

## 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

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[ 0 : 00 ] So, 2 Corinthians. In the Bible there is milk and there is meat. And I think I would want to argue that 2 Corinthians is mostly meat.

! And I'm trying to make it as palatable as possible. And that's why I want to slow right down and then we're going to look at the 6 verses. Now let me remind you that the Corinthian church was in trouble. Trouble from the inside. And that is the worst kind of trouble.

There were people who were outside the church. They'd come in and they'd become leaders. And yet there were false leaders, false teachers. And they were trying to get the church back to Moses. They were quite so vital people actually. Let's get back to Moses. Let's get back to the Old Testament.

They had a sort of Christianity which wasn't Christianity. And it wasn't Christianity at all because it wasn't centred on Christ. And it wasn't centred on the cross. It was actually very much centred on the personality of these preachers.

And it very much centred on the idea of working for your salvation. Doing enough. Getting things right. And Paul is combating these people. There's lots of them. And they've taken over the church really in Corinth.

[ 1 : 18 ] And this whole letter is a collision, chapter after chapter, a collision between Paul and these teachers who have infiltrated the church in Corinth. And of course what they're doing is they are ruining boys and girls and men and women.

And you might say to me, this is my biggest problem. It's going through Monday to Friday. And I don't find sermons on false teaching very helpful at all. But if the teaching is wrong, if the gospel is perverted, you cannot enjoy God.

If the gospel is perverted, you cannot enjoy God and you cannot glorify Him in your life on a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. We've got to keep a pure message for our Christian lives to be fed and nourished and strengthened.

And that is exactly what was not happening here because of these false teachers. So I want to be brief at that. So I've got 12 points. And so you'll see that. I've done an outline. I don't like outlines at all.

But I've done an outline just to help you out. You'll see it in the middle. So if you fall asleep and you wake up, you should know where we are. I think, I'm hoping, it's a point every two minutes. The first thing is four accusations rejected.

[ 2 : 31 ] So look at verse 1. We've got to pick these out by implication. Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.

We do not lose heart. They are saying he's demoralized. Oh, said the false teachers, Paul is demoralized. He's lost all fight.

He's just become apathetic. He's one of those people who used to have so much energy and so much vigor, but look at him now. He's lost heart. He's demoralized. That's one of the reasons why he doesn't come back to Corinth.

Recently, things have just been too tough for the apostle. That's why he fled Ephesus recently. Things were too tough for him then. That's why when he went to Troas, he only lasted a long weekend.

He just couldn't fit it. It was too hot in the kitchen for Paul, so he got out. He's pathetic. But look at us. Here we are. We are triumphant.

[ 3 : 31 ] And we are sweeping everything in front of us. We get knocked down, but we get up again. You're never going to keep me down, they sang. Here in Corinth. Here we are.

We are great leaders. But Paul is low as we see. He's lost our first one. Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. Just notice that. He says, you have your ministry. Me and my colleagues, we have this ministry. You have your ministry. Where all the attention is drawn onto you. We have our ministry by which we draw attention to the Lord Jesus Christ. You have your ministry, which tells people that they must keep a set of rules. And at last, they must be saved. We have this ministry by which we preach the kindness of God. By the mercy of God. God has been so kind and so merciful to us. [ 4 : 26 ] He has saved us as sinners. And he has given us this ministry. This ministry of our lives. And you are stomping around with all your triumphalism. But it is simply not true to say that we've lost heart.

Because we haven't. We've not given up on you, Corinth. I have visited. I have written to you. And I am writing to you again. I am not giving up. Because I have this ministry given to me by the mercy of God.

Ah, said the false teachers. Be that as in me, this man Paul is not straight up. He is not straight up. Look at verse 2. We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. And we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word. But by the open statement of the truth. We would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. Now Paul said these false teachers is basically a dishonest man. You can never lay them down. He says he's coming when he turns out. He's cunning. He's crafty. He's not straight up. [ 5 : 26 ] He's not a man you can trust. We've already told you about how he promises to come. And yet he doesn't keep his word. He says he'll do things. But he doesn't do them. Don't have anything to do with this deceitful, devious trickster.

But verse 2, Paul says we are not like that. We act in the sight of God. Don't we? The end of verse 2. Our great principle, says Paul, is that only God matters. And so actually we're not going to be moved by your praise, Corinth, or your censure. Only God matters. We're not going to change our way of doing things. Our ideals. Simply because of your opinions. Or pressure. Because it is what God thinks that matters. Only God matters. Look at that.

We would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And as we are honest. He says we commend ourselves. Your conscience bears witness to the fact. [ 6 : 29 ] That we are being straight up. Let's move forward. We deal with you plainly. And all we do in verse 2 is we open up the truth.

And we see this. We renounce the things of shame. We're not using tricks or gimmicks. We're not walking around craftily trying to entice you.

We're not handling the word of God deceitfully. We don't tamper with it. We're not diluting the message or adding to it. All we're doing is the open statement of the truth. We stand in front of common issues like this and we say this is the truth. And your own conscience is bear witness to the fact that our dealings are as plain as that. Yes say the false teachers. But he subtracts from the message. And he adds to the message. He handles the word deceitfully. He distorts the message. That's our third criticism.

[ 7 : 33 ] He distorts the message. And Paul has been teaching that God's covenant with Israel has been fulfilled. God's covenant with Israel. The people of Israel has been fulfilled in Christ.

In all believers in Christ. But the false teachers remember they want to get you back to Moses. So they won't take that on board. Paul has taught us in this letter that all of God's promises are yes and amen in Christ Jesus.

Now what does that mean? That means this. It means that God has nothing. Nothing for you. Outside of Jesus Christ.

I know what common grace. I know God is kind to the just and the unjust. The rain falls on the unjust. Just and the unjust. I know that. God has nothing for you. Outside of Christ. But in their teaching.

The people in Corinth. They say well God has got lots of you. Lots of things for you. Outside of Christ. Paul's teaching. Paul's teaching. Was it? However glorious the old covenant was. It has been superseded.

[ 8 : 44 ] By the glorious light of the new covenant. But they wanted to live in the old covenant. And Paul has got such high views of the Lord Jesus.

That it leaves these people utterly bewildered. Because as he will teach in this passage. Christ is the image of God. And we don't alter the message at all.

Says Paul. All we do is say what the truth is. We have. Don't we? Can you see it there again? Verse 2. An open statement of the truth.

Yes. Say false teachers. Okay. But verses 3 and 4. When Paul preaches. People just cannot get what he's going on about. But. Paul's preaching is not clear. It's the false criticism.

So. He preaches and he preaches. But it's like there's a veil on their understanding. So people come out. After hearing Paul on a Sunday night. They say. What was he preaching on? I think that's clear. He's very excited though. It's all very good for Paul to be teaching about veils.

[ 9 : 48 ] Like he did in the last chapter. But when he preaches. There's a massive veil. People listen to the apostle Paul. They come. People bring their friends. Come to hear this man.

And after he's finished. They turn to their friends. Say. What do you think? I don't know what he's talking about. What is he talking about? Yes. Says Paul. Yet. Even if our gospel is veiled.

It is veiled to those who are perishing. Whose minds the God of this age is blinded. So look at verse 3. If our gospel. It is veiled. It is veiled to those who are perishing.

In their case. The God of this world. The God is a small g there. Isn't it? God of this world. That is the devil. God has blinded the minds of the unbelievers. To keep them from seeing the light of the gospel. Of the glory of Christ. Who is the image of God.

People don't understand. Says Paul. Because. Of the people they are. The kind of people they are. That is the fact of the matter. That there is a devil.

[ 10 : 46 ] That is at work. False teachers don't seem to make any allowance for that. Paul is making it clear. That when he preaches. He is preaching to fallen sinners. Sinners. The fall of mankind.

The ruin of the human race. That moral and spiritual catastrophe. Where men and women. Boys and girls. Fell from that perfect. The state in which they were made.

And they fell into sin. Don't you see someone fall over. You see an old person fall over. On the street. That is horrific. Isn't it? Do you feel that?

Even thinking about it. When you actually see somebody. Who is old. Fall. It's horrible. That's how horrible. That's how horrible it is. In fact magnify that. There's catastrophe.

And why have we fallen morally? Well because of the work of the devil. And the devil's first tactic. Is to destroy. That's what he does in Genesis 3. He wants to destroy.

[ 11 : 48 ] The thought processes. So the people can't think straight. Their minds are affected. And therefore their emotions. And their will are affected.

The Bible calls all of us to be the heart. But what stops them seeing. This glorious message. Of the Lord Jesus. It's not that the message is veiled. What stops them seeing.

Is that their understanding. Is clouded. So think. The sun can shine as brightly as can be. Can't it? But some people can't see it.

It's because they may be short sighted. They might be blind. They might have cataracts. There's a problem in their sight. There's a problem in the sun. And the fact that people don't understand.

My message says Paul. Is a spiritual problem. Without understanding. Because of the devil's work. In the human mind. The gospel cannot be appreciated.

[ 12 : 46 ] Until the mind has been clarified. And illuminated. Where God has done something. In the thought processes of people. So Paul stands face to face.

In an open confrontation. Doesn't he? With these four acquisitions. They say he's demoralised.

They say he's not straight up. They say he's distorting the message. And they say his preaching is not clear.

And he says it is the exact opposite. He says God is with us. We tell you the truth. We've not altered anything. And if you don't understand. The problem is in your own spiritual life.

Now four key words. Four key words. So the verses five and six. For what we proclaim is not ourselves. But Jesus Christ.

As Lord. With ourselves as your servants. For our sake. First key word is preach. Paul is a ministry.

[ 13 : 48 ] How does he exercise that? By preaching. And the moment we mention preaching. You think of all sorts of things. You think of long. Dreepy sermons. Well not very dark.

But I think that's not at all. By men who don't understand. What life is really like. Who are dressed in a slightly odd way. But the words here. The words here. It doesn't carry any of those kind of. Negative connotations or. Things at all. So think about a news reader on the TV. That is the word. That is the word literally.

It's the kind of news reader on TV. It's more in line. With the word preachers. The New Testament uses it. That person has a message given to them. The news reader gets a message.

They don't alter the message. They. They transmit it clearly. So preaching is what Paul does. But the message is divinely given. He's not made it up.

[14:47] I don't alter it. I don't touch it. I don't shape it. I don't tailor it. That's what preaching is. I preach. All I do is. I take the message. That I have been given. And I transmit it to you.

Says Paul. Now there was no press. There was no TV. And there was no internet. Half of the population about this time couldn't actually read.

In some parts of the Roman Empire hardly anyone could read. So when Caesar had a message.

When there was the news. What did he do? He sent out to his empire. Heralds. Heralds.

And they stood on the corner. And they had a given message. And they were to give that message.

Word for word. Word for word. On the street corners. And in the public buildings.

And whenever people could be found. There were. In schools. Public places. Theaters. And they transmitted the message. That they had been given. That's all they did. And Paul says.

[15:45] That's all I'm doing. That's all I'm doing. I am just giving to you. What's been given to me. I preach. The second key word is Lord.

Lord. Jesus. The Lord. That is what I preach. The focus of Paul's preaching. Was the Lordship. Of Christ. His message.

Christianity's message. Is not basically about you. It's not. It's not primarily. About you. It bears on that.

The message primarily. Is not. Not primarily. About the listener. Though. The Bible has lots to say to the listener. His message is about. The Lordship of Christ.

He's telling the world about Christ. About who he is. And what he's done. And what he's doing. And what he's going to do. His message is focused. On Christ. If he is any place in it.

[16:47] Well look at verse 5. He says that he is. A servant. For Jesus sake. Again. Think about Corinth. Think about the false teachers. Where did they draw their attention.

They drew their attention. To themselves. And they were particularly doing that. In that church.

They were parading themselves. As super apostles. Paul calls them at one point. People who had strange drawing power.

Magnetic personalities. Wonderful communicators. Wonderful gifts. And compelling power. To move congregations. And Paul says.

We are preaching. Just notice it. Jesus. Christ. As Lord. Not ourselves. The third key word.

Is the word glory. So in verse 4. They have been kept. From seeing. The light of the gospel. Of the glory. Of Christ.

[17:42] And then it is there. In verse 6. Again. For he has shone. In our hearts. To give the light. Of the knowledge. Of the glory. Of God. If you include.

Last week's passage. He uses this word. Sixteen times. In this section. What is glory? Well. In the Old Testament. In the tabernacle.

Do you remember that? There is this wonderful. Shekinah glory. And there is a. Kind of a burning flame. Came over it. At night. And there is a great cloud.

Hang over it. By day. The Shekinah glory. But actually. That is only a picture. Of glory. Isn't it? You can think of glory. Like that. What actually is glory? Let me try and think about it.

Glory is this. Glory is. The godness. Of God. The godness. Of God. And when we come to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[18:40] Do you know what we see? We see the godness. Of God. In Christ. We see the otherness. We see the wonder.

We see the majesty. Of God. And we haven't got. The words. We haven't got the vocabulary. Glory. So the Bible used the word. Glory.

And when I see that. God. Is God. Jesus of Nazareth. Is God. Then I am seeing glory. And the wonderful thing. About heaven.

Which we sometimes call. Don't we. We say. Well they've gone to glory. Is that in heaven. We see. The godness of God. Without any form. Without any obstacle. For the Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 4. In their case. The god of this world. Has blinded the minds. Of the unbelievers. To keep them from seeing.

[ 19 : 37 ] The light of the gospel. Of the glory. Of Christ. Who is the image. Of God. So when you see Christ. You see all that God is. Verse 4.

He is the image. Of God. And looking at Christ. You see the glory. Of Christ. Who is the image of God. Therefore you see the glory. Of God. As you look at Christ. You see the godness. Of God. In looking at Christ. Now he's going to say. The same thing. In verse 6. Doesn't he. Verse 6. For God. Who said. Let light shine. Out of the darkness. Genesis 1. Has shone in our hearts. To give the light. Of the knowledge. Of the glory. Of God. In the face. Of Jesus Christ. That we come to know. The godness of God. In Jesus Christ. The light breaks in upon us. But we see it in the face. Of Jesus Christ. And that one is. The fourth word. The fourth word is light. Do you remember the apostle Paul.

[ 20 : 36 ] He's going along the. Damascus road. He's going along the Damascus road. To destroy the church. To persecute the church. He is on that road.

A Pharisee. A Christian killer. A murderer. And he is suddenly struck down. By a light. A light that shone brighter. Than the noonday sun. It was a physical light. But it's only a picture. Of a spiritual reality. It's only a picture. Of a spiritual reality. That was taking place. In his life. We. Men and women. And boys and girls. Live in darkness. And then the light. Burst in upon us. What do we see? What do we see? What do we see? We see the truth of it all. And we see the wonder of it all. And the facts of it all. And we didn't believe it before. And where do we see it? In verse 6. Can you see that? We see it in the face. Of Jesus Christ.

[ 21 : 36 ] We don't bring people to God. By using medieval arguments. About the existence of God. There's a lot of that. Isn't there? Because the light of the knowledge. Of the glory of God. Is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. All religions. Cannot be the same. They cannot be the same. Because of this verse. They cannot be the same. Because the light of the knowledge. Of the glory of God. Is seen only in the face of Jesus Christ. We look away to a baby. A child. A Nazarene. A teacher. A crucified victim. A buried corpse. A risen son of God. An ascended mediator. A coming king. A divine judge. And as we look at him. We see the glory of God. Which brings me. To four points. To take to heart. Alright. The first point is this.

[ 22 : 33 ] Do you understand. Why people don't believe. Do you? Wonder why you don't believe tonight. Maybe you're here tonight. And you don't believe.

Do you understand. Why people don't believe. It is not that intellectual proof. Is lacking. It is not that the gospel. Is unreasonable. It is not that the gospel message. Is so difficult. That only members of Mensa. Can understand it. Only the brightest and the best. People don't believe. Because of a spiritual problem. In the mind. They can't think straight. Because all of their thought processes. Have been poisoned. And everything is out of. Kilter. It is wrong. It is disoriented. It is broken. And there has to be a miracle. It is done in the mind. There has to be something done. In their mind.

[ 23 : 30 ] And there has to be an illumination. The lights need to go on. In their mind. In their thought process. Something has to go on. In their thinking. But the problem. Why people don't believe.

Is a spiritual problem. And the only answer. To darkness. Is light. And the only answer. To a spiritual problem. Is new birth. It is. Regeneration. It's what we saw in John chapter 3. It is you must be born. From above. The divine light. Life and light. Of God and the gospel. Coming into our minds. So here's the second reason. The second lesson. The first thing is. Do you understand. That people don't believe. Because they are darkened. In their understanding. So how does this life.

[ 24 : 23 ] Come into their minds. It seems to me. I think this is really helpful. Paul says. How are people delivered. Well you go with. An open statement of the truth. That's what you do.

You go with. An open. Undiluted. Untailored. Untapped with message. And you tell them the truth.

And you tell them the truth. Without deceit. Or without gimmicks. And you give them the gospel. In words. And God.

Takes hold of his own word. And he honors his own truth. And he sets them free. And they understand.

What Jesus said. You shall know the truth. And the truth. Shall sack you free. People are sacked free. By proclamation. So what do you do.

[ 25 : 25 ] You proclaim. Whether it's in public preaching. It's probably not. For most of you is it. But mainly. It's private conversation. It's emails. It's letters. We proclaim the truth. It's.

It's. We proclaim the truth. So what do we proclaim. What truth do we tell. What is the content. Of our message. And the third message.

To take to heart. Is. The truth that delivers them. Is the truth about Jesus Christ. It's verse five. Isn't it. Not ourselves. But Jesus Christ as Lord.

What the sad world needs. What you need tonight. What my lost neighbours.

And family members need. Is the truth about Jesus Christ. They need to hear the truth. And so tell them about the Trinity. Tell them about two glorious natures.

[ 26 : 25 ] In one person. That this man Jesus. Is fully God. And fully man. Tell them the facts of his life.

And his death. And his burial. And his resurrection. And his ascension. And that he's coming again one day. Tell them about his teaching.

Tell them about his parables. Tell them about his preaching. Tell them about his promises. Tell them about his warnings. Tell them about his threats. Tell him about his predictions. Tell them about Jesus Christ.

The truth is this. Is that you can talk to your neighbour. Your work colleague. Your family member. About God. Until the cows come home. Do you find that? I found my neighbour. I was in there. Last night.

Trying to watch their tally. The swans even on. And again. We very easily talked about God. It's very very easy I think. Today's day and age. It's a good thing. We can talk about. You can talk to them about God.

[ 27 : 23 ] Until the cows come home. But actually. As soon as you bring Jesus Christ up. The conversation shuts down. Is that right? Is that right? Well in fact.

You can't. You can't. You can't prove the existence of God. Talk to them about Jesus Christ. People don't believe because of the spiritual dampening. And the darkening and the destruction of their thought processes.

Their understanding. They are delivered by the truth. And the truth delivers them about Jesus Christ. And here is the great encouragement. But God uses human instruments. Doesn't he? Human instruments. Not superhuman instruments. Paul's already talked. Doesn't he? Again and again. In Corinthians. The theme of weakness. And he'll talk about it more and more.

As he goes on. He's already talked about feelings. And affections. And mixed emotions. And fears. Ordinary people. Very ordinary people.

[ 28 : 21 ] With truth in their mouths. Now we have to persevere. Because the world is hostile. Isn't it? Don't think tomorrow morning.

You're going to start at break time. Talking about Jesus Christ. I really want to listen. The world is hostile. And the world is indifferent. Or even worse. People have a thousand ideas in their heads. Sown by the evil one. You are not going to neutral ground. We are not coming to neutral ground. We never think that. Then he's loving. People say. Come on Christian. All you need is an open mind. For one thing.

People haven't got. You haven't got an open mind. You are not coming to good ground. But this is the great truth. God uses humans.

To speak the word. And we've got to persevere. And human beings are to go on. Giving out the truth. The Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 29 : 16 ] And the ministry of the gospel. Will do its work. It is very very encouraging. That at the end of the day. This passage teaches us. God is stronger than the devil. And all the damage. That the devil has done. Can be undone. And it's undone. By the power of the gospel. Of our Lord Jesus Christ. Presented by ordinary people. In simple words. In simple words. And the spirit. Takes hold of it. And we get none of the credit. God gets all the glory. In Christ Jesus. Let's pray. Let's pray. Thank you.