

International Bible Lessons Commentary
2 Corinthians 4:1-18

International Bible Lessons
Sunday, August 17, 2014

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The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, August 17, 2014**, is from **2 Corinthians 4:1-18**. NOTE: Some churches will only study **2 Corinthians 4:2-15**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary* below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further**, a study guide for teachers, discusses the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the **International Bible Lessons Commentary** website. The weekly *International Bible Lesson* is usually posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

2 Corinthians 4:1-18

(2 Corinthians 4:1) Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul listed some of the afflictions he had suffered. Almost all of his afflictions were caused by people who opposed the gospel of Jesus Christ that he preached. In addition, Paul knew how much he too had persecuted the church before he became a Christian, and how much he deserved eternal punishment; therefore, he knew that God's mercy was the only reason he was a minister, called to be an apostle, and was enabled by God to keep serving Jesus Christ. Because God's mercy, the truth of the Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit encouraged him every day, Paul did not lose heart but kept trusting in God.

(2 Corinthians 4:2) We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

Paul did not write that he had hidden from others shameful things he had done. Rather, he refused to do shameful things. Unlike the false apostles who misrepresented him and misled the Corinthians, Paul refused to use lies or trickery as a minister to draw people into his sphere of influence. Paul preached and taught only the true Word of God, and he relied on the power of God's word to work upon the conscience of his hearers. Paul ministered with the conscious understanding that God saw and heard everything he did and said, so he refused to do shameful things or falsify God's word.

(2 Corinthians 4:3) And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.

If a room is hidden behind a curtain or a face is hidden behind a veil, an observer cannot really know or understand what is hidden. The gospel is the power of God, so it is hidden only from those who are perishing. The apostle Paul taught the gospel truth openly. If someone did not understand, the cause was not the truth of the gospel but the fact that they belonged in the group of those who were perishing because they would not believe God.

(2 Corinthians 4:4) In their case the god of this world 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.

Those who are perishing are those who have turned away from the true God (see Romans 1:18-32). When they turned away from God, they perhaps unknowingly turned to the god of this world, to Satan. Because they have refused to believe the true God and His Word, Satan has kept their minds blinded to the truth. A blind man cannot see the blazing sun, and a person who is spiritually blind cannot see or understand the glory of Christ and the good news that Christ came, died, and rose again for their sake. The problem of not seeing the sun is not that the sun is not bright: the problem is with the person who is physically blind. The problem of not seeing the glory of Christ is not

the glory of Christ: the problem is with the person who is spiritually blind. Those who are not spiritually blind see the image of God in Jesus Christ. To see Christ is to see the glory of God, but unbelievers prefer darkness because of their unbelief and the fact that they prefer their evil deeds to right living.

(2 Corinthians 4:5) For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake.

The false apostles that troubled the Corinthians proclaimed themselves as somebody to be listened to and obeyed, instead of proclaiming Christ. Paul and the other true apostles, along with all those who truly preached the gospel, did not proclaim themselves as being more important than mere slaves of Jesus Christ. They proclaimed that Jesus Christ is Lord, and they did whatever Christ wanted as slaves of Christ and for the sake of Christ – not for their own sake or well-being.

(2 Corinthians 4:6) For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

When God created the universe, God created light to reveal the universe and the manifestation of His glory. God's light reveals the truth of what is, of reality that He created; likewise, God's light, God's truth, comes into our innermost being, the center of our spiritual and mental

life, so we can understand the truth of God and Jesus Christ. When a believer learns about Jesus Christ, he learns about the glory (the nature and character) of God.

(2 Corinthians 4:7) But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.

The knowledge and power of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit can dwell in the bodies of believers; which are the temple of God. God made human bodies from the dust of the earth, as clay jars to contain His Spirit. When a person truly believes in Jesus Christ as his Lord, he receives this treasure immediately – the actual, objective presence of God in his life through the Holy Spirit. Whenever a believer does work for Jesus' sake, the extraordinary power to do that work comes from the power and presence of God within them, which is far beyond mere human strength – mentally and spiritually.

(2 Corinthians 4:8) We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair;

Paul knew the ways of suffering he described from his personal experience. Jesus said that those who followed him would suffer, and those who follow Jesus will suffer in a variety of ways – some apparently more or less than other followers of Jesus. Paul's letter shows that Christians can be afflicted and perplexed and not truly understand

what and why something is happening to them. Some afflictions, especially the suffering brought upon them by others, are beyond human understanding; however, the presence of Christ within them and the truth of the gospel keeps them from being crushed or driven to despair and hopelessness.

(2 Corinthians 4:9) persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;

Many times Christians will be perplexed about why they are persecuted, especially when other religious leaders are persecuting them, but Jesus said this would happen even though we might not understand why. Both Jesus and Paul were persecuted by religious leaders who claimed to be godlier than they were. Yet, God did not forsake them, and God empowered them to complete their missions before they died for God and for the sake of those they came to serve. Christians can be struck down, but not destroyed or their testimony destroyed: neither Jesus nor Paul's testimony were destroyed.

(2 Corinthians 4:10) always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.

Jesus died on a cross after suffering in every way the religious leaders and Roman soldiers could think of at that time, but God raised Jesus from the dead. When believers suffer persecution for their faith and for the sake of Jesus Christ they carry in their body outwardly and inwardly the

death of Christ, because they are the body of Christ. However, because Jesus Christ rose from the dead and His Spirit lives in the bodies of believers, His life, presence, and power are also visible to those with eyes to see as Christ shines forth in the life and the body of believers.

(2 Corinthians 4:11) For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh.

As long as Paul and the apostles lived, these things could be said of them. In some way, all Christians who live for the sake of Jesus Christ and His kingdom are persecuted or given over to death. It may be someone telling lies about them or their losing a job or promotion, but in many places it may be imprisonments, beatings, with the killing of the body (because they cannot kill the spirit). However, the life of Jesus may be made visible in the life of the believer who is living for Jesus in spite of rejection and suffering from the worldly minded, from those enslaved by Satan.

(2 Corinthians 4:12) So death is at work in us, but life in you.

When Paul spoke of his ministry personally, which was actually seldom in his letters because he sought to keep the focus of attention on Jesus Christ, he wrote of his suffering for Christ. Just as Jesus Christ came and suffered to give God's people eternal life, so Paul traveled and suffered to

teach people about Jesus so they could receive eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

(2 Corinthians 4:13) But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture-- "I believed, and so I spoke"--we also believe, and so we speak,

Paul quoted Psalm 116:10, and the entire context of Psalm 116 fits what Paul wrote to the Corinthians in this passage. [Note: the words "I believed" are translated "I kept my faith" in the NRSV, so you may want to compare this verse with other translations.] Paul believed in and taught the Scriptures. The gospel he preached about Jesus Christ was according to the Scriptures (see especially 1 Corinthians 15:1-11). The Corinthians and Paul had the same biblical faith, bestowed on them by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit using the truth of the Scriptures. Paul taught according to the truth and the true faith of those who truly follow Jesus Christ. He wanted his readers to remain true to the gospel and not be misled by the false teachings of those who claimed to be Christians but were not.

(2 Corinthians 4:14) because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence.

Paul wrote in detail about the resurrection of Jesus Christ when he wrote his first letter to them (see 1 Corinthians

15). God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. In ways that we cannot understand, but in a real objective way, we are united with Christ spiritually, so when we die our spirits will go to be with Jesus and someday in the future Jesus will raise our new bodies from the grave. All Christians will rejoice when they stand in the presence of Jesus in heaven and later stand with Him on the earth.

(2 Corinthians 4:15) Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

For the sake of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again to save His people from their sins, Paul did what Jesus wanted and he preached the good news for Jesus' sake and the sake of those who came to faith. Paul also wanted the Corinthians to conform their lives to the way of Jesus who lived in them and led them according to the Scriptures. Through Paul's efforts, more would come to faith in Jesus, and more thanksgiving would be given to God, and God would receive more glory, honor, and praise from His people. For almost two thousand years, through Paul's letters in the Bible, thanksgiving to God has increased to the glory of God as millions have been led to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

(2 Corinthians 4:16) So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

Because Paul saw the gospel he preached changing people's lives and leading them to trust in Jesus, he did not become discouraged to the point of giving up or quitting his apostolic office. He kept serving Christ and others for the sake of Christ and others. Even though his outer body was suffering and dying because of his many tortures and his thorn in the flesh, his spirit was being renewed every day by the Holy Spirit within him and his trust in Jesus Christ. The same is true for all who trust in Jesus Christ.

(2 Corinthians 4:17) For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure,

If Paul looked up and out upon the universe and the vastness that he could see with his unaided human eyes, the weight of God's created universe seen and unseen would "weigh" less than the "eternal weight of glory beyond all measure." "Beyond all measure" might be considered as "infinite" in modern terms. When Paul compared an eternity of exploring the infinite along with knowing more personally the infinite and personal God in Jesus Christ to what he was suffering for the sake of Jesus Christ, he knew that his suffering was a "slight momentary affliction" that was preparing him for infinity and eternity with God and His vast creation.

(2 Corinthians 4:18) because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what

can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

When we see all around us what people have created, we know it is temporary and we in our physical bodies are physically even more temporary than many things created by human beings. So, consider where Paul kept his focus; where should people keep their focus? Obviously, we need to center our attention on Jesus Christ, whom God sent as the only way to eternal life. We cannot see what Jesus Christ has prepared for us until we first see Him.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why has the god of this world blinded the minds of unbelievers?
2. What can unbelievers do in order to see the glory of Christ with their minds?
3. Since Paul did not teach about himself to draw people to himself, who did he teach about and why did he teach about someone other than himself?
4. How can someone learn more about God?
5. Paul suffered in many ways; how did his afflictions have an effect on his faith in Jesus and his daily life?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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