

2 CORINTHIANS: DEFENDING GOD'S SERVANT TO HIS CRITICS

Part VII: The Encouraging Supernatural Nature Of A Biblical Ministry

(2 Corinthians 4:1-7)

I. Introduction

- A. 2 Corinthians was written "to defend the authenticity of " Paul's "apostleship and his message" to a church of believers who were susceptible to heeding false teachers who critiqued him, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 552.
- B. Such opposition can discourage any servant of God, but Paul never lost courage to perform his work, for he functioned in God's supernatural power in spite of his human frailty, an encouraging truth for us (as follows):

II. The Encouraging Supernatural Nature Of A Biblical Ministry, 2 Corinthians 4:1-7.

- A. Paul was encouraged by the supernatural nature of his **calling** to minister over the false teachers he faced:
 - 1. Paul did not "lose heart" (NIV, ESV), "give up" (cf. Luke 18:1) ministering when he faced discouraging opposition from false teachers who misrepresented him to his Corinthian readers, for he had received his ministry by God's grace, 2 Cor. 4:1; Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 562.
 - 2. Paul's dreadfully sinful past persecution of the Church (1 Tim. 1:12-13) had been overcome by God Who assigned him to minister the Gospel to the lost as an apostle (Acts 9:1-19), so Paul knew that God's grace would sustain him even when he himself faced wicked opposition much as he himself was once the wicked enemy of the Church! (Ibid.)
 - 3. Accordingly, Paul and his team members had before God renounced "disgraceful, underhanded" and "cunning" actions and distorting God's Word (2 Cor. 4:2a ESV) to function in complete honesty before their hearers so as to commend themselves to the consciences of every hearer, 2 Corinthians 4:2b.
- B. Paul was encouraged by the supernatural nature of his ministry **power** over Satanic opposition:
 - 1. There was a bigger obstacle to the efforts of Paul and his team that demanded supernatural help: Satan, the "god of this world," had blinded the minds of the lost lest they understand it and be saved, 2 Cor. 4:3-4.
 - 2. To address this obstacle, Paul's team resorted to supernatural resources in their ministry, 2 Cor. 4:5-7:
 - a. They did not preach themselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and presented themselves only as servants to their hearers in the sense of striving to minister to their benefit for the Lord's sake, 2 Cor. 4:5. Paul's team wisely realized the foolishness of trying to exalt themselves as mere, weak humans in a supernatural work that was opposed by Satan, so they resorted to living candidly before their hearers and preaching Christ.
 - b. Paul's team had seen the Lord reveal His truth to them, so they trusted that He would in turn cause the light they delivered through their ministries of the Word to be similarly effective with others, 2 Cor. 4:6. Considering Paul's great former ignorance to the point of persecuting Christians (1 Timothy 1:12-13) and how God overcame it on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-6) gave Paul and his evangelistic team courage that the Lord would equally make their proclamation of His Word effective in the lost they evangelized.
 - c. In addition, the sharp contrast between the great treasure of the supernaturally powerful gospel they gave and the frailty of their human natures and bodies, the "jars of clay" (NIV), worked to give glory to God's power in their ministry, not to any ability on their part as mere men, 2 Corinthians 4: 7. This vivid contrast between the servant of God's human frailty and his supernatural gifting and message gave glory to God before those who heard him minister, and worked to counter Satan's blinding work on the unsaved.

Lesson: Paul's team was not discouraged into quitting their ministry efforts due to false teachers misrepresenting them to their hearers nor due to Satan's blinding the minds of their hearers lest they understand the Gospel and be saved, for (1) Paul's team recalled God's merciful, supernatural salvation and calling of them into ministry as evidence that He would make them effective for having expended such great grace and power to save and call them. (2) Also, they relied on the power of God Who had revealed His truth to them to save them from darkness as evidence that He would likewise work in the unsaved to counter Satan's blindness of them. (3) Paul's team thus (a) renounced sin and deception to be candidly open as credible to their hearers, and (b) they let the contrasting power of God's revelatory work in the Gospel they gave that contrasted with their own human frailty convince their hearers that the power of God seen in their ministry was of God, not them, that their message was to be believed.

Application: To offset discouragement in ministry, may we (1) NOT focus on promoting any greatness in all our human frailties, a sure recipe for ministry disaster! (2) RATHER, may we focus on the supernatural calling, gifting and message we have from God, and (3) realize our hearers must come to SEE the CONTRAST between our human frailties and supernatural calling, gifting and message in all honesty so as to BELIEVE our message.