

Getting the Maximum Yield from Your Field

(2 Corinthians 4:1-12)

Every Christian has a field of ministry. Wherever you or I go during the week is our field of ministry. God wants us to get the maximum yield from our fields. This passage offers at least three principles for having a productive ministry under the new covenant. First ...

Protect God's Word (4:1-2).

In this passage, Paul returns to the theme of being a minister of the new covenant. He writes: *Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart* (4:1). *Ministry* is a privilege. As believers, we all have a *ministry*, not because we deserve it, but as a result of the mercy of God. We should *not lose heart*, or give up. What is the key to defeating discouragement (Galatians 6:9)?

Paul continues, *But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways* (4:2a). Defeating discouragement includes renouncing all personal sin. Earlier, Paul referred to false teachers and preachers as *peddlers of God's word* (2:17). They preached only to "fleece the sheep" financially. These teachers were probably those who were attacking Paul's credibility. However, what does Paul write in 4:2b?

Instead of straightforward preaching of God's Word, deceitful preachers always use tricks and stories to twist what God has said. They *tamper with God's word* to teach false doctrine and extort money. How does 2 Timothy 4:3 describe such despicable times?

Paul continues, *but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God* (4:2c). Rather than using made-up stories, Paul exclusively preached the Word and trusted God to confirm his message. True ministers simply proclaim the truth of God's Word. Paul may have changed his methods, but he never changed God's message (1 Cor. 9:19-23). To get the maximum yield from your field of ministry, **protect God's Word** and ...

Perceive the spiritual veil (4:3-6).

Apparently, Paul has been accused of preaching a vague or obscure message. Therefore, he writes, *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing* (4:3). Many people, especially the Jews of Paul's day, could not accept the Gospel. Yet, Paul would not change it to make it more acceptable to non-believers. The Gospel is *veiled* to those who are unwilling to accept it.

Why, according to 1 Corinthians 2:14?

Paul explains that the *god of this world blinds the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ* (4:4a-b). *The god of this world* is Satan (Jn 12:31). Many in this world choose to make Satan their god because they live how he wants them to live. Satan's goal is to spiritually muddle the minds and hearts of people, so they don't see the truth of the Gospel. However, people are still accountable for their own decisions and cannot blame Satan. According to John 3:19c, why are unbelievers so content to live in spiritual darkness?

Satan wants to prevent people from understanding Jesus Christ *is the image of God* (4:4c). The word translated image (EIKON, i'-con) is the word from which we get the word "icon." It means the visible Jesus accurately represents the invisible God. Jesus told Philip, "*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*" (John 14:9c).

Many people today reject this Gospel because they refuse to believe Jesus is God incarnate--God in flesh and blood. They also refuse to believe Paul's preaching and teaching that is recorded in the Bible.

Paul writes, *For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord* (4:5a). Paul didn't go around preaching about himself but preached *Jesus Christ as Lord*. The word translated Lord (KYROIS, koo '-ree-os) means "master" or "owner." In other words, if Jesus is your Lord, He is the Supreme Authority in your life, and you are His servant. Also, as Paul writes, if Jesus is our Lord, we are *servants of others/or Jesus' sake* (4:5b).

True preaching of the Gospel presents Jesus as Lord and Savior. However, many who hear the Gospel only want a Savior. Jesus cannot be your Savior unless you also make Him Lord. For every time Jesus is called "Savior" in the New Testament, He is called "Lord" at least fifteen times. For example, in the epistles, *Romans* through *Jude*, Jesus is referred to as Savior **nineteen** times, but is referred to as Lord over **300** times.

If Jesus is truly Lord of our lives, His light will shine in and through us. Paul continues, For God, who said, "*Let light shine out of darkness,*" *has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ* (4:6). God spoke, and light came out of darkness (Gen. 1:3). In the same way, God speaks through His Son, Jesus Christ, causing spiritual light to shine in the darkness of sin. The problem is not the light; the problem is people love the darkness rather than the light. Satan uses this reality to put spiritual veils over the hearts and minds of unbelievers.

To get the maximum yield from your field, **protect God's Word, perceive the spiritual veil,** and ...

Prepare for sacrifice (4:7-12).

This section begins, *But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us* (4:7). The *treasure* we possess is *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God* (4:6), which is the Gospel. These jars of baked clay to which Paul refers were common pots, or *jars*, that were cheap, breakable, and easily replaceable. We are *jars of clay* or "earthen vessels." God has entrusted common, everyday people, like you and me, with the invaluable *treasure* of the Gospel that dispels darkness.

The power of the Gospel is not the result of our cleverness or ability because we are just *jars of clay*. It is *the surpassing power* that comes from God. Therefore, what does Paul write in 1 Corinthians 2:5?

Because we are *jars of clay*, or simply human, sharing the *treasure* can be very difficult. Consequently, in verses 8-9, Paul uses one of the most encouraging words in the Bible four times. Circle the word *but* in these two verses. When life gets us down, then comes the " *but* God." He writes, *We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed* (4:8a). The word *afflicted* refers to being under severe pressure. It is to be hard-pressed. Satan always tries to afflict effective ministers of God. However, because of the power of God, they are *not crushed*.

He also writes he and his associates were *perplexed, but not driven to despair* (4:8b-c). To be *perplexed* is to be confused. Even when Paul did not understand what God was allowing, he was not *driven to despair*. He sometimes is totally frustrated, but he isn't giving up. This is because he knows what promise in Psalm 37:23-24?

Paul also writes he and his co-workers are *persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed* (4:9). Paul sometimes faced fierce persecution from people who tried to kill him. For example, we read in Acts 14:19 that some Jews persuaded the crowd to stone Paul and leave him for dead.

After describing the various conditions, Paul summarizes his experiences and those of his co-workers. He writes, he is *always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies* (4:10). To carry *the body of the death of Jesus* is to suffer repeatedly for the truth of the Gospel and His glory.

Like many today, the Corinthians were impressed with eloquence, fascinating stories, and worldly success. Many preachers today fly around in personal jets, living the lifestyle of the rich and famous. However, Paul is trying to redirect their thoughts to those who suffer and sacrifice for the cause of the Gospel. That reveals who is really serving the Lord.

Paul continues, *For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus ' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh* (4:11). Paul and his associates were in constant danger of death because they lived for Jesus. After Paul was first saved on the road to Damascus, Jesus told Ananias that Paul *must suffer for the sake of my name* (Acts 9:16). The consequences of making Jesus Lord will never change. How are they described in Luke 9:23b-c?

Paul concludes this section, *So death is at work in us, but life in you* (4:12). Paul is willing to face physical and mental hardship, and *even death*, so his readers can have spiritual life.

To get the maximum yield from your field of ministry, **protect God's Word, perceive the spiritual veil, and prepare for sacrifice.**