

3. *The minister's reliance (4:7)*

Note how Paul contrasts the “glorious light of the Gospel” with the weakness of those who are its ministers. Jars of clay in Paul’s day were ordinary, cheap and common; once damaged, they were discarded. The “light” (vs. 6) and “treasure” (vs. 7) are the focus for Paul, not the minister. God is powerfully at work in weak and ordinary vessels. This is the heading for section through to vs. 12 where Paul illustrates how despite his vulnerability, God’s power is at work in him.

4. *The minister's own experiences (4:8-12)*

If the logos (content of message) of Paul’s ministry is Jesus Christ and him crucified & exalted (4:5,6; 1 Cor. 2:2), then his ethos (integrity of character) is displayed in 4:8-12. What Paul believes, is testified to in his real life (See 11:23-33 for particular incidents). Note 4:1 & 4:16 - despite incredible opposition and difficulty, Paul did not give up believing in Christ and serving others, thus demonstrating God’s power at work.

5. *The minister's motives (4:13-18)*

Paul quotes Psalm 116:10. Like the Psalmist, despite great sufferings, he speaks just as he believes; in faith he goes on telling the Good News.

Q7. What motivates Paul’s perseverance in ministry?

Vs. 14 _____

Vs. 15 _____

Vs. 16 _____

Q8. What ‘big picture’ does Paul keep before him to motivate him to persevere in ministry under duress? (see also Romans 8:17-23)

Q9. Give examples of the “unseen” things Paul insists we must focus on? (See Romans 8:24-25; Colossians 3:1-4; Hebrews 11:1-3 for help)

#4 What it means to minister 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”

2 Corinthians 4:7

Warm Up

Whether you’re a worker, a parent or a student, think of one task that you do in that role that is better done solo, and another that is best done by a team approach. Discuss why the team approach is best for the task you identified.



Introduction READ 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

In chapter 3, the Apostle Paul addressed the question of competence for the task of ministry. In 3:5,6 in contrast to those ministers who distort the Old Testament Scriptures, he defends his own apostleship against the jibes of his opponents saying: “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant-- not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” Paul explains the surpassing and lasting nature of the New Covenant which he proclaims. Now in chapter 4 he returns to the topic of competence in ministry. He helps us to see what it means for all of us to minister.



Getting into the text—2 Corinthians chapter 4:1-18

Paul explains why, though there are plenty of reasons he might, he does not lose heart or give up on his work for God. In-so-doing, he sets forth 5 important tenets by which every minister may be tested:



1. The authenticity of a minister's methods (4:1-4),
2. The minister's message (4:5-6),
3. The minister's reliance (4:7),
4. The minister's own experiences (4:8-12), and
5. The minister's motives (4:13-18).

The **New Covenant** that Paul preached is a new era in which all share in God's mission and ministry. **God's people all** engage in "works of service" or **ministry** (Eph. 4:12). Leaders have a responsibility to enable and equip believers for the tasks the church is called to exercise in the world (Eph. 4:11). Each Christian should serve God in activities and ministries according to how God endows and directs them (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Peter 4:10). All the baptised are ministers and ambassadors of Christ's Gospel. Therefore, Paul's description of apostolic ministry provides a healthy test for us all.

1. *The authenticity of a minister's methods (4:1-4)*

- Q1. What do you think prompted Paul to say in verse 2 that he doesn't use secrets, deception or distortion of God's Word in his ministry? (see also 2:17)
- Q2. When he says, "the god of this world" who might Paul be referring to and what attitudes and activities might be representative of this 'god'?
- Q3. What attitudes should typically be associated with an authentic Christian ministry?

- Q4. Paul considered himself unworthy of his role and the "least" of all apostles (1 Cor. 15:9). What makes this fact an encouragement to others?

2. *The minister's message (4:5-6)*

- Q5. What are the key elements of the Apostle's message according to verses 5 and 6?

EXERCISE:

Read the following passages of Scripture and list any common elements of the Apostolic preaching of the Gospel in each:

- 1 Corinthians 15:1-4
- Titus 3:3-7
- Acts 2:14-40
- Romans 3:21-26
- Acts 17:22-31

John Stott from the U.K. lists the following as essential to the message we proclaim:

"...the atoning death of Christ, the authority of Scripture, the justification of sinners by grace alone through faith alone, and the indispensable ministry of the Holy Spirit."

Tim Keller from the U.S.A. summarizes the Gospel message thus:

"Through the person and work of Jesus Christ, God fully accomplishes salvation for us, rescuing us from judgment for sin into fellowship with him, and then restores the creation in which we can enjoy our new life together with him forever."

- Q6. What are some examples of "another gospel" (2 Cor. 11:4) that you have encountered that would not pass the test of Paul's measures?