

## Worksheet #4: 2 Corinthians 4:1–18

**Introduction:** In this chapter, Paul resumes his train of thought from where he left off in 3:6. In 3:7–18, Paul has described the differences between ministry under the old and new covenants. In 4:1–6, he explains that because he is a competent minister under the new covenant, he therefore remains unrelenting in his clear proclamation of the gospel message. Although his presentation is clear, this does not mean that it is universally understood, for it is “veiled to those who are perishing” (4:3) through the blinding efforts of the “god of this age” (4:4). Despite this, Paul remains motivated to present the message of Christ because doing so is commanded by the God who is able to shine light into believer’s hearts (4:6).

In 4:7–18, Paul describes apostolic ministry using a variety of vivid paradoxes. Commenting on this passage, Murray Harris suggests that “no person was ever more aware of the paradoxical nature of Christianity than Paul. And perhaps none of his Epistles contains more paradoxes than 2 Corinthians.”<sup>1</sup> Paul’s use of paradox is especially frequent in 4:7–12, where he strings together a number of contrasting ideas to describe the inherent tension of faithful ministry through suffering. In 4:13–15, Paul explains why he is motivated to continue to speak for God despite inevitable suffering. His ultimate goal is that as grace “spreads through many,” many give thanks, heaping up glory for God (4:15). Paul then summarizes how he continues to minister while suffering in 4:16–18, explaining that the eternal glory for which he labors far outweighs the affliction he must endure in the present.

### Abbreviated Outline<sup>2</sup> (current passage in bold):

- I. Introduction (1:1–11)
- II. Paul’s Relationship with the Corinthians (1:12–2:11)
- III. **Paul’s Defense of his Ministry (2:12–7:16)**
  - A. Paul’s Ministry in Troas and Macedonia (2:12–17)
  - B. Paul’s Letters of Recommendation (3:1–3)
  - C. Paul’s Competence (3:4–6)
  - D. Ministry of the New Covenant (3:7–18)
  - E. **The Unveiled Truth (4:1–6)**
  - F. **Treasure in Clay Jars (4:7–18)**
  - G. The Coming Resurrection (5:1–10)
  - H. The Ministry of Reconciliation (5:11–6:2)
  - I. Catalog of Paul’s Sufferings (6:3–13)
  - J. Call to Separate from Paul’s Opponents (6:14–7:1)
  - K. Paul’s Final Defense (7:2–16)
- IV. The Collection for the Believers in Jerusalem (8:1–9:15)
- V. Paul’s Renewed Defense of his Apostleship (10:1–13:4)
- VI. Final Exhortations (13:5–12)
- VII. Closing (13:13)

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians, vol. 10, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 1976), 342.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Academic, 2009), 484.

**Interpretation:** *Read through the passage, and then review and make notes under the questions below.*

1. What are “the hidden things of shame” that Paul says he has renounced in 4:2? Does 2:17 help you understand this phrase? Explain.  

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2. Is there any sense in which Paul’s gospel is veiled (4:3–4)? If so, how is this true? Be able to defend your answer from the text.  

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3. What does it mean that Christ is “the image of God” (4:4)?  

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4. When Paul says that he has “this treasure in earthen vessels,” what is the “treasure” and what are the “earthen vessels” (4:7)?  

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5. How can it be possible for Paul to remain buoyant under such difficult circumstances (4:8–10)? Although they certainly can be influential, should Christians allow external circumstances to determine their perspective and moods?  

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6. What does it mean for “those who live” to be “delivered to death for Jesus’ sake,” and how does that produce the result that “the life of Jesus” is “manifested in our mortal flesh” (4:11)?  

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**Application:** *Take time to reflect on the implications of this passage for your own life today.*

7. If true belief leads to and produces speech (4:13), what does your speech tell you about your belief?  

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8. If Paul described his experiences as a “light affliction, which is but for a moment” (4:17), how does that place our own experiences into perspective?  

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9. What does this passage mean for your walk with the Lord?  

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10. How does this passage challenge the way you think about situations in daily life? What should you do about that?  

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