

## 2 Corinthians 4

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 15 February 2017

Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

[ 0 : 00 ] Now as we look at this brief section, just the first half of this fourth chapter in 2 Corinthians, chapter 4. We remember that we are reading continuously, as it were, from chapter 3 into chapter 4.

As I mentioned on the Lord's Day, there wouldn't be chapter breaks in the original. It's just a continuous narrative. And so when Paul says, therefore, seeing we have this ministry as we have received mercy, we think not.

What's the therefore referring to? It's referring to the fact that the Lord is the Spirit who gives life. It is the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the Father and the Son who gives life.

And that as the saints of the Lord, the followers of Jesus, are beholding as in a glass dimly or as through something that they can't see perfectly yet, the glory of the Lord.

They are themselves transformed into his likeness. Now, if you look in a mirror yourselves, then you know that the reflection does whatever you do.

[ 1 : 04 ] And so that if you put up your hand and scratch your eyebrow, then the mirror does the opposite. It puts up its other hand and scratches the eyebrow. If you touch your head, it touches its head.

And the reflection does whatever you do. Whereas what we are looking at, we are meant to be the reflection of Christ. So that as we look to him, we likewise are to be changed to do what he does.

To become his appearance in the same way as the reflection in the mirror is the appearance of the person looking into it. As Christ looks upon us and we look upon him, so we are to be made more like him day by day.

Beholding us in a glass, the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, now ministry means service.

Seeing we have this service, this is what we are to do. This is how we are to live, to show forth this New Testament to which he has been referring in chapter 3. Seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we think not.

[ 2 : 13 ] Now, what does it mean he says, as we have received mercy? Well, you could say in a sense that the being called to serve the Lord is itself a mercy. Yes, but it's more than that. There is the sense in which because they are charged with, or as they are charged with this ministry, with this gospel, this message, they themselves are men who have been to the brink of the others.

And have been enabled to look over it into, as it were, the sort of lava glow, the depths of hell. And to see that in which they almost fell and were brought back from.

They have received mercy, having seen the depths of what they might have descended to, what they might have been abandoned to, indeed what their sins deserved.

And yet have been granted this mercy, not because they deserved it, but because God is simply good. And having received this mercy, they are thereby strengthened by it.

Now, I don't know what your own personality may be like. I know a little of my own personality. And I know that like when I was at school, if I was in a scouts or anything like that, if somebody was saying to me, what you're doing is really rubbish, that's terrible, you've made a real mess of that.

[ 3 : 28 ] You should be doing it this way, this way, this way. Not the way you were doing it at all. That's terrible. Do it right next time. Yeah, okay. Maybe you would try and do it right next time. But you're living in fear and you're living in anxiety and you're slightly resentful and you don't respond best to that.

Some people maybe do. Some people maybe respond well to discipline, chastisement. And I could boot up the backside perhaps. But I know myself, when I'm younger, lower self-esteem and so on, if somebody says, that's brilliant what you've done.

It's really good. But, you know, if you want to make it even better, then try doing it this way. And so through a bit of encouragement, you're more encouraged to want to do best, to seek another word of praise, to seek another pat on the head.

Because, hey, that was so good when people were nice to you like that, when they encouraged you like that, and you want more of it. So you want to do even better next time and you want to make sure you earn more of this praise in that sense.

And having received mercy, having been brought back from the very lip of the adults, and having been given this great privilege of serving the Kenyan, spreading this news that others be likewise brought back from the edge, they have seen what it might be.

[ 4 : 43 ] And they have seen now the grace and the glory and the goodness the Lord has given to them. They're able to say firsthand, look guys, this is what you're going to end up like. Well, this is what it can be.

This is the encouragement. This is the blessing. We have received mercy. And because we have received mercy, we don't faint. We don't get weary. We get encouraged.

We get strengthened. We get enabled to say, yes, look, this is real. We know that it's real because we've been to the very edge. We've been brought back from the brick. We've been changed.

We've been transformed in our hearts. This is real. And we know it's real because it's happened to us. Seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not.

We can't say, no, I'm getting fed up with this. Oh, we should do something different. No, this is life from the dead. This is transforming. This is what it's all about. So we faint not.

[ 5 : 41 ] We don't get discouraged. And we are transformed by, energized by it because we've seen how bad it could be. And we've now seen how good it actually is with the Lord.

Well, we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty. Now, what does this phrase mean? Well, what's translated as dishonesty in the authorised version means that which is not true.

It means essentially that which is shameful. We have renounced the hidden things of shame. Now, if something is shameful, you want to hide it away.

Let's go back again to the school scenario. And let's say everybody's been giving back their papers after the test. And some people have got like 19 out of 20. And some people have got 50 or 16.

And then you look at yours. Oh, gosh, you've only got six. So, you know, what are you doing? And we say, oh, what did you get on your sister? I'm hiding yours away. And you don't want anyone to say, oh, I don't know what you know. I haven't any look, you know.

[ 6 : 39 ] And you come away, sticking your snow bag quick. Why? Why are you hiding away? Because you're ashamed. Shame makes you want to hide things away. When it talks about the hidden things of dishonesty, it means that which is shameful, which is caused to be hidden, because it is shameful.

And Paul is saying, look, we know all about the shame that sin brings. And 99 times out of 100, when we commit sin, we know we're committing sin.

Sometimes we don't. Yes, you know, the sin of unbelief. If we never know any better, we've never been taught about Jesus, we don't know we're committing the sin of unbelief. If we've never been taught right or wrong, we don't perhaps know when we're doing wrong.

But we do have consciences. And they do convict us. And we do tend to know when we are doing something wrong. When we do something wrong, we try to hide it. And if that which is shameful seeks to be hidden.

And that's one reason. Indeed, that's the very first reason why lies enter into the world. Because lies, nine times out of ten, are an attempt to hide our shame, to cover that of which we are ashamed.

[ 7 : 53 ] We want to cover it over, so we tell a lie. We tell, that wasn't me. No, no, I didn't do this. You can see the evidence of the thing broken, everything that went wrong. It wasn't me. And we tell a lie to cover our shame.

Now, this is what Paul is saying. We've got experience of sin. We know what it's like. We know that it causes shame. And it caused us to want to hide away. It wanted us to turn into the darkness.

It was to stay in the shadows run, come into the light. Because it was shameful. And we were ashamed of who we were and what we were. You know, if somebody is living in that kind of state, or let's say they're an addict, and then enslaved by their addiction.

And what do you find? If you were actually able to plumb into the mind of an addict, of somebody who's constantly just living for their next fix, or their next drink, or their next shot, or whatever the case may be, then their self-esteem will be just like rock bottom.

And they hate themselves. They hate themselves. They hate their addiction. They hate the power it has over them. But they just can't see past it. They've got to be able to breathe.

[ 9 : 00 ] They can't breathe properly unless they get their next fix. And they hate themselves. There is this shame. There is this hiding away. There is this secrecy. And that's what it means here. The hidden things of dishonesty.

The things of shame which are hidden away. We have renounced that. We have put it behind us. That's what we were. That's what we were when we were teetering over the brick, looking into the abyss.

And the Lord brought us back from that. And because we have received this mercy, we don't think, but we have renounced the sins of the past. The hidden things of dishonesty. Not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully.

Just twisting and turning in whichever way in order to make us look good. Or saying what we think people want to hear. Or just giving a little half-truths here and there.

Well, as we see, you know, in verse 17 of chapter 2, we are not as many which corrupt the word of God. But as of sincerity, as in the sight of God, speak we in Christ.

[ 10 : 03 ] You see, the things of deceit. The things of cheat. They have things to be ashamed of. And this ill use, this wrong use, abuse of the word of God, which some people obviously were doing.

You know, if we go to chapter 11, we see what Paul writes there in verse 13. This is shameful what they do.

But instead of being something that wants to be hidden away, Paul says, you know, I am not ashamed of the gospel. Romans 1 verse 16. I am not ashamed of the gospel. It is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.

To the Jew first and also to the Greek. We have renounced the hidden things of shame. Not walking in craftiness. Not handling the word of God deceitfully. But by manifestation of the truth.

Commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Now what does that mean? That's saying, oh, I am not brilliant. Tell your conscience how good I am. Commending ourselves to every man's conscience.

[ 11 : 23 ] No, what it's saying is here. But rather, by the manifestation of the truth. You can see by our lives, by the way that we walk and live and talk, the consistency of what we do with what we believe.

How we walk with how we talk. How we act compared with how we teach. You can see that it is our unity. The manifestation of the truth. That recommends it.

That recommends perhaps not to your outward acknowledgement. People won't see, wow, what brilliant people these Christians are. Because if they're prejudiced against Christianity or against the gospel or against believers.

They might still say, oh, what hypocrites are they all just corrupt. They're all just putting on a show. But their consciences. Commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Then they will say, well, actually, you know. Although I would never admit it publicly. They do live according to their beliefs. Actually, you don't actually see them doing this or that or the next thing.

[ 12 : 24 ] You don't hear corrupt words out of their mouth. You don't hear profanity. You don't actually see them living contrary to their professed beliefs. You've got to admit they are pretty consistent.

And even if they would never admit that publicly. Their consciences will be convicted. So we are commended to men's consciences by the manifestation of the truth.

So that what they see in our lives is made manifest. It is outwardly proclaimed, even silently, by the way that we live in accordance with what we believe.

There is inconsistency. That is what's meant by commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And we're not trying to please men because it says in the sight of God, the Lord sees how we move.

The Lord sees what we do. And even if we might keep secret from other people, perhaps things that we may be a little bit ashamed of, God sees them all. So our lives have to be open because they're already open in the sight of God.

[ 13 : 26 ] So they might as well be open in the sight of everybody else as well. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost. Now notice here again, there's partly a contrast with our gospel here.

With verse 2. You know, the hidden things of dishonesty. The hidden things of shame. Well, if our gospel is hidden at all, it's not because it's shameful. It isn't hidden except it's hidden to those who don't believe.

Not because we're hiding it away. But simply because they will not see it. They are shutting their eyes. They are refusing to look. If it is hidden, it is hidden to them that are lost.

But there's also another contrast here with what we were seeing in chapter 3. Remember, the chapters aren't really there. The narrative would just run continuously in the original. And there's a contrast here with what we see at chapter 3, verses 13 to 18.

Talking about Moses. Moses, how he veiled his face. So that the children of Israel couldn't look or didn't have to look steadfastly on him. Because his face was glowing with the power of God and the joy of having been in the Lord's presence.

[ 14 : 33 ] So as Moses veiled his face. He says, but our gospel isn't veiled. Our gospel isn't hidden in that sense. It's not veiled. It's not covered.

Or if it's covered, it's not covered by us. It's covered to those who will not believe. They have veiled their own faces. They have demanded that the veil be put on so that they don't have to look at it.

If our gospel is hidden to our veil, it is hidden to those, to them that are lost. In whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not.

So it's not just veil. Imagine, you know, if you think of a veil over somebody's face, you know, like a bride's veil. As she comes in, you know, to church, excuse me, a white veil or whatever. And you can see a wee bit of her face through the veil until she picks it back, you know, when she gets to the front of the church.

But you can see through it a wee bit. So veiled is almost like, you know, like neck curtains or whatever. But it's not blinded. Blinded means you completely can't see at all.

[ 15 : 34 ] The God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not. Now we know of that history, don't we? You think of people like Richard Dawkins and other comparatively intelligent people who know a bit about science and a bit about fact and a bit about truth.

And yet they point blank refuse to acknowledge scientific fact, mathematical truth. They point blank refuse to accept and acknowledge the truths which are staring them in the face.

Because if they acknowledge that, they must acknowledge the reality and the existence of God. So they won't acknowledge these truths. They are blinded to these things.

They'd rather deal in falsehood than deal in fact. And deal in actual truth. The God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not. Less the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

Now that's the glorious gospel of Christ which is the light. It's not Paul. It's not his followers. You know, as it says in Hebrews chapter 1 verse 3, Who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person, abounding all things by the word of his power.

[ 16 : 52 ] This is what Christ is like. We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves yourselves for Jesus' sake.

See, Paul's not saying, hey, everybody listen to Paul. Everybody know what Paul said. Everybody look at Peter. Everybody look at Silas. No, it's not about us. No, we preach not ourselves. There's nothing in us. We're going to die.

We're eventually going to be taken from this world. No matter how, as we were hearing in prayer, you know, we sorrow with those who mourn and lost a faithful servant of this island in the past.

But in a sense, unless Christ came back first, this day was going to come. As this day will come for all of us unless the Lord comes back first.

Because we are going to pass away. We are going to perish from this scene of time. The gospel can never be about us. It can only ever be about Christ who lasts and who lives.

[ 17 : 48 ] Men die. Christ lives. For we preach not ourselves who die, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves, your servants, for Jesus' sake.

Paul is serving the Corinthians, the Philippians, the Colossians, all the other different churches of his day. He's serving them for their day so that they can receive the eternal message of the gospel.

And that is what each of us are called to do in our day. To serve our day. Not our grandparents' day. Not our grandchildren's day. But rather the day in which the Lord has placed us.

Here is where we are. Here is where the Lord has placed us. We might think to ourselves, I would fit in much better into the world of a hundred years ago than I do now. There's so much in this world that's so confusing.

I just don't understand it. And we might think, oh, if only I was there. No, God hasn't placed you then. And God doesn't make mistakes. And he hasn't put you in the future or some space age yet to come. He's put you here and now.

[ 18 : 48 ] And we are the servants of those around us for Jesus' sake. For God who commanded the light to shine out the darkness. Reference to Genesis chapter 1. And God said, let there be light.

And there was light. Hath shined in our hearts to give the light to the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This is what he's saying. You see, contrary again to Moses veiling his face.

God's intention by putting his spirit and the spirit of his son into the hearts of his people is so that Christ should shine out of them. So that what they see in the faces of God's servants is the face of Jesus Christ.

The love of Jesus Christ. The light of Jesus Christ. Who hath shined in our hearts to give the light to the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Not to see us. Nobody wants to see us. Nobody wants to see Paul. Nobody wants to see Peter. Nobody wants to see Jesus. That's what the Greeks said, you know, when they said to Philip and I was so, we would see Jesus.

[ 19 : 47 ] And that is what our design is. And that is God's intention. But how can we do this? How can we possibly do this? We are just, as it says, packed and vessels. We're like jars of clay. How can we show forth the glory of God?

Well, in one sense, the contrast is the greater. Somebody's bringing in a quajar. Not much in that, is there? Then you look inside. There's treasure inside. There's gold and jewels and all these things.

Who wouldn't believe it in such a nondescript chamber? A nondescript artifact or receptacle in which these things were placed.

This is to declare that the glory should all be of God. Because you look at the earth and this and you think, nothing. You look at Paul, he said, well, you know, his letters are weighty, but his speech is contemptible.

And his bodily presence is weak. And you look at God's servants now and you think, well, they're not too much. And so they're not. But the treasures of Christ, the contrast is between the eternal treasure and the earth and vessels in which it is placed.

[ 20 : 48 ] And if we think of an Old Testament illustration of this, you think of Gideon and his army. Just 300 of them. They hardly had one hand trumpets to proclaim the battle of Satan.

And in the other hand, they had lamps or torches. But those torches were inside a clay pitcher, a jar inside. So when they're held up inside the jar, the Midianites will can't see it.

And then some as they creep up on them in the dark, then they smash the jars. And all these torches are blazing suddenly around them. Then as long as they were in the clay jar, they couldn't be seen.

The light couldn't be seen. And in a sense, it is only when us, the earthen vessel, the pitcher, the clay jar breaks, that the light is seen and the glory of Christ shines forth.

It is when we are cracked. It is when we are perhaps damaged. It is when we are broken. That the light shines out most.

[ 21 : 51 ] A clay jar which is kept in perfection and never cracked or chipped or anything. The light still stays hidden. But as it is cracked, as it is broken, the light shines forth.

It is in the times of trial, testing, pressure, cracking, that the light of Christ is seen most through the clay jars, the earthen vessels that we are.

We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. We have this treasure in the earthen vessel,