

## Christ-Centered Ministry

2 Corinthians 4: 5-7

If one takes the time to study the two letters Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, it becomes clear that Corinth was a difficult place to minister. The church was situated within one of the most popular and secular cities of that day. In fact, the church had been heavily influenced by society, and Paul was forced to confront their compromise and failure to embrace pure doctrine. Naturally, such an approach was not welcomed by all. Some viewed Paul as a threat to their desired practices, and sought to discredit his authority through slander. Paul felt it necessary to defend his authority and apostleship.

Our text today should be viewed in light of the struggles present in Corinth. Having defended himself regarding the accusations of his accusers, Paul offers his approach to ministry in Corinth, and everywhere he ministered. He was settled on a Christ-centered approach to ministry. Paul was confident in his salvation, and yet he understood his inadequacy apart from Christ. He knew if anything beneficial and eternal resulted from his efforts, it would come by and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

While our society and culture is different from that in Corinth, there are many similarities. Our culture is rapidly changing and the difficulties we face are increasing. As difficult as our efforts in ministry have become, we too must rely upon the Lord and maintain a Christ-centered focus in ministry. I want to examine the [disclosures](#) of Paul as we consider: [Christ-Centered Ministry](#).

**I. The Proclamation of Christ** (5) – [For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake](#). Paul discloses the basis of his preaching. Notice:

**A. The Priority** (5a) – [For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord](#). Bear in mind the attacks Paul had faced and the many accusations that had been brought against him. He affirms yet again that the focus and priority of his preaching is Christ alone. He is not promoting himself, his agenda, or even his ministry. He in no way insinuated that salvation was obtained through obedience to his desires. He preached Christ and Christ alone. Paul knew salvation was in Christ alone and the preaching of the Gospel of Christ was his priority.

- In our modern struggles, many are tempted to alter their course, and change their focus. Many today are more concerned with cultural relevance and providing what the “consumers” want than sharing the truth of the Gospel. I am not opposed to programs, activities, and reaching people where they are, but we cannot abandon the preaching of Christ in our efforts. The Gospel of Christ, (His great sacrifice, death, burial, and resurrection,) must be the central focus of

ministry. If we fail to preach the Gospel, exalting Christ, we have offered nothing of eternal, life changing value!

**B. The Humility (5b)** – [and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake](#). While Paul was an apostle of the Lord, with authority to preach the Gospel, he assured the church that he too was a servant of Christ and willing to serve them as well. He had received a high and holy calling, but at the end of the day, he was nothing more than a servant of the Lord, just as they were.

- I fear we struggle more with this than those in other parts of the world. We live in an area that is saturated with the Gospel. Many of us have been exposed to truth, and attended church our entire lives. It is easy to develop a sense of “spiritual entitlement.” If we aren’t careful, we can develop a self-righteous attitude that creates a superior view in regard to others. I am certain we have no apostle Paul’s among us today. If he saw the benefit and need of humbling himself as a servant of the Lord, we must be willing to do so as well. We will never reach others until we see them as God sees them, and ourselves as nothing more than sinners deserving of hell, saved by the grace of our Lord. It has been said, “If service is beneath you, then leadership is far beyond you.”

**II. The Illumination through Christ (6)** – [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.](#)

Paul understood the darkness of religious formality, being apart from Christ. He knew all who were unsaved remained in spiritual darkness. He reveals the great illumination through Christ.

Consider:

**A. The Sovereignty (6a)** – [For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness...](#) As I read this passage, I was reminded of Paul’s salvation experience. He had no desire for Christ or the Gospel. He was not seeking the Lord, but the Lord sought him. Paul knew that God had sovereignly designed a plan for the salvation of humanity. He sent His Son as the sacrifice for our sin, offering Himself on the cross in our place. In the midst of great spiritual darkness, the Light of salvation shined in the world.

- I can relate to Paul’s words. As I walked through this life, I was not seeking the Lord, but He sought me. I knew I remained in sin and stood in need of a Savior, but I was not seeking the Lord the day I was saved. I rejoice that the Lord came to me, revealed my need, and saved me by His grace. Long before I realized my need, and even before the Lord came to me that day, God’s sovereign plan of salvation had been accomplished.

- Our world is filled with those who continue to walk in darkness. God provided the means of salvation for them through the sacrifice of His Son. The saved by grace have received this great light, being delivered from the darkness of sin. I pray we will let our lights shine, so this dark world may see the Light of Christ in us!

**B. The Sufficiency** (6a) – *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts.* Paul knew he was undeserving of such grace. He viewed himself as the least deserving, and yet this great Light had shined within his heart. It had shined in the hearts of all who had come to saving faith in Christ. The provision of God in salvation, through Christ the Son, had illuminated the dark, sinful hearts of mankind, revealing the hope and availability of salvation.

- The Gospel of grace remains sufficient to save today, illuminating the hearts of those apart from Christ, drawing them to the Lord in salvation. All who have ever been saved have come by faith in Christ alone. The grace of God was revealed as the Light of Christ shined within their sinful hearts. The sacrifice of Christ remains sufficient to save, and is available for all who will come to Christ by faith, repenting of sin and recognizing their great need.

**C. The Stability** (6b) – *to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* Paul was very educated in Scripture, tradition, and law, and yet he had not comprehended the doctrine of grace prior to his conversion. He knew most in Corinth had been brought out of idolatry and pagan practices. They too knew little of the doctrines of grace. How would one know how to follow Christ and live for Him? God provided the source for guidance and stability through the direction of the Spirit. Following salvation, the Spirit imparts knowledge and truth regarding the Lord and our spiritual lives. Darkness is replaced with glorious light!

**III. The Transformation in Christ** (7) – *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.* Here Paul speaks of the great transformation that takes place in the lives of those who experience salvation. Consider:

**A. The Possession** – *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels.* Having walked with the Lord for many years, experiencing the greatness of God in many ways, Paul remained amazed that mankind could possess such a glorious treasure. The sovereign, eternal God had provided the way for humanity to be reconciled to Him and enjoy a personal relationship. Paul had experienced and received much, but nothing compared to the great treasure he had in Christ.

- Isn't it amazing that we too can possess such a great treasure? None of us were worthy or deserving of such grace and provision, and yet it was freely offered. We have received the saving grace of God, pardoned of our sin, placed within the body of Christ, and given eternal life. What a treasure the saved by grace possess!

**B. The Power** (7) – *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God.* Paul experienced much and enjoyed great success in ministry, but he knew his accomplishments were not the result of his own abilities. He had received the power of Christ through the Spirit in salvation, and it was this excellent power working through him that provided the success and fulfillment he enjoyed.

- I stand amazed at the grace and provision of God. Saving us from sin and eternity in hell would be more than any of us deserve. Having eternal life exceeds anything we can possibly imagine, and yet that is not all we enjoy. Every believer possesses the Spirit within. Through Christ we can do all things. God allows us to enjoy great success in life, but we must remember that it is His power working through us, not our abilities. God takes a vessel worthy of death, places His Spirit within, and accomplishes much through His mighty power!

**C. The Persuasion** (7) – *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.* Paul was reminded that he was nothing more than a vessel of clay. His salvation rested in the provision of Christ alone. The success he enjoyed in ministry was accomplished through the power of God, not in his power or ability. He knew all that he enjoyed, and everything he looked forward to, was in the hand of God. All that he experienced in life was because of Christ. He stood amazed that God would bestow such honor on mortal men.

- We need to be reminded of this great truth as well. If anything of lasting value is accomplished in our lives or our church, it is accomplished through the power of God. We are nothing more than vessels He has chosen to use in order to accomplish His divine will. I am not discouraged by that. In fact, I am honored and humbled that the Lord would use any of us for His purpose. We are sinners saved by grace who serve and awesome Lord!

**Conclusion:** As we look forward to a New Year, anticipating continued growth, we must maintain a Christ-centered ministry. Apart from Him we have no hope, wisdom, or power to continue. Has the Light of Christ shined in your heart unto salvation? If so, are you thankful for that and desiring to be used of the Lord for His glory? Why not come today if the Lord has dealt with your heart? He stands ready to meet your need!