But the true Christian glorifies Christ and not the ministers who deliver the message.

Paul humbled himself to Christ because he was grateful for the ministry God mercifully entrusted to him. Moreover, Christ had acted incredibly toward Paul during his conversion.

Paul associated the light of creation to the light of his re-creation in Christ. In Genesis 1:3, the account of the first day of the Creation reveals, "God said, 'Let there be light'." Paul was confident in the unadulterated Word of God, its power, and its glorification of Christ. When preaching to the Corinthians and other churches, Paul relied on God's Word and his personal experience with God to help him relay the truth. However, as demonstrated in this passage, Paul doesn't use a long discourse filled with references to himself or his accomplishments in ministry. Rather, he relies on the backing of Scripture to relay what's happened inside his heart and mind.

Persist **(2 Cor. 4:16-18)**

Discouragement is just as much part of the Christian journey as blessings are. Because Satan opposes God and those who follow Him, he uses discouragement as an effective weapon against us. In 2 Corinthians 4:7-9 and 4:16–5:10, Paul writes to expound on the concept of having strength (the power of God at work in us) in weakness (frailty of the human body). A Christian's suffering for the gospel's sake is only the beginning of a process that leads to eternal glory. So, Paul encouraged his readers to keep God as their focus despite the challenges they faced. So as not to taint his witness, Paul did "not give up" (2 Cor. 4:16) on his service to God. When Paul said his "outer person is being destroyed" and the "inner person is being renewed day by day" (v. 16), he wasn't just stating the obvious (the body's deterioration versus the soul's eternal newness). He was also suggesting that the "outer person" included material belongings (e.g., wealth, security, popularity, etc.) and, the "inner person" included spiritual qualities like the ones mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23.

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Believers have the indwelling Holy Spirit as “the down payment of our inheritance” (Eph. 1:14). So, in faith, we await our full salvation at the end of the age, when our bodies will be resurrected and renewed. In the meantime, we take comfort and joy in the Holy Spirit’s daily renewal of our inward person.

Paul’s faithfulness in satisfying his God-assigned tasks placed him at risk for great difficulties. Describing his trials as a “momentary light affliction” (v. 17), Paul was in no way denying the severity of his sufferings (11:24-27). Verse 18 provides an appropriate summary: “Focus . . . on what is unseen.” Respond to God by living faithfully and trusting in Him.