

Sunday, March 27, 2022
2 Corinthians 4:1-6 (Open Statement of the Truth)
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Intro

Paul is writing to the Corinthian church with whom he has a strained relationship (7:2-4). As he writes he's defending his apostleship (12:11-13) against charges from false apostles who are slandering him (10:7-12; 11:1-6, 12-15) while seeking to win the hearts of the Corinthians so that they're not spiritual casualties of these false apostles.

Today we find Paul defending his ministry.

Gospel proclamation is central this morning. How should we think about evangelism? Paul gives us some ideas.

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Passage Focus

Paul's perspective on gospel proclamation.

Point 1: Gospel proclamation stems from God's mercy (4:1)

Therefore

"Therefore" points back to what Paul said before. In chapter 3, Paul referred to himself and his companions as "ministers of a new covenant" (3:6). Paul then goes on to contrast the New Covenant ratified by Christ's substitutionary atonement with the Old Covenant given to Moses.

New Covenant versus Old Covenant

- 1) Ministry of the Spirit vs ministry of death
- 2) Obedience enabled by the Spirit vs obedience required
- 3) Freedom to obey God vs hardness
- 4) Transforming effects (sanctification) vs unchanged hearts
- 5) Practical righteousness vs condemnation
- 6) Seeing the glory of God vs blind to God's glory

As Christians living under New Covenant we see the glory of God and we're being progressively transformed into conformity with God's character over time (3:18).

Paul illustrates these concepts with a veil. Unbelieving Israelites read Moses' law with a veil over their hearts. Like a veil over the face restricts sight (or a blindfold). Christians have the veil removed. They see the glory of God and this results in transformed hearts.

This is what "therefore" points to. Paul continues to discuss his New Covenant ministry.

“by the mercy of God”

Paul’s New Covenant ministry is itself an act of God’s mercy. In other words, the privilege of public gospel proclamation is an act of God’s mercy towards Paul. This is how Paul sees it. This is how we should see it.

Application

How do you think about gospel proclamation? A duty to grin and bear. A burden to run from. Or an act of God’s grace towards you? What Paul is saying is this. I only deserved God’s judgment. Yet I now have the privilege of sharing the good news of Jesus’ death and resurrection. The fact that I have opportunity to share this message is a sign of God’s mercy towards me.

View gospel proclamation as neither a miserable duty or a horrific burden but rather an act of God’s mercy. How blessed we are to be given this opportunity to share God’s message. It’s about seeing things as they truly are. We ought to speak the gospel from gratitude towards God, not from threat of punishment or miserable obligation.

One way we relate to God is rejoicing over his mercy. We communicate joy in mercy by sharing the gospel. **Evangelize from joy in God, not from guilt!**

Paul doesn’t “lose heart”, he doesn’t quit, because he remembers God’s mercy. Remembering God’s mercy pushes him to keep on speaking.

Point 2: Gospel proclamation requires open statement of the truth (4:2)

What Paul doesn’t do

Paul starts with what he doesn’t do. Then he states what he does do. Paul avoids:

1) “disgraceful, underhanded ways”

Hidden or secret things characterized by what is disgraceful or shameful. Paul doesn’t secretly (out of sight) do what is morally unacceptable and shameful = he isn’t a fraud and he isn’t different in secret.

Paul aims to commend himself and the gospel he represents by above board conduct.

2) “cunning”

Trickery, evil cunning, craftiness. Used of the Sanhedrin’s attempt to trip up Jesus by asking questions about paying taxes to Caesar (Luke 20:23). They weren’t genuinely interested in obedience. They had other motives. Used of Satan’s cunning deception of Eve in the garden (2 Cor 11:3). In Ephesians 4:14 used of the cunning of false teachers that results in undiscerning believers “*tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.*”

Paul isn’t trying to trick anyone. He isn’t trying to pull a fast one. Paul isn’t a con man trying to get the Corinthians to invest in a Ponzi scheme. He strives to commend himself to the Corinthians so they don’t follow these false teachers. Paul wants to commend the gospel, not contradict the gospel.

3) “tamper with God’s word”

To distort something to the point of making it false. Adding to or subtracting from the gospel and thus creating another gospel that doesn’t save sinners.

Wine diluting – BDAG?

Earlier Paul said:

For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ. – 2 Cor 2:17

A peddler is a deceptive and greedy salesperson. Out for profit and will say anything to get a sale. Paul didn’t alter his gospel to get an audience. He didn’t say what people wanted to hear. He didn’t keep silent on what people didn’t want to hear. He’s not trying to trick anyone to get a sale. He’s not willing to do anything to get a convert.

What Paul does do

by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. – 4:2

Paul openly declares God’s word in the gospel. The term “open statement” refers to something fully made known (nothing left out), made clear, in considerable detail, full disclosure, in public. Out in the open. Not hidden or in secret. Nothing left out. No tampering or peddling here. God’s truth fully made known.

Application

How can we have a clean conscience in gospel proclamation? Full disclosure. All the necessary details. Nothing left out. Nothing added. Spoken with clarity.

Fellow elders, this is what we as elders are called to. Take God’s truth, speak it all, leave nothing out, and make it clear. What is evangelism? “*open statement of the truth.*” Paul didn’t just evangelize the Corinthians. He also taught them for their maturity. What is teaching? “*open statement of the truth.*”

Let’s think evangelism for a moment. What is faithfulness? No gimmicks. No sales pitch. Just open declaration of truth. Nothing pertinent left out. Sounds a little like Harry Fletcher. Using God’s word, actual Bible verses, to bring people to faith.

- 1) We’re not peddling some dubious product.
- 2) Not an air conditioner that doesn’t give off cold air or an overpriced purse.
- 3) Problem lies in the sight, heart, affections of the hearer, not the gospel.

To non-Christians

What is this gospel Paul proclaimed? Gospel means good news. Good news because we need to be rescued.

God

God is Creator and ruler over the heavens and the earth.

Man

The first man, Adam, broke God's one prohibition and death and sin came into our world. As a result, we're blind to the glory of God so we rebel, incurring guilt. God doesn't tolerate rebellion because he's holy.

Christ

In order to rescue us from the punishment our sin deserves, the Father sent the Son, Jesus, to die in our place as a substitute...

Response

such that everyone who repents and believes is forgiven and given eternal life. If we persist in our rebellion, we'll be punished for our rebellion in hell. If we turn from rebellion to trust, Jesus took our punishment.

That's the good news. God is merciful. If we believe, we're not treated as we deserve. So repent and believe.

Point 3: Gospel proclamation goes out to the blind (4:3-4)

Explanation

Paul declares the gospel with "*open statement of the truth.*" But the gospel remains veiled. Veiled to "*those who are perishing*" = non-Christians, the world, those who are not in Christ. People who haven't believed and repented of their sins. People who aren't born again. Veiled in the sense that the world can't see "*the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.*" Veiled not just intellectually, but also in the affections of the heart. In chapter three when Paul noted that "*whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts*" (3:15). The veil is a matter of both what one sees and what one treasures.

The world doesn't see "*the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ*" meaning the gospel shines brightly but they don't have the ability to perceive it. In the gospel, the glory of Jesus is on display. Glory meaning the shining brightness of the beauty of Jesus. The beauty of his sinless life, his self-giving sacrifice (the cross), his mercy, his teaching (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount), etc. We delight in Jesus. We treasure him. He shines brightly in our hearts.

When the world encounters Jesus, they don't find him appealing, beautiful. If you want an illustration it would be like the sun at the peak of the day glaring in their face and they fail to notice it's there. Or perhaps when the sunsets. The beauty when it turns kind of like pink and purple. It's right in front of them. They fail to notice. If they do notice the gospel, they don't find Jesus beautiful. Nothing of value to see here.

Why is it that they can't see? I say they can't see because Paul says they are blind. They have a veil over their eyes that restricts sight. Blindness speaks to inability to see. Inability to treasure the beauty of Jesus.

They can't see because *"the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers."*

- 1) *"the god of this world"* = Satan
- 2) god in that *"the whole world lies in the power of the evil one"* (1 John 5:19)

god in that the world is fallen and often characterized by Satan's values.

Satan remains in a leash such that he can't do anything unless God permits (see Job 1-2).

- 3) When did Satan blind the minds of unbelievers?

When he deceived Eve into sin and Adam followed. When our representative head (Adam) fell, we fell with him. Sin came into the world and a veil over came over mankind's eyes. So we're born spiritually blind.

- 4) Satan blinded the world for a purpose

to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. – 4:4

Christ is the image of God in that he perfectly reflects the character of God.

- 5) This means everyone ever born is born with a veil over their hearts and minds!
- 6) Escape from blindness only comes through faith and repentance.

Application

It doesn't mean a non-Christian can't grasp concepts and understand some of what you're saying. It doesn't mean they can't comprehend the basic gospel message. It means they don't see the gospel as true or beautiful or bearing on their eternal destiny. They don't treasure the gospel. So they respond with giggles or indifference or excuses or anger.

It's not your fault if they don't respond to *"the open statement of the truth."*

Why is evangelism so hard? The answer is clear. Because everyone we evangelize is blind to the beauty of Christ. Our only hope is that God would shine light on those we speak to like he did with us.

Non-Christian

Recognize the state you're in and ask God to give you sight that you may see the beauty of Jesus and treasure him.

Point 4: Gospel proclamation declares Jesus Christ as Lord, not ourselves (4:5)

Explanation

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. – 4:5

Paul doesn't talk about himself. He talks about Jesus. An "open statement of the truth" is Christ-centered. What does he proclaim? "Jesus Christ as Lord." Lord = chief, ruler, master, leader, a superior who commands us and places demands on our life. Jesus' lordship is essential gospel truth.

But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. – Romans 10:8-9

Faith confesses Jesus is Lord. Confessing Jesus' lordship functions as an aspect of repentance. In faith we turn from indifference or hostility towards Jesus to treasuring him as our Lord.

We don't proclaim believe facts about Jesus. We proclaim trust and treasure Jesus. Turn from rebellion = repent of your sins. Jesus says it this way:

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? – Matt 16:24-26

If we are to be saved, we must deny ourselves and follow Jesus. That's repentance. That's viewing Jesus as the Lord we obey.

Application

What about giving our testimony? Point the world to Jesus not yourself. Make Jesus shine not yourself. Testify to your brokenness, foolishness, rebellion, enslavement. Testify to Jesus' sinless life, self-giving sacrifice, mercy, the wisdom you've received from him. Testify to Jesus' lordship. One day he'll gather all the nations before him and judge every individual ever born, separating the sheep from the goats. Jesus indeed is Lord!

There's a way to give a testimony that speaks to Jesus Christ as Lord without seeking glory for ourselves.

Point 5: Gospel proclamation rests in God who shines light (4:6)

Explanation

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. – 4:6

On the first day in Genesis 1:3 God said, *"Let there be light."* Like the world was covered with darkness, we were blind to *"the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ."* Like God shined light on the unformed earth, he shined light in our hearts which resulted in our veil being lifted.

- 1) Light shined in our hearts

God reaches not only the intellect but also the affections, loves, desires, what we treasure.

- 2) The light was effectual

When God shined a light on the Corinthians' hearts the veil was lifted and they believed.

Those who received light believed. We believe because God removed the veil from our eyes by shining light inside us, in our hearts.

- 3) God gave the light for a purpose

"to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

So that the Corinthians would see the shining beauty of Jesus and treasure him. So that we would see Jesus as beautiful.

Application

We were once blind, but now we see. Uninspired by the beauty of the gospel. Then one day God chose to shine light on our hearts. That's amazing grace.

Conclusion

Gospel proclamation stems from God's mercy. The fact that we have opportunity to share this gospel is a sign of God's mercy towards us.

Gospel proclamation requires open statement of the truth. Don't add to the gospel. Don't subtract from the gospel.

Gospel proclamation goes out to the blind. That's why unbelief persists.

Gospel proclamation declares Jesus Christ as Lord, not ourselves. Point them to the one who says, "Repent and believe in the gospel."

Gospel proclamation rests in God who shines light. Call on God to shine light.