

# CHAPTER 4

In this chapter we have an account,

**I.** Of the constancy of the apostle and his fellow-labourers in their work. Their constancy is declared (v. 1), their sincerity is vouched (v. 2), an objection is obviated (v. 3, 4), and their integrity proved (v. 5-7).

**II.** Of their courage and patience under their sufferings. Where see what their sufferings were, together with their allays (v. 8-12), and what it was that kept them from sinking and fainting under them (v. 13 to the end).

## 2 CORINTHIANS 4:1-7

### THE APOSTLES' INTEGRITY

The apostle had, in the foregoing chapter, been *magnifying his office*, upon the consideration of the excellency or glory of that gospel about which he did officiate; and now in this chapter his design is to vindicate their ministry from the accusation of false teachers, who charged them as deceitful workers, or endeavoured to prejudice the minds of the people against them on account of their sufferings. He tells them, therefore, how they believed, and how they showed their value for their office as ministers of the gospel. They were not puffed up with pride, but spurred on to great diligence: “*Seeing we have this ministry*, are so much distinguished and dignified, we do not take state upon ourselves, nor indulge in idleness, but are excited to the better performance of our duty.”

**I.** Two things in general we have an account of: Their constancy and sincerity in their work and labour, concerning which observe,

**1.** Their constancy and perseverance in their work are declared: “*We faint not* (v. 1) under the difficulty of our work, nor do we desist from our labour.” And this their steadfastness was owing to the *mercy of God*. From the same mercy and grace from which they received the apostleship (~~ROM~~Romans 1:5), they received strength to persevere in the work of that office. Note, As it is great mercy and grace to be called to be saints, and

especially to be *counted faithful, and be put into the ministry* (<sup>3012</sup>1 Timothy 1:12), so it is owing to the mercy and grace of God if we continue faithful and persevere in our work with diligence. The best men in the world would faint in their work, and under their burdens, if they did not receive mercy from God. *By the grace of God I am what I am*, said this great apostle in his former epistle to these Corinthians, <sup>650</sup>1 Corinthians 15:10. And that mercy which has helped us out, and helped us on, hitherto, we may rely upon to help us even to the end.

**2.** Their sincerity in their work is avouched (v. 2) in several expressions: *We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty*. The things of dishonesty are hidden things, that will not bear the light; and those who practise them are, or should be, ashamed of them, especially when they are known. Such things the apostle did not allow of, but did renounce and avoid with indignation: *Not walking in craftiness*, or in disguise, acting with art and cunning, but in great simplicity, and with open freedom. They had no base and wicked designs covered with fair and specious pretences of something that was good. Nor did they in their preaching *handle the word of God deceitfully*; but, as he said before, they used *great plainness of speech*, and did not make their ministry serve a turn, or truckle to base designs. They had not cheated the people with falsehood instead of truth. Some think the apostle alludes to the deceit which treacherous gamesters use, or that of hucksters in the market, who mix bad wares with good. The apostles acted not like such persons, but they *manifested the truth to every man's conscience*, declaring nothing but what in their own conscience they believed to be true, and what might serve for the conviction of their consciences who heard them, who were to judge for themselves, and to give an account for themselves. And all this they did *as in the sight of God*, desirous thus to commend themselves to God, and to the consciences of men, by their undisguised sincerity. Note, A stedfast adherence to the truths of the gospel will commend ministers and people; and sincerity or uprightness will preserve a man's reputation, and the good opinion of wise and good men concerning him.

**II.** An objection is obviated, which might be thus formed: "If it be thus, how then does it come to pass, that the gospel is hid, and proves ineffectual, as to some who hear it?" To which the apostle answers, by showing that this was not the fault of the gospel, nor of the preachers thereof. But the true reasons of this are,

**1.** *Those are lost souls* to whom the gospel is hid, or is ineffectual, v. 3. Christ came to *save that which was lost* (<sup>471b</sup>Matthew 17:11), and the gospel of Christ is sent to save such; and, if this do not find and save them, they are lost for ever; they must never expect any thing else to save them, for there is no other method or means of salvation. The hiding of the gospel therefore from souls is both an evidence and cause of their ruin.

**2.** *The god of this world hath blinded their minds*, v. 4. They are under the influence and power of the devil, who is here called *the god of this world*, and elsewhere *the prince of this world*, because of the great interest he has in this world, the homage that is paid to him by multitudes in this world, and the great sway that, by divine permission, he bears in the world, and in the hearts of his subjects, or rather slaves. And as he is the prince of darkness, and ruler of the darkness of this world, so he darkens the understandings of men, and increases their prejudices, and supports his interest by keeping them in the dark, blinding their minds with ignorance, and error, and prejudices, that they should not *behold the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God*. Observe,

**(1.)** Christ's design by his gospel is to make a glorious discovery of God to the minds of men. Thus, as the image of God, he demonstrates the power and wisdom of God, and the grace and mercy of God for their salvation. But,

**(2.)** The design of the devil is to keep men in ignorance; and, when he cannot keep the light of the gospel out of the world, he makes it his great business to keep it out of the hearts of men.

**III.** A proof of their integrity is given, v. 5. They made it their business to preach Christ, and not themselves: *We preach not ourselves*. Self was not the matter nor the end of the apostles' preaching: they did not give their own notions and private opinions, nor their passions and prejudices, for the word and will of God; nor did they seek themselves, to advance their own secular interest or glory. But they *preached Christ Jesus the Lord*; and thus it did become them and behove them to do, as being Christ's servants. Their business was to make their Master known to the world as the Messiah, or the Christ of God, and as Jesus, the only Saviour of men, and as the rightful Lord, and to advance his honour and glory. Note, All the lines of Christian doctrine centre in Christ; and in preaching Christ we preach all we should preach. "As to *ourselves*," says the apostle, "*we*

*preach*, or declare, that *we are your servants for Jesus' sake.*” This was no compliment, but a real profession of a readiness to do good to their souls, and to promote their spiritual and eternal interest, and that for *Jesus' sake*; not for their own sake or their own advantage, but for Christ's sake, that they might imitate his great example, and advance his glory. Note, Ministers should not be of proud spirits, *lording it over God's heritage*, who are servants to the souls of men: yet, at the same time, they must avoid the meanness of spirit implied in becoming the servants of the humours or the lusts of men; if they should thus *seek to please men*, they would not be the servants of Christ, <sup>Ⓜ</sup>Galatians 1:10. And there was good reason, 1. Why they should preach Christ. For by gospel light we have the *knowledge of the glory of God*, which shines in the *face of Jesus Christ*, v. 6. And the light of this *Sun of righteousness* is more glorious than that light which God commanded to shine out of darkness. It is a pleasant thing for the eye to behold the sun in the firmament; but it is more pleasant and profitable when the gospel shines in the heart. Note, As light was the first-born of the first creation, so it is in the new creation: the illumination of the Spirit is his first work upon the soul. The grace of God created such a light in the soul that those who *were sometimes darkness are made light in the Lord*, <sup>Ⓜ</sup>Ephesians 5:8.

**2.** Why they should not preach themselves: because they were but earthen vessels, things of little or no worth or value. Here seems to be an allusion to the lamps which Gideon's soldiers carried in earthen pitchers, Jud. 7:16. The treasure of gospel light and grace is put into earthen vessels. The ministers of the gospel are weak and frail creatures, and *subject to like passions* and infirmities as other men; they are mortal, and soon broken in pieces. And God has so ordered it that the weaker the vessels are the stronger his power may appear to be, that the treasure itself should be valued the more. Note, There is an excellency of power in the gospel of Christ, to enlighten the mind, to convince the conscience, to convert the soul, and to rejoice the heart; but all this power is from God the author, and not from men, who are but instruments, so that God in all things must be glorified.

## 2 CORINTHIANS 4:8-18

### THE APOSTLES' SUFFERINGS AND SUPPORTS

In these verses the apostle gives an account of their courage and patience under all their sufferings, where observe,

**I.** How their sufferings, and patience under them, are declared, v. 812. The apostles were great sufferers; therein they followed their Master: Christ had told them *that in the world they should have tribulation*, and so they had; yet they met with wonderful support, great relief, and many allays of their sorrows. “*We are,*” says the apostle, “*troubled on every side*, afflicted many ways, and we meet with almost all sorts of troubles; *yet not distressed*, v. 8. We are not hedged in nor cooped up, because we can see help in God, and help from God, and have liberty of access to God.” Again, “*We are perplexed*, often uncertain, and in doubt what will become of us, and not always without anxiety in our minds on this account; *yet not in despair* (v. 8), even in our greatest perplexities, knowing that God is able to support us, and to deliver us, and in him we always place our trust and hope.” Again, “*We are persecuted* by men, pursued with hatred and violence from place to place, as men not worthy to live; *yet not forsaken* of God,” v. 9. Good men may be sometimes forsaken of their friends, as well as persecuted by their enemies; but God will never leave them nor forsake them. Again, “*We are sometimes dejected, or cast down*; the enemy may in a great measure prevail, and our spirits begin to fail us; there may be fears within, as well as fightings without; yet we are *not destroyed*,” v. 9. Still they were preserved, and kept their heads above water. Note, Whatever condition the children of God may be in, in this world, they have a “*but not*” to comfort themselves with; their case sometimes is bad, yea very bad, but not so bad as it might be. The apostle speaks of their sufferings as constant, and as a counterpart of the sufferings of Christ, v. 10. The sufferings of Christ were, after a sort, re-acted in the sufferings of Christians; thus did they *bear about the dying of the Lord Jesus* in their body, setting before the world the great example of a suffering Christ, *that the life of Jesus might also be made manifest*, that is, that people might see the power of Christ's resurrection, and the efficacy of grace in and from the living Jesus, manifested in and towards them, who did yet live, though they were always *delivered to death* (v. 11), and though *death worked in them* (v. 12), they being

exposed to death, and ready to be swallowed up by death continually. So great were the sufferings of the apostles that, in comparison with them, other Christians were, even at this time, in prosperous circumstances: *Death worketh in us; but life in you*, v. 12.

**II.** What it was that kept them from sinking and fainting under their sufferings, v. 13-18. Whatever the burdens and troubles of good men may be, they have cause enough not to faint.

**1.** Faith kept them from fainting: *We have the same spirit of faith* (v. 13), that faith which is of the operation of the Spirit; the same faith by which the saints of old did and suffered such great things. Note, The grace of faith is a sovereign cordial, and an effectual antidote against fainting-fits in troublous times. The spirit of faith will go far to bear up the spirit of a man under his infirmities; and as the apostle had David's example to imitate, who said (<sup>1830</sup>Psalm 116:10), *I have believed, and therefore have I spoken*, so he leaves us his example to imitate: *We also believe*, says he, *and therefore speak*. Note, As we receive help and encouragement from the good words and examples of others, so we should be careful to give a good example to others.

**2.** Hope of the resurrection kept them from sinking, v. 14. They knew that Christ was raised, and that his resurrection was an earnest and assurance of theirs. This he had treated of largely in his former epistle to these Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 15. And therefore their hope was firm, being well grounded, that he who raised up Christ the head will also raise up all his members. Note, The hope of the resurrection will encourage us in a suffering day, and set us above the fear of death; for what reason has a good Christian to fear death, that dies in hope of a joyful resurrection?

**3.** The consideration of the glory of God and the benefit of the church, by means of their sufferings, kept them from fainting, v. 15. Their sufferings were for the church's advantage (<sup>4006</sup>2 Corinthians 1:6), and thus did redound to God's glory. For, when the church is edified, then God is glorified; and we may well afford to bear sufferings patiently and cheerfully when we see others are the better for them if they are instructed and edified, if they are confirmed and comforted. Note, The sufferings of Christ's ministers, as well as their preaching and conversation, are intended for the good of the church and the glory of God.

4. The thoughts of the advantage their souls would reap by the sufferings of their bodies kept them from fainting: *Though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed day by day*, v. 16. Here note,

(1.) We have every one of us an outward and an inward man, a body and a soul.

(2.) If the outward man perish, there is no remedy, it must and will be so, it was made to perish.

(3.) It is our happiness if the decays of the outward man do contribute to the renewing of the inward man, if afflictions outwardly are gain to us inwardly, if when the body is sick, and weak, and perishing, the soul is vigorous and prosperous. The best of men have need of further renewing of the inward man, even day by day. Where the good work is begun there is more work to be done, for carrying it forward. And as in wicked men things grow every day worse and worse, so in godly men they grow better and better.

5. The prospect of eternal life and happiness kept them from fainting, and was a mighty support and comfort. As to this observe,

(1.) The apostle and his fellow-sufferers saw their afflictions working towards heaven, and that they would end at last (v. 17), whereupon they weighed things aright in the balance of the sanctuary; they did as it were put the heavenly glory in one scale and their earthly sufferings in the other; and, pondering things in their thoughts, they found afflictions to be light, and the glory of heaven to be *a far more exceeding weight*. That which sense was ready to pronounce heavy and long, grievous and tedious, faith perceived to be light and short, and but for a moment. On the other hand, the worth and weight of the crown of glory, as they are exceedingly great in themselves, so they are esteemed to be by the believing soul far exceeding all his expressions and thoughts; and it will be a special support in our sufferings when we can perceive them appointed as the way and preparing us for the enjoyment of the future glory.

(2.) Their faith enabled them to make this right judgment of things: *We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen*, v. 18. It is by faith that we see God, who is invisible (<sup>4812</sup>Hebrews 11:27), and by this we look to an unseen heaven and hell, and faith is the *evidence of things not seen*. Note,

[1.] There are unseen things, as well as things that are seen.

[2.] There is this vast difference between them: unseen things are eternal, seen things but temporal, or temporary only.

[3.] By faith we not only discern these things, and the great difference between them, but by this also we take our aim at unseen things, and chiefly regard them, and make it our end and scope, not to escape present evils, and obtain present good, both of which are temporal and transitory, but to escape future evil and obtain future good things, which though unseen, are real, and certain, and eternal; and faith is *the substance of things hoped for*, as well as the evidence of things not seen, ~~811~~ Hebrews 11:1.