

4:1-18, The Sacrificial Nature of Paul's Ministry

"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." (4:16)

Define the following words or phrases as they are used in context:

- ❑ **4:2 – walking in craftiness** (see Luke 20:22-23, 2 Cor 11:3, Eph 4:14):
- ❑ **4:2 – adulterating the word of God** (see Col 2:8, 2 Thess 2:10-12, 1 Tim 4:1, 2 Pet 2:1-2):
- ❑ **4:4 – the god of this world** (see Eph 2:1-2, 1 John 5:19, Rev 9:11):
- ❑ **4:4 – unbelieving** (see 1 Cor 7:12-13, 14:22, 1 Tim 5:8, Rev 21:8):
- ❑ **4:7 – this treasure in earthen vessels** (see 2 Cor 5:1-4, 2 Tim 1:14, 2:20-21):
- ❑ **4:10 – always carrying...of Jesus** (see Gal 6:14,17, Phil 3:10-11, 1 Pet 4:1-2):
- ❑ **4:16 – our inner man...renewed day by day** (see Rom 12:1-2, Eph 4:21-24, Col 3:9-10):

Practical exposition:

Given the divine source and life-giving effect of this "new covenant" (the gospel), Paul says confidently, "Therefore, since we have this ministry, we do not lose heart [or, we faint not]" (4:1). This is in sharp contrast to the message (or preaching) of those who "[walk] in craftiness" or who are "adulterating the word of God"—a reference to Judaizers specifically, but also to anyone generally who changes the message (see Gal 1:8, Phil 3:2-3, 2 Pet 2:1-3, et al). The gospel that Paul preached and the Corinthians originally believed—"our gospel"—is "veiled" only to those who refuse it, who will not turn to the Lord (3:16; see also John 8:21-24).²⁷ While Moses' face was veiled because of God's glory, the godless world is veiled because of Satan's evil influence. He is indeed the "god of this world [lit., age]" (4:4; see also Eph 2:1-2), but he cannot be the god of one's heart unless that person gives him permission by resisting the "light of the gospel" (John 3:19-21, 2 Thess 2:9-11). God wants people to be saved (1 Tim 2:4); Satan wants people to be deceived and thus ruined. Each person makes his own decision as to which "light" he will embrace—the true light of God, or the "angel of light" that Satan pretends to be (2 Cor 11:14). "Blindness of heart is both a sin and a punishment of sin."²⁸ God is light, life, love, and knowledge; Satan, on the other hand, is filled with darkness, hatred, ignorance, deception, and death. While the heart of the unbeliever is blind to God's gospel, the believer's heart radiates with the glory of the "face of Christ" (4:6).

²⁷ "That Paul's Gospel has been rejected does not however prove that it is false" (Barrett, 130).

²⁸ Lipscomb, 60.

Summary of the “Veil” Analogy		
Moses’ literal veil (3:7)	to hide the Lord’s glory, so as not to frighten the Israelites	indicates the divine source of the Law, but also its limitations (in that the glory “faded”)
The (figurative) veil over the hearts of the Jews (3:14-15)	self-imposed, but perpetuated by a lack of faith and understanding (cf. Mt 22:29)	prevented them from seeing the fulfillment of God’s covenant with Israel in Christ
The (figurative) veil over the hearts of the unconverted (4:3-4)	self-imposed, but directly influenced by Satan’s activity	describes the blinding effect of the godless world upon those who are condemned by God
The veil is removed (3:14)	the believer “sees” the Father through the redemptive work of the Son of God <i>and</i> the ministry of the Spirit of God	as a result, we are able to look into the “face of Christ” (now in faith, one day in fact), in anticipation of future glory

Whereas the false teachers who challenged Paul’s authority boldly asserted themselves before the Corinthians, Paul acknowledged his humility and human weakness (4:5). “We do not preach ourselves” is also the exact opposite of what is so common among so-called Christian churches today where the emphasis is hardly on Christ, but is instead on preachers, performers, and the creature comforts of the casual churchgoer. God is the source of Paul’s illumination (1 John 1:5) and strength (Eph 1:19)—the same God whose voice spoke light and energy into existence (4:6). “Miners carry a lamp on the forehead, Christians carry one in their hearts lit by the Spirit of God.”²⁹

Paul was just an “earthen vessel,” even though he was a minister of a great “treasure” (the gospel) and deferred to the “greatness of [God’s] power” (4:7; 2 Tim 2:20-21). As a servant of the gospel, he continually faced difficulties and hardships which would have been insurmountable if not for the power that worked within him (4:7-10; Col 1:25-29). He was “always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus”³⁰—i.e., he proclaimed the bodily death of Christ as part of his gospel. Paul was not a pallbearer, but a proclaimer; he was not a eulogist, but an evangelist of the good news of salvation which was brought about (paradoxically) through the horror of crucifixion. This is contrasted with the “life of Jesus”—i.e., His bodily resurrection—that is also the essence of his own soul and earthly ministry (Gal 2:20). Paul was in constant danger of death (4:11; 1 Cor 15:31), but served as a minister to a Living Savior. Thus, “death works in us, but life in you” (4:12)—i.e., we are braving death so that you might hear the message of life. Jesus laid down His life in order (for Him) to take it up again (John 10:17-18); the servant of Christ lays down his life (cf. 1 John 3:16) in order that Christ will raise him up.³¹ The same Christ who raised Himself from the dead will certainly raise to

²⁹ Robertson, 225.

³⁰ The Greek word for “dying” here is *nekrosin*—not the usual word for death (*thanatos*)—which involves not only “death” itself but also the entire dying process (Kistemaker, 149; Robertson, 226). Thus, Paul implies not just the literal death of Jesus on the cross, but all the events, actions, and orchestrations that purposely led to His death.

³¹ Lenski, 981-982.

glory all those who believe in Him (4:14; Phil 3:20-21).³² “All things are for your sakes” (4:15) recalls an earlier discussion from 1 Cor 3:21-22.

Given such hope and expectation, “we do not lose heart” (4:16), which brings the discussion back to where he began (4:1). The “outer man” refers to one’s physical body and the human condition; the “inner man” refers to one’s soul (or heart). This idea of personal, inward renewal (Rom 12:1-2, Eph 4:20-24, Col 3:10, et al) indicates a continually rejuvenated outlook based on a heavenward-thinking process or attitude (Col 3:1-4). As one decreases, the other increases (as stated in John 3:30); as the physical life decreases and diminishes, so the spiritual life increases in awareness, brightness, strength, and intensity. The hardships of earthly life (and the Christian’s cross; Mt 16:24), while seeming to overwhelm us now, are negligible in comparison to the glory and reward that awaits those who are faithful until death (4:17-18). The “natural man” (1 Cor 2:11-14) focuses on tangible things and physical elements; the child of God sees the higher plane, the “things which are not seen” from a worldly standpoint. In essence, Paul is saying this: I am content to endure difficulty—even face death—for the sake of Christ, since I am confident of that reward which awaits me (see also 2 Tim 1:12, 4:6-8). “The Christian who neglects duties and shirks responsibilities will find himself unqualified for the honors and glories God has in reserve for his faithful servants.”³³

If you can see it, it will not last (4:18): this is the principle upon which the entire physical world is based.³⁴ Human faith does not rest upon what is seen, but ultimately upon what is not seen (Heb 11:1). Just as God made the present world out of nothing (Heb 11:3), so it will return to nothing (1 John 2:15-17); only the spiritual realities that for a short time are tethered to this world—the souls of men—will continue to exist. Our works will follow after us into death (Rev 14:13), but only the historical reality of those works, not the physical works themselves. “The things which are not seen are eternal” because they transcend the physical creation and thus belong to the timeless spiritual realm in which the Eternal God exists.

Questions:

- 1.) The believer is repeatedly encouraged not to “lose heart” (4:1; see also John 14:1, 16:33, Gal 6:9, Heb 6:11-12, and 10:35-39). What exactly does this mean? What does it look like?
 - a. What positive incentives does God provide for us in His gospel—i.e., what is promised to those who do *not* lose heart?
 - b. What negative incentives does He provide—i.e., what is promised to those who *do* lose heart?

³² Some have mistakenly concluded that Paul believed that Christ would come in his own lifetime, yet 4:14 indicates that he anticipated his own physical death (consider also Phil 1:21-24).

³³ Lipscomb, 68.

³⁴ “This is not metaphysics, but eschatology...; the life to which Paul’s observation leads is not one of abstraction, but of faith” (Barrett, 148).

- 2.) Does Satan *obscure* the truth, or does he hinder the human heart from *receiving* the truth (4:3-4)? Is Satan really so powerful that he can *prevent* one from being saved, or is there another explanation that does not violate a person's free will? Please explain.

- 3.) Paul says, "For we do not preach ourselves" (4:5). How might a person preach himself today? Is this problem limited to actual preachers?

- 4.) Paul lays out the natural expectation of faith when he said, "I believed; therefore I spoke" (4:13). To what does this "speaking" refer (see Acts 5:20)? Is this in any way related to one's "confession" of Christ—i.e., if we believe in Him, are we not also obligated to "speak" about Him (see Mt 10:32-33, Rom 10:9-10)?

- 5.) How is one's "inner man...being renewed day by day" (4:16)? Is this accomplished merely by reading the Bible, or does this refer to something God does to the believer's heart? How do you know one way or the other?

- 6.) Compare Paul's words in 4:16-18 with Peter's in 2 Pet 1:8-11. What do these two passages have in common? How are they different?

5:1-21, The Anticipation of Redemption through Christ's Ministry of Reconciliation

"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." (5:17)

Define the following words or phrases as they are used in context:

- ❑ **5:1 – not made with hands** (see Mark 14:58, Acts 17:24-25, Heb 9:11,24):
- ❑ **5:2 – clothed with our dwelling [house] from heaven** (see Phil 3:20-21, 1 John 3:2):
- ❑ **5:4 – swallowed up by life** (see Mt 10:39, John 5:24, 11:25-26, Rom 6:22-23, Col 3:3-4):
- ❑ **5:7 – we walk by faith, not by sight** (see Gal 5:25, Eph 5:8,15-17, Heb 11:1-2,6):
- ❑ **5:14 – the love of Christ controls us** (see John 13:34-35, Gal 5:6, Eph 3:17-19):
- ❑ **5:17 – in Christ** (see Rom 3:24, 6:11, 12:5, Gal 3:26-28, Eph 1:3, Col 1:28):
- ❑ **5:18 – ministry of reconciliation** (see Rom 5:10-11, Eph 2:14-16, Col 1:19-20):

Practical exposition:

Anything that is *made* by man or *corrupted* by man will eventually be "torn down"—it will either die (Rom 8:13) or be destroyed in divine judgment (1 John 2:15-17). This has been illustrated through the Genesis Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the destruction of the Jewish temple (586 BC), and the destruction of the Jewish system (AD 70). But Paul's emphasis here (5:1-4) is not on the condemnation of specific sin, but the *result* of sin generally upon the human race: the "earthly tent" (physical body) does not last forever; death has become a natural and unavoidable aspect of human life.³⁵ Just because the body dies does not mean that we will be "unclothed"—that is, that we will not have a spiritual body once we are in the spiritual world. (Some of the ancient Greek philosophers believed that, upon death, a person's existence simply "atomized" into nothingness; no doubt some Corinthians were influenced by this teaching, and may have even taught it within the church.) To be "naked" does not mean merely to be without covering, but without a *body* with which to represent our spiritual existence.³⁶ (The negative implication is: if we are naked in this sense, we will be "void of all power and activity").³⁷ To be "clothed" implies

³⁵ We should not forget that Paul was a tentmaker by trade (Acts 18:3); perhaps he drew upon this for this illustration. It would also be natural for him to allude to the temporary tabernacle of God which Israel constructed under the direction of Moses—a temporary tent which foreshadowed a permanent "temple" built by God Himself (Eph 2:19-22).

³⁶ "Naked" also implies shame, as seen in Gen 3:7; "unclothed" means to be put to shame. The believer in Christ, however, "will not be disappointed [lit., put to shame]" (Rom 10:11-13) whether in this life or the life to come.

³⁷ Robertson, 228.

identity (as in Rom 13:14 or Gal 3:27), and certainly we will exist as identifiable, known spirits in the world to come—even though we are not told exactly what this means (cf. 1 John 3:2).

Such comments not only build upon what Paul has just said (in 4:18), but most certainly are an extension of what he has already said to the Corinthians concerning the bodily resurrection of the dead; see 1 Cor 15:35-58. Some commentators wonder if Paul was trying to explain that we would be given a “body” between death and the final (bodily) resurrection. Such a point does not even need to be considered, for it imposes earthly things (like the duration of time, or the departed soul’s cognizance of earthly time) upon a timeless and spiritual world. His comments, then, are “not speculation, but the momentary expression of a very human fear”³⁸—namely, of being unprepared to enter into eternity.

The believer does not leave this life unprepared, and it is God who so prepares him through the sanctification of His Spirit (5:5; see also 1 Cor 6:11, 2 Cor 1:21-22, Eph 2:10). “Therefore, being always of good courage” (5:6)—lit., of good cheer, or having a sure confidence: knowing what the future holds, the Christian can serve the Lord, and even *suffer* for Him, “knowing that [our] toil is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58). Because of the surety of God’s promises (1 Cor 1:9, 2 Cor 1:18), one is able to “walk by faith, and not by sight” (5:7). Sight refers to a physical perception of earthly forms; faith refers to a spiritual conviction in heavenly realities. People who live according to this world are influenced by the things of this world; those who live by faith in God live in a realm that transcends this world (John 18:36). Paul was always “ready to die” for the Lord (Acts 20:13), but he realized that God desired to put him into service for the good of others, and so was hard-pressed either way (Phil 1:21-24). Certainly the believer longs to be in heaven, but he must first demonstrate faith and courage while here in this life; otherwise, he is not “prepared” for the life to come. “We also have as our ambition...to be pleasing to Him” (5:9)—regardless of whether we are here or there, our *earnest striving* must be to find favor with Christ, just as Christ lived in favor with God (John 8:29, Rom 14:8). Regardless, all men will have their presentation before the judgment seat of Christ and will give answer for their beliefs and conduct (5:10; Rev 22:12). Those who are “prepared...for this very purpose” have nothing to fear in this.

Having departed from his original stream of thought (begun in 3:1), Paul now returns to the Corinthian situation and his relationship to those people (5:11ff). Paul did not fear the accusations of the Judaizers or his enemies, nor did he need to commend himself to them. He feared God, and God’s approval of him was sufficient. Regardless of the outward appearance of Paul or his ministry to those who “take pride in appearance,” Paul’s conscience was clear, being justified by the Lord. “Beside ourselves” (5:13) literally means to be mad, insane, or deranged (of which he had been accused; Acts 26:24), and is contrasted with a “sound mind.” His point: however he is regarded, he works to their benefit. Paul is controlled (and compelled) by the “love of Christ,” not by human ambition or agency (5:14). Christ’s love led to His own death, but His death brought life to “all.” In other words, regardless of what people think of Him, Christ works to the benefit of all men (John 3:16). In the same way, Paul sees his own “death” [lit., sufferings] as bringing life to the Corinthians and others. “Therefore all died”—all those associated with Christ are united with Him “in the likeness of His death” (Rom 6:5) in order to enjoy *life* with Him (Mt 16:24-25, 2 Tim 2:11). Just as Paul no longer lived for himself (Gal 2:20), so all Christians are to live for Christ and not themselves.

³⁸ Strachan, 100.

Christ was once known in the “flesh” (John 1:14), but He is no longer a physical man, nor is He a dead man (5:16). Rather, “He has risen” (Mt 28:6) and is known as a Living Redeemer in whom one finds reconciliation with God (see also Rom 5:1-11). Likewise, once we are in Christ, we are no longer known as we were before. We have (been) changed; we are now a “new creature” [or, “creation”] (5:17; see also Col 3:9-10). The change or transformation that Christ underwent in His resurrection foreshadows the transformation one undergoes in his own “resurrection” to a “newness of life” (Rom 6:5-7). Thus, “The old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” “New things” are those which we cannot create; only God can create truly “new things,” just as He spoke the world into existence out of nothing (Heb 11:3). “Reconciliation” [lit., to be made friends with again] is a gift of God, and is achieved only through the atoning blood of Christ *and* the sanctification of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:11, 1 Pet 1:2). “While we were yet enemies, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:6), and thus His blood gives life to our otherwise condemned souls.³⁹ Having been reconciled, the sins which were once counted against us are no longer recognized by God; the “word [lit., gospel; ministry] of reconciliation” has erased them forever. As God promised, “I will remember their sins no more” (Heb 8:12).

Ideally, an ambassador only says what his government has instructed him to say, just as Christ only spoke what He was instructed to speak (John 5:19, 8:28). Paul spoke words of God *for* God, so that those who hear these words would indeed be reconciled to Him (5:20). We should note here that while God has “reconcile[d] the world to Himself” (5:19), He still requires an *acceptance of* and *response to* His offer of reconciliation for it to have any effect; thus, Jesus died “for the whole world” (1 John 2:2), but the whole world is not automatically saved simply because He died.

We need to be careful to interpret 5:21 in light of other passages. Jesus did not *become sinful*, but took the *penalty* of sin upon Himself—which was death (1 Pet 2:22, 3:18). The expression here does not refer to a mere offering *for* sin, but describes One condemned *as though* a sinner (Gal 3:13). He was numbered *among* the transgressors without having Himself become one; instead, He interceded *for* transgressors (Isa 53:12, Luke 22:37). In essence, He became “the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin” (Rom 8:3). This does *not* mean that He takes *responsibility* for our sins, but has provided the *sacrifice* required for them in order to make forgiveness possible (Col 1:19-22). Because of what He has done for us, therefore we can “become the righteousness of God in Him” (see also 1 Cor 1:30).⁴⁰

³⁹ “The point made by Paul here is that God needs no reconciliation, but is engaged in the great business of reconciling us to himself. ... God has made possible through Christ our reconciliation to him, but in each case it has to be made effective by the attitude of each individual” (Robertson, 232).

⁴⁰ There is a religious doctrine called “penal substitutionary theory” which states that Christ was punished by God in place of our own well-deserved punishment. This theory is based upon certain interpretations of passages such as Isa 53:4-6 and 1 Pet 2:24. However, we have no Scripture to support God’s punishment of the innocent; He punishes “His sons” (Christians) who are disobedient (Heb 12:6ff), but Christ was never disobedient. In fact, if God *did* literally punish Him, then it would imply that Christ *did* sin, and not His perfect obedience. Instead, God *allowed* His Son to be punished, but it was man himself who did the punishing. God never spoke against His Son, but man accused Him of being a blasphemer and thus worthy of death (cf. Mt 26:63-66).

Questions:

- 1.) Paul says, “We have a building [body] from God” (5:1; notice the present tense). Does this mean we already have an immortal “body” waiting for us in heaven? Or is there another way in which this can be understood? Is this a conditional or an unconditional statement? Please explain.

- 2.) What are some of the negative connotations associated with “nakedness” in Scripture (5:3-4)? What is the *source* of these? (Consider Gen 2:25, 3:7,10-11 in your answer.)

- 3.) For centuries, the Judgment Day has been used to terrify and intimidate people into submission (to church officials, if nothing else). Is this the reason why Paul alludes to this here (5:10)? If so, how does this fit the context (5:1-10)? If not, then why *does* he bring it up at all?

- 4.) What does Paul mean when he says “the love of Christ controls us” (5:14)? Should this mean anything for the believer today? For you?

- 5.) “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (5:17). Please read Rom 8:12-15, Eph 4:17-24, and Titus 2:11-14 and answer: What “old things passed away”? What “new things have come”?

- 6.) Being reconciled to God (5:20) necessarily means that we once *enjoyed* “friendship” with God (just as falling from grace [Gal 5:4] necessarily means that one *had* grace, but lost it). What does this previous friendship with God imply?
 - a. How does this conflict with man-made theories like “hereditary total depravity,” which teach that each person is born a sinful creature?

 - b. Why does Paul entreat the Corinthians to “be reconciled to God” when they were already Christians?