

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 & 4 • Irrefutable Proof of God's Existence

Introduction

Why is it that some believe that “evangelism” is something set apart for only a special few to undertake? A study of the New Testament church indicates that bringing others to Christ was not just a special role played by a few but an everyday part of the life changed by Christ. If we really are to be imitators of Christ and the lives of His apostles, we see that bringing others into the kingdom was a basic characteristic of their daily walk with Christ; that their very lives provided others a glimpse of Christ. What we call “Paul’s Missionary Journeys” were extremely long, causing him to spend years at a time in each location, **LIVING** among people to not only disciple them but to provide a daily example of the consistency of his walk and faith in the One Who changed him. **THIS** is the power of God that is available to all of us – regardless of our gifts, talents or calling – to change the world we live in.

¹⁷Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

¹⁸But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

[Read 2 Corinthians 3:17-18]

Q: How is the glory of God being revealed to the world?

A: By the way it continues to change us. We are supposed to be the visible proof of God’s working to a world that has not yet entered into fellowship with Him and therefore cannot see Him directly.

Q: How can Paul term this process as “liberty”?

A: It is the process of becoming unencumbered with the ways of this world which were leading us to death, and embracing God’s ways to begin living as His children even in this life.

Q: Why might this be a powerful thing to non-believers?

A: It’s a powerful, visible witness of God’s glory and power to encounter someone that is leaving the slavery of this world behind in favor of freedom in their obedience to Christ. It’s a tangible “sign”, if you will, of God.

^{4:1}Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, ²but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.

[Read v.2 Corinthians 4:1-2]

Q: Who is the “we” Paul is referring to? Why is this distinction important for our study?

A: “We” specifically refers to Paul’s ministry team comprised at least of himself and Timothy and probably others such as Silas. It’s important because we need to understand the example Paul is setting that teaches us what it means to be a minister in the body of Christ.

Q: Is the “ministry” Paul refers to in v.1 something specific or just a general reference to Paul’s apostleship?

A: The specific answer is found in 5:18, “Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.” “Ministry” can be thought of as 2 different sides of the same coin, one side inward-directed to believers and the church, the other side outward-directed to non-believers. There are aspects of reconciliation to both groups in all the gifts.

NOTE: The word “ministry” is used 10 times in 2 Corinthians, more than any other NT book. The Greek word for “ministry” is “diakonia” which literally means “service.” Our word “deacon” is derived from this word. The main point is that this is a word that applies to **EVERY** believer’s service to God through whatever gifts or opportunities are provided so as to assist in the reconciliation of all people to God regardless of their status.

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Q: What exactly is Paul “renouncing” in v.2? What does it mean to “renounce” something anyway?

A: To “renounce” is to repudiate or disown something specific. In this case it’s unconfessed sin (“*things hidden because of shame*”) and trying to justify its hold on one’s life by changing the message we preach (“*walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God*”).

Q: What has Paul renounced personal sin in favor of in the second part of v.2?

A: Cleansed from the inside out by God’s truth (“*the manifestation of truth*”) that is not only seen by God Who sees all things hidden, but by men who visibly see the integrity of a life that is **BOTH** inwardly and outwardly sincere (“*commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.*”).

Application: So far Paul has taught that as we are being transformed into the image and glory of Christ, the changes becoming not only evident to God who sees us in secret but to men who see our public persona. This is an essential part of our “service” which acts for the reconciliation to God of all those we come in contact with, both believer and non-believer alike.

[Read v.3-6]

Q: This speaks specifically to the condition of non-believers. What is the image of the “veil” explained as representing in the non-believer’s life?

A: According to v.4 “blindness” of the mind or “unbelief.” This is often referred to in Scripture as “hardness of heart.”

Q: What is primarily the cause of their unbelief? What is at work in the non-believer’s life?

A: Satan (“*the god of this world*”). He does not want them to see the light of God shining in our life.

Application: Ever notice that in sharing with some people that they will try to change the focus of the discussion from what God has done in your life personally to peripheral issues or questions such as, “But how could a loving God allow suffering?” or “How could the world be created in a week?” This is Satan taking their attention off the true, material proof of God’s existence and love: Your changed life. This is the indisputable argument.

Q: What is the focus of the message of a minister of reconciliation according to v.5?

A: To always first preach Jesus Christ as Lord. When it comes to ourselves, we convey the attitude of a servant to others – a minister of reconciliation – for Christ, not for our self or any institution to which we might belong.

Q: Compare and contrast v.6 with 3:18. What is the progression of thought in Paul’s teaching?

A: Fully exposed to Christ, we are fixed on **HIS** face and image and not our own. Our life becomes transformed into the image and glory of Christ. This process is the true essence of “knowledge” of God. One’s knowledge is increased in direct proportion to our assuming more and more of His likeness -- not knowledge derived by human means such as research, study, etc. This becomes the visible, earthly evidence of God’s glory.

³And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake. ⁶For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Application: *The more we focus on and become the image of Christ the more our understanding and knowledge of Him increases and the better that others see God through us.*

⁷But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; ⁸we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

[Read v.7-10]

Q: The key here is the first and last verses of this reading in v.7 and 10. Re-state v.7 in your own words to state the meaning.

A: [Encourage the group.] One possibility: "So that others will see Him, not me."

Q: What does it mean, as stated in v.10, for us to carry within our own bodies "the dying of Jesus"?

A: The Greek for "the dying" literally means "the being made a corpse." It is the image of the ultimate servant Christ, Whose earthly ministry culminated in the ultimate act of service – "ministry of reconciliation" – by His death on the cross. He was literally made into a corpse.

Q: So how does that relate to the last part of 10 that "the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.?"

A: If we are becoming the image of Christ, and His death is at work within us, so too is the work and power of the resurrection. If non-believers are "perishing" as stated in v.3, the light of Christ that they see in us is the power of the resurrection transforming us into the image of Christ as we forsake the old ways and embrace the new.

¹¹For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹²So death works in us, but life in you.

[Read v.11-12]

Q: How does this summarize the previous points? How does it make sense that "death" in us is providing "life" in others?

A: As we are "being made a corpse" to the old life – the ways of the world – we shine as tangible proof of the power and existence of God. This brings life in those that come to believe in Christ as a result.

¹³But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed, therefore I spoke," we also believe, therefore we also speak, ¹⁴knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. ¹⁵For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.

[Read v.13-15]

Q: Taken altogether to this point, is the power and work of the resurrection limited to the scope of just our physical death?

A: No. Paul's point, summarized in v.15, is that it has already begun to work in our life and is the actual, visible evidence of God's grace. People don't have to die to find out that there will be a resurrection from the dead. It's supposed to be already visible in its current working in our forsaking the fleshly life to become the image of Christ. **WE** have become resurrected in the present in the visible transformation resulting from rejecting the old life and embracing the new.

Application: *Have you ever thought of yourself as a physical, visible representation of God's grace? This is why, regardless of our gifts or talents or calling, we are ALL "evangelists" to all people, engaged in the ministry of reconciliation of all people to God through His grace. A measure of the quality of our life in Christ is how much Christ can be seen in it.*

¹⁶Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

¹⁷For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, ¹⁸while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

[Read v.16-18]

Application: These verses summarize a higher wisdom for us in how we view our life through God's eyes. When we see the death and resurrection working through us as a ministry of reconciliation to God of every believer and non-believer in our life, we can victoriously live through all circumstances because we can see the spiritual results that the world cannot see.

Q: What is the Spirit specifically speaking to your heart through this reading? What do you personally need to do?