

2 Cor 4:1-6 How to Do Christian Ministry, part 2

Anyone involved in serving God has experienced hindrances, difficulties, disappointments, and failures. Part of that is normal. Human failure is a normal part of life. No matter what we do, there is always a potential for failure. But there are other reasons for difficulties and hindrances in Christian ministry. The Bible tells us that those who serve God are engaged in a great spiritual battle. The “god of this world” and the principalities, rulers of darkness, and spiritual wickedness in high places are all arrayed against those who serve God. We should expect satanic opposition whenever we engage in Christian ministry.

In 2 Cor 4:1, Paul says “we have this ministry,” and then he goes on to describe how he and his colleagues conduct the ministry. He makes a comparison between the right way to do ministry and the wrong way to do it. As we approach ministry, we must make sure to avoid the pitfalls he mentions here and adopt the proper way of doing ministry.

Most of us are *not* in the same kind of ministry that Paul and his colleagues were in. We are not traveling all over the place trying to establish churches. But there are many forms of Christian ministry. If you are serving in any capacity here at church, then you are involved in Christian ministry. Ministry is just service. If you are serving the Lord, then you are in the ministry. And you should be following the biblical pattern of ministry.

Last week we looked at part of this passage.

Paul warns us **first** to avoid common pitfalls like faintheartedness, shameful behavior, cunning deceitfulness, mishandling the Word of God, and self-promotion. Misbehavior like this is sadly quite common in many churches, but we must do our best to avoid it.

Second, Paul exhorts us to proclaim the truth openly and honestly, call for a personal response to the truth, proclaim the Lordship and authority of Christ, serve for Jesus’ sake, and trust that God will shine the light of his truth into the hearts of our hearers. If a church is operating in that way, you can be confident that it is pursuing a biblical form of ministry.

In the remaining part of this passage, Paul encourages us to ...

III. Acknowledge a primary hindrance to ministry. .3-4

Have you ever wondered why people don't accept Christ when they hear the Gospel message? This is a wonderful message—I can be forgiven of sin and granted a home in heaven if I turn from my sins and believe in Jesus. Why would anyone reject that message? Paul tells us here one of the major reasons for unbelief.

A. .3 The Gospel is “veiled/hidden” to the lost.

1. The word (κεκαλυμμένον) means “conceal, cover, hide; to cause something not to be known.”
2. The lost have a “veil” over their minds. That indicates a lack of understanding, a lack of knowledge. Something is preventing them from seeing and understanding.
3. Unbelief is *not* merely an intellectual problem. It's not really a lack of evidence. Lack of belief is a spiritual problem. Unbelievers are spiritually blind; the Gospel is veiled/hidden to them.

We might think that if people really understood Christianity, they would accept it. The problem, some would say, is a lack of knowledge or a lack of education. Unbelievers just don't have enough facts or evidence; if they did, they would get saved.

But that's not really the problem. Here's the real problem:

1 Corinthians 2:14 *But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

The veil/blindness is the inability to discern spiritual things. Unbelievers are dead in trespasses and sins. They don't have the capacity for spiritual discernment. They are spiritually blind.

Belief is *not* the result of answering all the objections to the Christian faith. A spiritually blind person will remain in unbelief no matter what facts he has or no matter where the evidence points. It's a spiritual problem, not an intellectual one.

The solution to unbelief also spiritual. Rom 1:16. The only thing that can penetrate this blindness is the Gospel.

4. .3end Unbelievers are “perishing” (ἀπολλυμενοις)—those who are being ruined, lost, or destroyed. (KJV “the lost”)

- a) Note that this is the present state of unbelievers; it's happening right now. The lost/unsaved are in the process of perishing. They are right now under the wrath and condemnation of God.

Cf. John 3:18—"condemned already." Cf. John 3:36—"the wrath of God abides."

It might seem like they are *prospering*, but in reality, they are *perishing*.

- b) Of course, the ultimate destiny of the lost is eternal destruction.

2Th 1:9 *[The lost] shall be punished with everlasting destruction (ὄλεθρος) from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;*

James 4:12 *There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy (ἀπόλλομι). ...*

We cannot deny that the Bible teaches the eternal destruction of the wicked. It is not a pleasant doctrine to contemplate or to believe. But it is clearly what the Bible teaches, and we cannot deny it. Unsaved people are perishing right now and they will perish eternally.

That is one good reason to get saved. If you don't like the prospect of eternal punishment, then you must repent of your sins and put your faith in Jesus.

Next we see a reason why this is happening—

- B. .4 The "god of this age" (i.e., Satan) has blinded the lost.

This is the only time that Satan is referred to as "the god of this age," but the NT uses similar language to describe Satan.

John 12:31 *Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out.*

Paul describes Satan as "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Eph 2:2)

John calls Satan "the wicked one" (1 John 5:19).

Peter calls him "our adversary, the devil" (1 Pet 5).

The Bible presents Satan as a very strong, cunning, deceitful, destructive enemy who is doing all he can to prevent people from being saved. His highest desire is to hinder God's purposes and plans.

What are his schemes; what are his strategies?

1. He's blinded their minds. .4
 - a) Satan is a powerful adversary who has the capacity to blind the minds of unbelievers. This blindness is spiritual. Unbelievers simply don't see the truth of the Gospel—it's foolishness to them.

1 Corinthians 1:18 *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

1 Corinthians 1:23 *but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,*
 - b) Does that mean that the unsaved are *not* responsible for their lack of belief? I.e., can they say, "My eyes were blind; Satan put a veil over my mind, so I'm not responsible for my unbelief."
 - c) No, God's holds us responsible for what we believe or fail to believe. No one can avoid accountability by blaming satanic blindness. Satan can aid or promote unbelief, but he can't force anyone not to believe in Jesus.
2. .4b This blindness is a cause of unbelief. This satanic action is one factor in unbelief.
 - a) Notice the purpose language here—"lest..." The Greek here says literally, "in order not to shine" (εἰς τὸ μὴ αὐγάζουσαι). Satan's purpose is to prevent the light of the Gospel from shining on anyone. He does not want vs. 6 to happen (read).
 - b) The word "shine" (αὐγάζω) means "to become evident, to be clearly seen." Satan does not want anyone to see the glory of Christ clearly. He is actively plotting or scheming to hinder belief in the Gospel. He wants to keep people blind, lost, and condemned.

- c) We know that Satan's work is *not* the *only* reason people don't believe. Unbelief has many reasons.

Jesus told the parable of the soils, in which we find several causes of unbelief—e.g., the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches. Unbelievers see the message of the cross as a stumbling block (1 Cor 1:18f) and an offense (Gal 5:11). They could give you many reasons why they reject the Gospel.

- d) The work of Satan is only one element in explaining why people don't believe in Jesus. The work of Satan only strengthens their unbelief. Satan can't *cause* unbelief; he can only aid and promote unbelief.

3. We know from the other things that the Bible teaches about God's plan of salvation that Satan cannot stop God from accomplishing his purposes. Satan does his worst, but God still prevails in shining the light of the Gospel into our hearts.
4. We should not get the idea that God is trying his best to save people, but Satan is blinding their minds and preventing God from saving anyone. This is *not* an equal battle between God and Satan. Satan is trying his best to thwart/hinder the plan of God, but ultimately God will succeed in his plan.
5. We also know that *everyone* is spiritually blind until they are saved. Everyone is in darkness and the truth is veiled until the light of the Gospel shines through. Everyone is perishing before he gets saved.
6. It's my belief that God will save his sheep, and ultimately Satan cannot stop God from saving those he has determined to save. Satan will do everything he can to prevent people from being saved, but ultimately, he can't prevent God from shining the light of the Gospel into our hearts.
7. If you are saved, it's because Satan was unable to keep you veiled/blinded. God shined his light in your heart. You perceived the glory of God in the face of Jesus, and you believed the Gospel. In fact, that is why you believed. You can't take credit for that. God turned on the light for you; that's why you are saved.

8. Salvation is the work of God. He has to shine the light into our hearts. If he doesn't do that, no one will be saved.
9. The Bible tells us that "men love darkness rather than light" and that they don't want the light to shine on them. Their deeds are evil, and they don't want to be exposed.
10. God has to remove the veil, remove the blindness, and shine his light into your heart. That happens through the Gospel proclamation—Rom 1:16.
11. What can we do about spiritual blindness in unbelievers?
 - a) We can give them the Gospel. The more exposure unbelievers have to the Bible, the better.
 - b) We can pray for them. Pray that God would shine the light into their hearts.
 - c) It's our privilege to be used of God to communicate the Gospel to the lost. God shines the light of the Gospel when we tell others about Jesus. That's a ministry we all should be involved in.
12. If you are not saved, part of the reason for that is because Satan has blinded your mind lest the light of the Gospel should shine unto you. You are lost, blind, and condemned without Christ. If you persist in that condition, your eternal state will be the destruction and punishment of eternal hell. Don't allow Satan to blind you to that truth.
13. I would fervently urge you to respond to the light that you have. Jesus is the light of the world.

John 8:12 Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

In spite of all the difficulties, it's a great privilege to be involved in Gospel ministry. Every Christian should have some involvement in spreading *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*. We are the bearers of that light; God wants to use us to shine the light of the Gospel.

And as we engage in ministry, we should be careful to avoid the pitfalls Paul talks about in this passage—things like faint-heartedness, shameful practices/behaviors, clever schemes, distorting the Word of God, and self-centeredness.

Instead, we must proclaim the truth openly, appeal to the conscience, preach Christ as Lord, think of ourselves as servants, and trust in God to shine the light of the Gospel into darkened hearts.

There are many hindrances to the Christian ministry. Satan is trying his best to keep people from understanding the Gospel. He is trying his best to prevent the light of the Gospel from shining. But we also know that ultimately Satan cannot prevent God from accomplishing his purposes. The Gospel is still the “power of God unto salvation,” and it’s our duty to proclaim that Gospel message to those who are lost, perishing, and blind.