

THE BELIEVER'S GLORY

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
Chapter Bible Study Series
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Let's Begin

It is a wonderful reality to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Even more, how incredibly satisfying to serve the Savior Who died for us! In the New Testament, a sense exists in which every Christian is a minister (cp. 3:6). Our ministry primarily focuses on bringing others to the Jesus we have come to know.

In chapter three, Paul spoke of the glory of God and His Gospel of grace. Now he reveals the glory of the Christian believer. And, according to Paul, the glory in the believer's life stems chiefly from his or her activity in bringing others to Christ. Later, after acknowledging his knowledge of the terrifying judgment awaiting people without Christ, Paul writes, "we persuade men" (5:11). If Christians are to display glory in their lives, they must learn to "persuade men" of the Gospel of Jesus.

With such a background in mind, let's explore chapter four using the simple outline below as our guide:

- I. The Obligation We Possess: Service to God (vv. 1-2)**
- II. The Obstacle We Face: Satan and his Army (vv. 3-6)**
- III. The Objective We Gain: Salvation for Eternity (vv. 7-18)**

I. The Obligation We Possess: Service to God (vv. 1-2)

Paul begins chapter four by rehearsing the believer's obligation after coming to Christ. He writes, "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (vv. 1-2). In order to experience the glory of the Christian life in our service, we must be entirely honest with ourselves, our fellow men, but especially honest toward God.

Honesty involves, first of all, an examination of our *motives*. Paul says we have "received mercy." In other words, we became objects of mercy when we came to Christ. We did not come to Christ because we deserved Christ. Believers never receive what they deserve. If we received what we deserved, we would all be sent to hell! Instead we received what we did not deserve—mercy. No one deserves mercy. Mercy is something given to the undeserving; justice is something given to the deserving (cp. Eph. 2:4; 1 Tim. 1:11-16). And, because of the mercy we have in Jesus Christ, we may aptly confess, "we faint not." The Greek term translated "faint" is *ekkakeō* which means "to give up," "to lose heart." Mercy is a mighty motivator for the child of God!

Reflection Connection

Have you ever noticed how easy it is to demand justice when others wrong you but expect mercy when you wrong others? What do you think? Explain.

In addition, Paul says the believer has, "renounced the hidden things of dishonesty" which includes "craftiness" and "deceitfully" handling Holy Scripture. Dishonesty requires things performed in secret, secrecy which includes a hidden agenda or what some call "ulterior motives." There is absolutely no room for tricky dealing or underhanded play in God's Kingdom. Nor may distortion be used in dealing with the Word of God. Many groups today mix a little truth with a lot of error, posing as the community of faith—the church—as we see it in the New Testament. However, the crafty, dishonest dealing with God's Word makes them a community of deceit, an assembly of Satan rather than an assembly of God.

Honesty further involves an examination of our *message*. The Apostle speaks of the "manifestation of truth." Our obligation is to make the



Word of God clear. Though the truth of God has tremendous power in and of itself, there are many aspects to the faith that may get complicated. Glory results when Christian truth is so clearly presented a child may understand its meaning. Nothing pleases the Father more than our making plain the Word of God to those who do not yet understand.

II. The Obstacle We Face: Satan and his Army (vv. 3-6)

Our obligation is clear: we are saved to serve God. And, know the obstacles we face are just as clear. Paul writes, “But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (vv. 3-4). Just because we have an obligation to serve our Lord does not mean we will not face hindrances to our service.

Were we to list the difficulties we face as we serve the Lord Jesus, undoubtedly we may very well begin with financial difficulties; we simply have no money. Or, we may begin with a lack of people who volunteer to serve. Paul does not begin with the tangible but with the intangible. He begins in the spirit world. Why do more people not believe the Gospel when we share it? Why is it when a person fully understands the consequences of judgment to come, he or she nonetheless refuses to believe? What is Paul’s answer?

Those who believe not are blind to the goodness of God.

He says if people do not believe, it is because the “god of this world has blinded the minds of them that believe not” (cp. John 14:30; 16:11; 1 John 5:19). There is an invisible obstacle producing visible results; his name is Satan! And, just what can Satan do?

According to the Apostle, Satan *hides* the Gospel—“hid to them that are lost.” The Greek verb is present tense, indicative of a present state. In other words, if a person is lost, his or her travel-ticket has printed, as its destination, hell. Each and every day is one day closer to hell. Also, note the hidden nature of the Gospel is not because the Gospel is not powerful enough to break through the blindness. Paul elsewhere calls the Gospel “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16). Instead, the hiddenness of the Gospel stems from the refusal to believe. Again, the Apostle emphasizes the Gospel is hid to “them which believe not.”

In addition, Paul explains how Satan hides the Gospel—he hides the Gospel by blinding their minds. Those who believe not are blind to the *goodness* of God. The Apostle James insists that every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of lights (James 1:17). Satan blinds the unbeliever to the goodness of God.

Reflection Connection

Do you ever wonder why some people are saved and not others? Explain.



Next, Satan blinds unbelievers to his or her personal *spiritual condition*. The Bible teaches from Genesis to Revelation that, apart from Jesus Christ, all people are poor, lost, helpless, condemned, and blind. No hope exists apart from Christ. And, the most horrible thing of all is, people do not even know they are blind.

Satan further blinds people to the *only way of salvation*. A thousand and one religions exist today promising adherents connection to God. If they would but obey their rules, they would gain entrance to God's presence. However, Jesus bluntly says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). In essence, Jesus was saying without the way, there is no going; without the truth, there is no knowing; without the life, there is no living. And, He remains the substance of them all! Christianity is utterly exclusive in this sense—no other way to be saved exists apart from Jesus Christ.

Finally, Satan not only *hides* the Gospel, he *hinders* the Gospel. Paul affirms Satan covers over the Gospel message "lest the light... should shine unto them." He does not want you or me to believe the Gospel. Why? Those who believe are saved in that very moment (John 3:16). At the moment of regeneration, a person is transferred from spiritual death to eternal life (John 5:24).

Indeed the worst thing from the devil's vantage point is for a person's testimony to the Lordship of Christ to take hold, to have teeth in his life as well as others. Paul writes, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (vv. 5-6).

The testimony required of every child of God is simply this: *Jesus is Lord of my life*. If we proclaim ourselves rather than Christ, Satan is satisfied. Nevertheless, Paul insists we are "servants for Jesus' sake." Christ's desire is for us to lead people to Him. Satan's desire is exactly the opposite.

Not only do we testify Jesus is *Lord* of our life, He is also *light* of our life. Being saved is like what happened at creation—out of nothing, the Father spoke into existence the world as we see it, an amazing miracle taking place. Similarly, at our conversion, out of spiritual nothingness, God spoke spiritual life into existence, no less an amazing miracle taking place! Hence, the Gospel "shines" into our life.

The Bible teaches from Genesis to Revelation that, apart from Jesus Christ, all people are poor, lost, helpless, condemned, and blind.



III. The Objective We Gain: Salvation for Eternity (vv. 7-18)

Paul first revealed our obligation—to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. He then explained our obligation to serve God by no means implies God's obligation to shield us from all difficulties. In fact, Scripture repeatedly warns Christians about obstacles we all inevitably face, obstacles which include the arch-adversary himself, Satan. However, we must not lose hope but stand strong. Why? The goal we seek—the objective we gain—is nothing less than eternal salvation!

Paul explains, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (v. 7). The metaphor Paul employs comes from the potters' house. Our bodies are but raw clay, members to be molded at the guidance of another (cp. Jer. 18). The reason could not be more clear. It's all about God, not about us. He is Lord over us. He decides our destiny, our duty, our development. His strength surpasses our weakness. In fact, it is only when we are weak that God's power may be fully displayed in us. We are His vessels of service (cp. Acts 9:15).

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Therefore, when He shows up in our weakness, His power alone gives us incredible victory. Paul writes, "*We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body*" (vv. 8-10).

Moving from the image of the potter's clay, Paul takes us to the bloody battlefield. In the paradox, while the Christian is pictured as a surrounded warrior in hand-to-hand combat, he nevertheless escapes death. He is hit by the enemy but rises and walks. At every point, victory reigns over what otherwise is considered certain defeat. Why? Only the power of the living Christ working in an unseen realm sustains him! In the midst of every trial, God lifts the battle-scarred warrior up. If he is "troubled" he is not "distressed." He may be "perplexed" but he is not "despaired." Or, if he is "cast down," Christ will personally see to it he is not "destroyed."

Reflection Connection

How often do you experience trouble without distress? Or experience a "perplexing" period without the oft accompanying "despair"? Do you think it is impossible? Why or why not?

In addition, Paul offers the victorious believer a glimpse behind the heavenly curtain, a glimpse into the unseen world. He records, "For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you" (vv. 11-12). An incredible truth is proclaimed here: *out of death comes forth life*. Paul affirmed the same truth elsewhere, "He was raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25).

Paul then speaks of a world unseen (vv. 13-18). At the end, he writes, "...but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day.



For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal” (vv. 16b-18).

First, Paul speaks of our *proclamation* (vv. 13-15). We proclaim the faith we embrace and upon which we firmly stand (v. 13). If we do not believe, how can we speak? He also speaks of our hope (v. 14). Only those without God ultimately possess no hope (cp. Eph. 2:12). Love remains the substance of why we speak (v. 15). We want others to believe in order to be saved. We want them to be saved because we love them. It is as simple as that.

Second, he speaks of our *transformation* (v. 16). We are daily “renewed.” Our physical bodies continue to decay. Each and every day—whether or not we can see it with the naked eye—our bodies are dying. Cells are slowly falling off like so many scales. Yet, for the believer, our inward life is daily rejuvenating itself. If it is not, we must consider ourselves void of God’s grace, empty of God’s Spirit. We need Christ in our hearts! Our only hope is to turn from sin and trust Him.

Third, Paul speaks of our *anticipation* (vv. 17-18). For the “moment,” we experience “light affliction.” However, in the end, we expect a “far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory.” Our troubles—even the obstacle of Satan himself, whom we discussed earlier,—work for us instead of against us. Truly, Paul’s magnificent promise elsewhere applies, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Only eternity itself bears out the privileges awaiting the child of God!

Golden Greek Nugget

Though our physical bodies continue to die daily, Paul confidently asserts our inner person is “renewed” day by day (v. 16). The word translated in the English Bible as “renewed” is the Greek word *anakainoō*. It means “to make new,” “to renew,” “to change into something new and different.” It further implies a fundamental superiority. The transformation believers experience as a result of conversion remains nothing less than a radical creation—indeed a recreation—which remains far superior than the “first” creation (that is, the person’s creation at conception).

Wrap Up

We are saved by grace. No truth is so clear in the Bible. However, we are saved not to sit, but we are saved to serve. In other words, our allegiance to the Lordship of Christ obliges us to His service, not in order to be saved but because we are saved. Moreover, the service we give to Him possesses an obstacle—namely, Satan and his innumerable army from hell. The last thing the devil desires is for our service to the Lord to succeed. Hence, he makes an all-out assault on the servants of God. Nonetheless, the child of God can stand with confidence in the power of God. Our objective—our ultimate goal—will not fail; we will gain eternal salvation. Our omnipotent God promises it!

