

Our Commitment For Witnessing II Corinthians 4:1-18

This past week I talked with someone about their faith journey. Our screen door needed to be fixed and a repair guy came out Monday. Since this was the 3rd or 4th time coming to fix the same problem, I asked what his plan was for a solution. About that time I got a little Holy Spirit nudge which led to a silent conversation in my head. “Are you sure Lord? Look at this guy. He has tattoos all over his arms and legs. And then he has these big, black things in his ear lobes. I don’t know.” Now I’m not against tattoos, but sometimes you look at someone and you aren’t sure if they want to hear what you have to say. Maybe he was part of a cult.

I hemmed and hawed wondering about how to talk with this guy who, from all appearances didn’t look like the kind of guy who would be interested in a spiritual discussion.

How many of you know that sometimes the proverbial foot in the door is just starting off with small talk, asking about simple, everyday things? It doesn’t have to be jumping right into the Romans Road or Four Spiritual Laws. So, I broke the silence and used all his tattoos to break the ice, since that was something he was really into. I said “you have quite a lot of art work.”

He said “Yea, they’re expressions of my faith.” And then he told me what they stood for. One was a dagger through a serpent which he said symbolizes the victory won by Christ over the serpent. Another was for being part of the bride of Christ. Another was for the throne of God. He told me how they all symbolizing something about his faith. I asked him to tell me about his faith journey. He shared his salvation story then went to Bible college and became ordained and now serves as part time youth pastor at the Baptist church where he and his family attend.

This guy is passionate about serving the Lord and trying to encourage the congregation to be intentional in sharing their faith.

We had a great conversation and while I didn’t get the opportunity to witness to him it goes to show that all it takes is opening the door through some common interest or simple discussion. That’s the point about our series. You don’t need a flashy presentation or slick marketing strategy. It’s not a sales pitch. Some people think they don’t have a spectacular enough testimony to draw attention to the night and day transformation that some high-profile celebrity may have. Every testimony is one of transformation whether you grew up in church and never did anything outrageously terrible or if you were the town drunk always in trouble with the law. Every person who has been saved by grace through faith has a testimony of transformation. Like the blind man who was given his sight said to the Pharisees – once I was blind, now I can see. If saved, we have been changed from darkness in sin, doomed to an eternity of separation from God into a kingdom of light and eternal glory through faith in Christ for salvation.

Witnessing starts with understanding our commission; understanding the capability we have through the indwelling, empowering Holy Spirit who gives us the courage to share the gospel. That brings us to our text today in **II Corinthians 4** where we discover our commitment to witness. We can understand the commission from Christ. We can understand the capability through the Spirit. We can understand the courage necessary to speak. But we need to be committed to that calling.

Let me remind you of something I quoted last week from Patrick Morley what stated that witnessing “**is simply taking someone as far as they want to go toward Jesus at that particular moment.**”

When you’re sick and given an antibiotic, you don’t take the whole bottle all at once. You take it in doses. Sometimes we just want to unload the gospel gun on them, but there are times they only want to or can only tolerate a little bit of the good news at a time. You may share a bit one day and someone else will share something another day. In other words, God uses any number of people witnessing to someone, to prepare their heart so that He can

finish the work.

I Corinthians 3:7 “So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”

I read the story of a guy in college who had been approached on the same day by several different students who shared the gospel with him. The first person he completely ignored. The second person he was a bit more tolerant with. The third person shared more of the gospel. When the last person came along and witnessed to him, he was ready to hear and respond. Some plant the seed of the gospel. Others come along and water the plant, but God is the one who reaps the harvest.

Did you read the quote Pastor Jim sent Thursday from Jerry Bridges? “God intends that everyone who has embraced the Gospel become a part of the great enterprise of spreading the Gospel. What our particular part may be will vary from person to person, but all of us should be involved.”

We each play a role in spreading the gospel. **How committed are we to being part of God’s plan to add people to His forever family?**

So, while I’d like to say that I always have the courage to speak, I don’t always take it. Too often I’m a bit fearful. Or maybe I shouldn’t attempt to justify my own timidity and just be honest and say that sometimes I’m Howard the coward. Last week I had a golden opportunity to witness and I didn’t. I was getting an upgrade to my phone, and they were copying everything from my old phone to my new phone and it took about half an hour. As I reflected on how I could have started the conversation, the gal helping me had beautifully manicured nails. I could have commented about how nice they were and then asked if I could share about the nails of someone else and then talk about the nails that held Christ to the cross while taking my burden of sin.

This passage challenges me to put aside that hesitation and be committed to sharing the gospel.

From his own life, Paul gives us three compelling reasons why he was committed to proclaiming the

gospel message.

I. PAUL WAS COMMITTED TO WITNESSING BECAUSE OF HIS CONFIDENCE IN THE GOSPEL – vv. 1-6

I saw this cartoon last week and it’s absolutely true. “Fear of public speaking is quite common. If dressing up like Speaker Man makes you feel more confident, then so be it.”

Last year in school David got a taste of what it would be like to argue or defend various bills in a legislative process. They were divided into caucuses and each was given a bill to present. Other caucuses could then speak for or against the bill. Several of the bills had already been debated in the Michigan House. Parents were in the gallery listening. You could tell the students who were committed to their position because of the confidence they had in what they were presenting. Even if in real life they were for or against a particular bill, the position they had to take in this exercise was to convince the rest of the legislative body that their position was right. How they approached the podium, the manner in which they spoke, the material they had prepared for their position said volumes about whether they believed what they were presenting.

Paul had confidence first of all, in his ministry.

A. Paul Had Confidence In His Ministry – vv. 1-2a

Paul begins with a link to the previous chapter. Whenever you read the word “**therefore**” you have to stop and see what it’s there for. In this case, he just spoke about the glory of the new covenant in Christ that brings righteousness or makes a person right with God. In **verse 12** he says “**since we have such a hope, we are very bold.**” He goes on to say that he didn’t have to veil his message like Moses who veiled his face after having been in God’s presence. Paul then says that the spiritual eyes of some have been veiled from seeing the truth. Belief in Christ is the only way the veil is removed. He ends the chapter by stating that they reflect the Lord’s glory by being transformed into His likeness.

As he opens **chapter 4**, he looks back to **chapter 3** and states that his ministry came through God. Because his ministry to preach the gospel had come from God, he had bold confidence to speak. **How do we know his ministry was from God?**

Acts 9:15 (Speaking to Ananias God told him to go to Saul) **“But the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.’”**

Romans 1:1 **“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.”**

I Corinthians 1:1 **“Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.”** (He gives the same opening credentials in II Corinthians, Ephesians Colossians, and II Timothy.)

Galatians 1:1 **“Paul, an apostle – sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead.”**

I Timothy 1:1 **“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Jesus Christ our hope.”**

It’s clear that Paul didn’t appoint himself and neither did anyone appoint him. The 12 apostles didn’t have a meeting and take a vote and confer on him the mantle of preacher to the Gentiles. God chose him for this task. His ministry was clearly ordained by God and that divine ordination gave him the confidence for his ministry of witnessing for and about Christ.

We already saw from **Matthew 28** that we have been commissioned by Jesus, which should give us confidence in the ministry of witnessing that we are called to as well. Because that is the case, we could insert our names into Paul’s opening verses in those passage to say something like this: *“Howie, a witness for Christ Jesus, by the will of God.”*

Notice also, that this ministry was from God through His mercy. Remember that mercy is God not giving us what we deserve. Paul may have been thinking about his past before he was saved. He was

a persecutor and murderer of Christians. At one point he called himself a wretched man. And that’s what we all are. So, Paul admits that because of his past, he didn’t deserve this ministry, but God in His mercy called him to be a witness. Mercy from God helped him not lose heart or be discouraged. False teachers may have used his past to say that Paul wasn’t fit to teach or they shouldn’t listen to him since he was a blasphemer. He had learned to put the past behind and not cause it to discourage him since God in His mercy saved him and gave him this ministry.

Like Paul, that gives us confidence in the ministry of sharing the gospel. It is a divine appointment. Not only was Paul’s confidence in his ministry because it was given him by God, but next we see that Paul had confidence in his message.

B. Paul Had Confidence In His Message – vv. 2b-4

Paul is now going to contrast the deceptive message of false teachers with his own approach to ministry. He neither deceived nor distorted the gospel. Some of the false teachers were claiming that Paul used the gospel deceitfully for his own personal gain. The word deceive means to use trickery or to be cunning. They said he was trying to profit from the gospel to elevate himself to a position of power or prominence. But his preaching wasn’t to seek fame or fortune. He didn’t want power or prestige. He states that when it came to the message of the gospel, he spoke the truth plainly. He didn’t use flowery words or persuasive speech.

Most of you will remember the 60’s TV show “Dragnet”. Whenever a witness was be interviewed about a case and they began to wax on about their opinions, Sgt. Friday would say **“All we want are the facts ma’am.”**

Paul only gave them the simple facts of the gospel. Writing to Corinth, he articulated with clarity and conciseness exactly what the gospel message is: **“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried,**

that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” (I Corinthians 15:3-4)

Paul’s gospel message was simple and clear. He says that anyone who can’t or won’t believe it has been blinded by Satan so that they cannot believe. He resumes the imagery of the veil from **chapter 3** that those who cannot or will not see the truth of the gospel have their spiritual eyes covered. Jews and Gentiles refusing to see the gospel in effect reject it. To the Jews it was a stumbling block. To the Gentiles it was foolishness. But it is the power of God for salvation to those who believe it (**I Corinthians 1:18**).

In **I Corinthians 2:4**, Paul says that the person who refuses to see or who rejects the gospel does so because they do not have the Spirit of God. It is therefore foolishness to him and he can’t understand it. Because he doesn’t possess the Holy Spirit, he is unable to receive the truth of the gospel. In writing to Titus, Paul says that person needs the Holy Spirit’s work of regeneration to make spiritual understanding clear (**Titus 3:5**).

Unlike his opponents, Paul would not alter the gospel to make it more appealing. He had complete confidence in the simplicity and clarity of the message of the gospel given to Him by God. This message gave him a commitment to preach the simple message of salvation.

He was confident in his ministry because it was from the Lord.

He was confident in his message because it was about the Lord.

The third thing we notice about His commitment to witness was his confidence in His Messiah because it was about his Lord.

C. Paul Had Confidence In His Messiah – vv. 5-6

Up until his Damascus Road experience where he encountered the living, resurrected Christ, Paul was consumed with proving that the message of Christianity was false, that the Messiah had come in the person of Jesus Christ. He wanted to prove that

the Messiah had not yet come, and that Jesus had a false claim to that title. He did everything in his power to disprove the gospel.

Paul wanted to be clear that the message of the gospel was not about him. There are those today who teach that Paul’s gospel was different than the gospel Jesus preached. But the message of Jesus in **John 3:16** is the same as what Paul teaches in **Acts 16:31** – **“Believe in Jesus Christ and you will be saved”**.

This Jesus was Lord of Paul’s life. He came to acknowledge and accept that Jesus was alive and was the prophesied Messiah promised beginning in **Genesis 3:15**. The thread of Jesus as the Messiah is sewn throughout the fabric of the Old Testament. He is seen in books like Genesis, Ruth, Psalms, Isaiah, and Micah. Through a careful study of the Bible, we can see that Jesus is the Messiah. That gave Paul confidence to proclaim Jesus as Lord. He was committed to witnessing because of his confidence in the gospel. We should have the same confidence as we witness to others about the Savior.

In **verses 7-15**, Paul was committed to witnessing because of his conviction about the gospel.

II. PAUL WAS COMMITTED TO WITNESSING BECAUSE OF HIS CONVICTION ABOUT THE GOSPEL – vv. 7-15

We understand a conviction to be a sentence handed down to someone guilty of doing something wrong because there was substantial evidence surrounding the facts that they did the deed for which they stand trial. The dictionary defines conviction as the act of convincing, the state or appearance of being convinced as of the truth of a belief. Simply put it is a strong belief. There isn’t a shadow of doubt about what you believe to be true. And because the conviction about that belief is so strong you alter your life based on that conviction.

Paul had conviction about the power of the gospel message because it had dramatically changed his life and consequently, he set out to share with others

that the same gospel could change their character as well if they became convinced of its truth.

First, he had a conviction about his resources. In essence, he had seen the power of the gospel in his own life because it came from God.

A. The Conviction About His Resources – vv. 7-12

Paul speaks about something familiar to his readers. It was about treasures and clay jars. Clay jars were inexpensive, common household items. We might say they were a dime a dozen, purchased anywhere.

During an excavation near Tyre, archaeologists found piles of broken clay jars. When Alexander the Great set out to conquer the small, fortified city just off the coast in the Mediterranean Sea, he built a causeway that extended to the island. Much of the causeway was filled with broken clay pots because they were inexpensive and readily available. They weren't of any value.

In Bible times, people took valuables like gold or jewelry and put them in a common clay jar and buried them for safe keeping.

Jesus told a parable about a man who found a hidden treasure out in the field and went and hid it again. It's possible he was plowing when he struck and broke the jar containing the valuable contents.

The priceless Dead Sea Scrolls were found in a cave in clay jars.

Paul likens us to clay jars, but the gospel that has been received by us is of inestimable value. The worth of the gospel far surpasses any difficulties we may encounter. Notice the language Paul uses about his hardships, but that the treasure of the gospel sustained him during those difficulties. Be reminded of the gospel's value when facing similar hardships.

He was hard pressed or troubled on every side, but not crushed. The word trouble speaks of affliction, being under great pressure of some kind. This pressure can be from something physical, emotional or spiritual. Think about all that Paul endured for

the sake of the gospel. He wrote in **II Corinthians 1:8-9** **“We were burdened excessively – so that we despaired even of life.”**

But despite hardships, he says he wasn't crushed. It's the idea of being confined in a narrow, tight place. We might liken it to being boxed in on every side. Paul was pressed in, but it didn't crush him.

Then he says he was perplexed but not despairing. The word perplexed means not knowing which way to turn. Despair refers to being at a loss. It's a word play here because both words come from the same root. Literally he was at a loss but not at a total loss.

Third, he says he was persecuted but not forsaken. The word persecuted means to pursue or be hunted. Even though Paul had many enemies pursuing him, he never felt abandoned by the Lord. We may be attacked verbally or physically for sharing the gospel, but we know that God will not abandon us.

Finally, Paul says he was struck down but not destroyed. Struck down means to be thrown down to the ground repeatedly. He spent time in jail in Jerusalem, Philippi, Caesarea and Rome. He was beaten multiple times. Yet with all he endured because of the gospel message he was not destroyed meaning he was not lost. He had the resources for victory. His conviction about the gospel left him with a commitment to the Lord to keep preaching. Anyone who didn't have a conviction about the gospel would have given up a long time ago. His resources helped with his resolve to press on.

Then we see his conviction about his resurrection.

B. The Conviction About His Resurrection – vv. 13-14

When you have conviction about the nature of the gospel in its power to save from the penalty and power of sin in the present, you have the same conviction about its power to save from the presence of sin in the future so that the guaranteed eternal home will be a reality for the believer. Paul had that kind of assurance. He puts it in terms we should be able to understand. If Christ was raised from the dead, then those who believe in Him will

also be raised from the dead.

I Corinthians 15:12-20, 51-57

I Thessalonians 4:16-18

The resurrection is not wishful thinking. Death is not the end. Our bodies are not just given over to decay – end of story. There will be a resurrection for everyone, whether you are dead or alive. Those who have heard and received the gospel, believing that Jesus died for them, offering salvation from the penalty of sin by receiving the free gift of God’s grace, will be resurrected to new life in a real place called heaven where he or she will be in God’s presence for eternity.

Those who have heard and refuse to believe the gospel that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, rejecting the free gift of salvation, will also be resurrected but will spend eternity in a real place called hell where they will forever be separated from God.

Paul had a conviction about his resurrection based on the promise of the gospel and the resurrection of Jesus Christ Himself.

He also had a conviction about his reverence.

C. The Conviction About His Reverence – v. 15

Paul’s aim was to preach the gospel so that as more people heard its message and believed, their inclusion into the body of Christ, the family of God would result in praise offered to God that more people were being saved.

Jesus told three parables and after each one spoke of a celebration. We find it in **Luke 15:3-32**.

In the first parable a man owned 100 sheep and one wandered away and was lost. He searched and searched until he found that one sheep. Getting it back home safely, he called all his neighbors for a celebration. Jesus said, **“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”**

In the second parable, Jesus talks about a woman who had lost one of her 10 coins that were part of

her dowry. She searched and cleaned until it was found. Jesus said, **“In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”**

The third and more familiar parable is about the prodigal son. He pressed his father for his inheritance and then left home to squander it all on foolish living. Destitute, he returned home to the welcoming arms of his father. The parable closes with another celebration in which the older brother refused to participate, but the father said **“We have to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”**

Paul invited the Corinthian believers to praise God out of reverence for the gospel that was reaching more and more people.

Paul was committed to witnessing because of his confidence in the gospel.

Paul was committed to witnessing because of his conviction about the gospel.

Paul was committed to witnessing because of his character from the gospel.

III. PAUL WAS COMMITTED TO WITNESSING BECAUSE OF HIS CHARACTER FROM THE GOSPEL – vv. 16-18

He speaks first about his earthly renewal.

A. His Earthly Renewal – v. 16

Paul faced physical oppression and personal opposition. Many were out to harm him physically. Others wanted to damage his reputation, but he kept pressing on for the sake of the gospel, committed to proclaiming the good news. In spite of the hardships he faced, he said he did not lose heart.

Looking at someone, we might say they have lived a hard life. Their job or lifestyle may have taken its toll on them, and their body shows it, they have aged beyond the length of their days. With all that Paul endured over some 20 years of ministry, he may have looked older than he was. Bent by all the

beatings, fatigued by all the miles of travel. Emotional toil from his concern over the spiritual well-being of the churches he started had all impacted him in some way, yet he remained steadfast and confident in his commitment to the gospel. Though his body was wasting away, he felt renewed by the impact of the gospel in the hearts and lives it had touched.

As one author noted “Because of the inextinguishable flame of the resurrection life of Jesus burning within (he was renewed). Moreover, the inward renewal overcomes the outward destruction, and ultimately overcomes death itself.”

Paul’s character was being renewed through the daily work of the gospel in his own life and he was encouraged to see it working in the lives of others. **Deuteronomy 33:25 “As the days, so shall your strength be.”** That’s his earthly renewal.

He closes this chapter a word about his eternal reward.

B. His Eternal Reward – vv. 17-18

He mentions two things about his eternal reward. He speaks of his palatial future. He speaks of his present focus.

1. His palatial future – v. 17

When Paul considered the duration of eternity, the future glory that waited him when he arrived, the present trials seemed insignificant. They were of little importance compared to his eternal reward. I had a friend whose parents had a plaque hanging in the kitchen. It read “Kissing don’t last, cooking do.” That’s like hardship. They’re temporary, it doesn’t last, but Paul’s reward, though still future, was eternal and abundant.

1 Peter 5:4 “And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”

When we know the eternal reward that waits for us in the future, we can stand strong through the trials that are only temporary.

Paul closes with a word about his commitment to the gospel that was yet future because of his present focus.

2. His present focus – v. 18

As long as Peter was focused on Jesus, he was walking on water, but when he took his eyes off Christ, he floundered and sank.

Paul’s focus wasn’t on his present trials, it was on the Lord. He walked by faith and not by sight. He didn’t let what he could see in his hardships overshadow what he chose to see by faith – his future reward. His focus was crystal clear and that focus helped him endure a lot for the sake of the gospel. What he saw was only temporary, but what he chose by faith to see instead was eternal, that was his focus.

Hebrews 12:1-3

An athlete can endure the grueling days of strenuous workouts knowing that his focus helps him prepare for the future reward of victory that will be his.

Paul had a strong commitment to the gospel that gave him confidence in the gospel, built on conviction about the gospel, that strengthened his character from the gospel. **How committed are we to the gospel?**