

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

Most of us probably were raised in a certain church tradition, and that tradition is mostly what we know. If you are born into and raised in a particular church or denomination, the ministry of that church is what you know about church. How that church operates sets the expectation for what you think of as “normal.”

As we grow up and have further experiences in life, we come to realize that other churches differ dramatically. They believe and practice differently from you. And not only do we find that other churches do things differently, we also come to realize that some churches do things wrongfully, even sinfully.

I recently read that one branch of the Mennonite Church has decided to “repent” for their past treatment of LGBT people. They will now endorse and perform same sex weddings and allow LGBT membership. That decision is clearly wrong, and it marks out that church as liberal and apostate. That’s the wrong way to do Christian ministry, and I would advise anyone in that church to get out of it.

In the passage we’re looking at today, Paul warns us about the wrong way to do ministry and he sets a pattern for proper church ministry.

The first seven chapters of 2 Corinthians focus on Paul’s character. The people there in Corinth had misunderstood why Paul was doing what he was doing, so Paul takes some time to describe and to explain his ministry. Then in chapters 8-9, he encourages his readers to participate generously in the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. The final four chapters are a further vindication or explanation of Paul’s credentials and ministry, especially as compared to his opponents.

So 2 Cor 4 is part of Paul’s explanation and defense of his ministry. In 4:1, Paul says “we have this ministry,” and then he goes on to describe several things about how he and his colleagues do the ministry. He makes a comparison between the proper way to do ministry and an improper way to do it.

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. No matter what aspect of ministry you are in, you should be following the biblical pattern of ministry.

Let’s consider what Paul says about how to do Christian ministry.

I. Avoid common pitfalls in ministry.

A. Don't quit. .1b

1. The words “we do not lose heart” come from a single word in the original language (ἐκκακοῦμεν), literally meaning “to be weary, to be discouraged, to be fainthearted.”
2. A fainthearted person is prone to quit or to compromise. He is weary of serving the Lord. It's too hard, too inconvenient, too costly or time consuming, even too dangerous.
3. In spite of all the trouble Paul faced, he did not capitulate; he did not cave in; he did not quit. He just kept on going.

**Illus.:** On a Sunday afternoon several weeks ago, we studied the life of the pioneer missionary, William Carey, and his missions work in India. Carey described himself as a “plodder.” He kept on going in the face of great obstacles, opposition, and tragedy. When a fire burned a warehouse with all his materials, he simply started over.

**Often in ministry, that's what we have to do.** In spite of all the obstacles and difficulties, we keep on going, keep plugging away. Don't quit; don't lose heart; we keep on plodding forwards.

B. Don't participate in hidden things of shame. .2a

1. All of us are probably aware of people in the ministry who have committed shameful acts (αἰσχυνῆς) and have disqualified themselves from the ministry.

It seems like about every few weeks, I hear about another pastor or person in Christian ministry who has been found guilty of some kind of immoral behavior. Somebody's hidden, shameful activity has been exposed.

2. Following Paul's example, we are to "renounce" the hidden things of shame. "Renounce" (ἀπεῖπον) means "to reject, to avoid, to disown."
3. Of all places in the world, the church should be free from the hidden things of shame. Christian ministry must avoid even the hint of shameful behavior. But it's a sad fact that even within some churches, evil people do shameful things, and often try to keep them hidden.

**Illus.:** We are probably aware of the scandalous behavior from some RC priests that has come to the surface in the last few years. That church for many years tried to hide shameful behavior and protect those guilty of it. What a great tragedy that so many children were abused at the hands of Catholic church leaders.

We must work hard to prevent any kind of shameful behavior from happening here. That's one of the reasons we do background checks and have a child protection policy. We want to make every effort to prevent shameful behavior from being a part of this ministry.

**Illus.:** You are probably aware of how prominent drag queens have become in our culture these days. Even churches are hosting drag queen events. Churches are flying the rainbow flag, showing their approval of a perverted lifestyle. Many people today revel in and promote shameful, wicked behavior.

Ephesians 5:11 *And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.*

Church should in no way be associated with hidden things of shame. We must renounce such things, avoid them, prevent them, and stand against them. There should be nothing shameful whatsoever about how we do Christian ministry. We must maintain a zero-tolerance policy for the hidden things of shame.

The Bible says, “Be sure your sin will find you out” (Num 32:23). If you are engaged in shameful immoral behavior, God knows about it, and most likely others will eventually find out as well.

C. Don’t walk in craftiness. .2b

1. The word (*πανουργια*) means “clever, cunning, deceitful.” It’s the opposite of being honest or sincere.
2. Some people think that they have to be clever/crafty in presenting the Gospel message. They think that they need to use high pressure salesman techniques and marketing tactics to convince sinners to accept the Gospel.
3. We don’t have to employ clever and crafty methods to “sell” the Gospel. All we have to do is proclaim the Gospel and urge people to accept it.

*1 Corinthians 2:4–5 And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

D. Don’t handle the Word deceitfully. .2c

1. The word here (*δολουντες*) is from a root word meaning “to catch with bait, to ensnare, to corrupt with error.” It refers to treachery, falsehood, or deceit. It could be translated as “adulterating the word of God,” “tampering with/distorting the word of God.”
2. Our job as a church is to preach the Word, to proclaim it clearly and honestly. We intentionally avoid corruption and error. The biblical expectation is that preachers “preach the Word” and “rightly divide the word of truth.”
3. Unfortunately, many pastors distort or tamper with the meaning of God’s word. They are trying to sell a corrupt version of Christianity.

I’ve heard many supposed spiritual leaders mishandle the Word.

**Illus.:** I listen to a podcast (Fighting for the Faith) that exposes the terrible ways that preachers mishandle the Word of God. Sadly, there is no shortage of preachers who distort, corrupt, or adulterate the Bible. We could find hundreds if not thousands examples.

We must be discerning and we must “search the scriptures” (Acts 17:11) like the Bereans to make sure that what the preacher is saying is an accurate reflection of the text.

It’s a shame when a preacher distorts the Word, and it’s also a shame when the people of the church allow it to happen. E.g., the people of the Mennonite Church should not have allowed this recent decision.

*Jer 5:31 The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule by their own power; And My people love to have it so. ...*

*2 Timothy 4:3–4 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*

If the people in the pew can’t tell the difference between the truth and a fable, then both the preacher and the people are to blame.

Let it never be said that the people of LBC tolerate the corruption or the distortion of God’s Word.

E. Don't preach yourself. .5a

1. Some smart aleck has coined a word to describe the practice of centering the message on the preacher instead of the text—it's called narcissesis. A narcissist is a self-centered person. A sermon is supposed to be an exegesis of a biblical text. If a sermon revolves around the *preacher* instead of a *passage*, he's guilty of narcissesis.
2. The topic in Christian ministry is never ourselves. The topic or center of attention is always Jesus and the Word of God.
3. The preacher's goal is to focus attention on Christ, not on himself. People ought to become fans of Jesus, not of the preacher.

Ps 115:1 *Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake.*

**Trans:** There are many pitfalls in Christian ministry to avoid. Sadly, many churches and preachers have fallen into these errors. And because of that, their ministry is corrupt and in serious error.

If we want to follow the apostolic pattern in ministry, we must avoid these common pitfalls. Not only that, but we must also...

II. Adopt the proper way of doing ministry.

A. .2c Preach the truth openly – “by manifestation of the truth.”

1. The word “manifestation” (φανερώσις) means “to appear, to show, to shine forth, to make known/plain.”

The preacher's job is to expose—exposit the truth, to exegete it, that is, to bring the meaning of the text to the surface.

2. What is supposed to “shine forth” from a message? “The truth”, i.e., the word of God. The preacher is supposed to proclaim the message of the text—he's supposed to exposit the truth of God's Word.

2Ti 4:2 *Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*

The goal of a Bible message is that it proclaims what the Bible says. That's exegesis—bringing out the truth of the text. Let the truth of the text shine forth.

B. Commend yourself to the conscience. .2end

1. It's not enough to preach the truth; we must also call for a personal response. We apply the truth to the heart.
2. Notice that his appeal is "in the sight of God." This little phrase suggests accountability. God will hold us accountable for our ministry.
3. We must proclaim the truth and then urge people to respond to it, to accept it and believe it and apply it.
4. Every time we hear the word of God expounded, our desire should be that we understand it and apply it. We always want to respond appropriately to biblical truth.

C. Preach "Christ Jesus the Lord." .5b

1. The center of Christian proclamation is that Christ Jesus is Lord. That is a necessary aspect of salvation and of the Christian life. Cf. Rom 10:9
2. It's unfortunate that some preachers separate Jesus Christ from his title as "Lord." That is, they do not preach the lordship of Jesus. They say that salvation does not require that you recognize Jesus as your Lord. They don't say much about Jesus' authority or right to demand obedience. They focus on love and mercy, but say little about submitting to Christ as Lord.
3. One of the marks of a biblical ministry is that they proclaim Jesus as Lord. They exhort people to submit to the Lordship of Christ.
4. Proclaim the deity of Christ .4end "...Christ who is the image of God."

Associated with the Lordship of Christ is the deity of Christ.

Jesus has authority—he is the Lord—because he is God in the flesh, the image of God.

Colossians 1:15 *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.*

Hebrews 1:3 *[Jesus is] the brightness of [God's] glory and the express image of His person ...*

The deity of Christ is a fundamental Christian doctrine. Jesus is God in the flesh. Anyone who denies that truth is a false prophet. Anyone who denies the Lordship of Christ is not a Christian.

D. Consider yourself to be a servant for Jesus' sake. .5b

1. The word “servant” here (δοῦλος) is “bond slave.” Paul was not serving in ministry for his own sake or for his own reasons. He considered himself as a bond-slave to Christ.

*1Co 9:16 For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!*

2. All the sacrifices and difficulties he endured were ultimately “for Jesus’ sake.” He saw himself as little more than a servant.

**App:** I wonder if you’ve ever considered yourself a servant for Jesus’ sake. Are you engaged in ministry for the great purpose of serving Jesus and proclaiming the Gospel? That ought to be our motivation.

We can withstand the difficulties of ministry because we are serving “for Jesus’ sake.” We serve others for Jesus’ sake.

E. Trust in God to shine the light in the hearts of your hearers. .6

1. .6a God is powerful—he caused the light to shine out of darkness. Of course, that’s a reference to Genesis 1—God said “Let there be light,” and there was light. That event speaks of God’s power.

Creation is one of the greatest demonstrations of God’s power. God spoke and it came to pass. That is great power.

2. God has shined the light in our hearts.

- a) The light consists of the knowledge of the glory of God. He’s talking about the light of the Gospel.

*John 1:5–9 And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. ... [Jesus brought] the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.*

*Joh 8:12 Then Jesus [said], “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”*

- b) The knowledge of God comes to us through God’s Son, Jesus. The light shines through the work of Christ.



*Acts 26:18 to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.*

As we serve God, we trust that God would shine the light of truth into the hearts of our hearers and open their eyes to turn them from darkness to light. Only God can do that. We rely upon God to shine the light of his truth into human hearts.

I wonder if your eyes have been opened to the Gospel message. Do you have the light, or are you still walking in darkness? Can you see or are you blind? Jesus came to give us light, forgiveness of sins, and a home in heaven. Turn from your sins and put your faith in him.

How do we do Christian ministry? We avoid common pitfalls like faintheartedness, shameful behavior, cunning deceitfulness, mishandling the Word of God, and self-promotion. Too many preachers, teachers, and churches are involved in such misbehavior. If a church is involved in these kinds of things, run away as fast as you can.

Instead, we ought 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 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.

Can you say with Paul (vs. 1) "We have this ministry"? What ministry do you have? How are you serving "for Jesus' sake"? Every believer ought to have a place of service in the Lord's vineyard, in the harvest field. We all ought to be involved in ministry of some kind. And we should make sure to pursue the ministry in a way that avoids these pitfalls and adopts this pattern.