

## AF A9 BIBLE STUDY: II Corinthians 4

Scripture of Lesson: II Corinthians 4: 1-18

In this chapter the apostle Paul aims to present the gospel of Christ and the ministry of this gospel so that the Christians at Corinth are reminded of what they had received from God and have proper appreciation for the ministry of the servants of Christ.

### 1. Light of the Gospel: v. 1-6

In Chapter 3 Paul mentioned the veil on Moses' face, which prevented the people of Israel from seeing his face clearly due to the shining light of God's glory on his face. Paul employs a typology here and implies that the people of Israel in the OT era could not see the truth of God clearly because of prejudices they had before them. For this reason, when the Lord Jesus came from God as their Savior, they could not discern Him and crucified Him. Thus, the veil represents prejudice, dishonesty and duplicity that work against the workings of the gospel of Christ. In Paul's ministry he *"has renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully..."* (v. 2). Perhaps he is aware of such practices of the Jewish religious leaders from his familiarization of how they work. This is possible because he had spent years in the society of the Pharisees as one of their leaders with great zeal. What caused Paul to become different?

Verses 2~6 seem to be rooted in Paul's personal experience of conversion from a Pharisee to a disciple of Christ, as described in Acts 9. On his way to Damascus to search out and put Christians into prison, Saul was visited by Lord Jesus who spoke to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4). Saul became blind. Through this experience Saul came to an earth-shaking realization that all he had believed true and worth holding onto made him an enemy of God. Saul repented, regained his vision and was born again as a Christian. Paul describes his former state as *"the gospel is hid to one who is lost"* (v. 4:3). Paul cites Genesis 1:3, *"And God said, Let there be light; and there was light."* God commanded the light of His truth to shine onto his own heart so that he could see *"the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"* (v. 4:6b). This miraculous experience of conversion was not unique to Paul himself. He believed that the gospel brings about the same miracle in every person who accepts the gospel of Christ in full honesty, without prejudice, dishonesty or duplicity of heart. As a result of this miracle, a person comes to see the glory of God in Jesus and rejoice as he did.

There is someone, however, who works against this work of God. In verse 4, Paul refers to *"the god of this world, who blinds the minds of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."* Since Genesis 3 there has been constant battles between the servants of God and the forces of Satan. Satan's work is often very subtle and innocuous. His attempts are viewed as logical, scientific and religious persuasions -- always trying to cause divisions among children of God, trying to plant doubts and suspicions into the hearts and minds of the believers, and to blind the minds of the unbelieving mass to prevent them from approaching God. As Paul was acutely aware of the schemes of Satan, servants of God and Christians should be wary of them and bravely confront and fight against his evil endeavors.

### 2. Power of God Working in Earthen Vessels: v. 7-18

In several places of this second epistle, Paul lists the hardships he has endured in his service to Christ [2 Cor. 4:7-12, 6:3-10, 11:21-33]. In so doing he introduces the core value of the Stoicism, a branch of Greco-Roman philosophical tract, as a defense of his ministry, namely, imperturbability in the face of external

circumstances. A Stoic is a person *“who though sick, is happy; though in danger, is happy; though dying, is happy; though condemned, is happy; though in disrepute, is happy.”* [Epictetus, *Discourses*, 2:19, 24]. Here, Paul lists troubles on every side and perplexion (v. 8), persecution and casting down (v. 9), and dangers of death (v. 11).

Paul, however, declares the goals of going through these afflictions willingly as follows:

- 1) So that the excellency of the power of God may be manifest through his ministry [v. 7]
- 2) So that the life of Jesus might be manifest in his body [v. 10]
- 3) So that life might in the Christians [v. 12]
- 4) So that God who raised Lord Jesus shall raise them up also by Jesus [v. 14]
- 5) So that the abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many, result in the glory of God [v. 15]

Because he has these goals in his heart he does not faint before afflictions [v. 16]. Rather, *“though our outward man perishes, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.”* And on each day he labors for Christ, his vision looks beyond the temporal troubles to the glory which will be his in eternity, *“for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal”* [v. 18].

Today we live in the world’s most affluence nation in the 21st century where people are hardly aware of any suffering and afflictions. Many pastors teach that we do not need to suffer afflictions for Christ. Rather, they often preach the so-called “Blessing Gospel,” which preaches abundant blessing to all who join mega churches and take part in their activities while making faithful financial donations. Blessings of the present life are far more assuring than the blessings in the life after, which is difficult to believe. Churches have made God very accessible by not emphasizing holiness and ‘fear of God.’ Words such as repentance and obedience have disappeared from pulpit languages. This gospel and world view are very different from those of the apostle Paul. We need to reflect on where we have gone wrong and turn around to the basic truth of the gospel of Jesus.

*Topics for Discussion:*

1. *What was your conversion experience like? Was it similar to Paul-- you felt the light of God’s truth suddenly shine in your heart and filled your entire being as it happened to Paul? Please share your experiences.*
2. *Do you see examples of dedicated ministry as Paul’s around you? Share such cases with the class.*