



Hiding the Gospel

~ 2 Corinthians 4:1-7

“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

What is in the book? What’s in the Bible? When you use the book to hide things, –or to hide behind, you ruin its story. You destroy its message. What do you find when you open that book? Money? Pride? Self-righteousness? Importance? Revenge? –Or, do you find: Jesus, truth, humility, forgiveness, and healing?

The theme of the passage is plain; it is obvious. If it is the purpose of God’s opponent to obscure, to “make cloudy” the clear message of the gospel of Christ, then it must be the deliberate design of his friends to make it known in every possible way. If Christ is the God of light, who said, in the beginning, “Let there be light,” “Commanding that the light shine out of darkness,” then his people cannot be expected to “walk in darkness.”

Our passage contains a comprehensive “*statement of goal*” for every Christian Church. “For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:5-6).

How does Satan hide the gospel? Obviously, he doesn’t go around hiding Bibles. In fact, the very opposite is often true --he becomes, instead, an “angel of light” --a preacher of the Bible. That is to say, it is possible to preach the Bible in such a way as to depreciate the great message of the Bible, which is “the knowledge of the glory of God” which is seen “in the face of Jesus Christ.” The Bible leads to one thing and one thing alone, and that one thing is Jesus Christ. Without Jesus Christ, we are still in the dark. “That was the true Light, which lights every man that comes into the world” (John 1:9) (People can tell that Jesus is right –even if they won’t admit it). Jesus said, “I am the light of the world: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). The message of light contained in the Bible is the message of Christ. There is no light other than the light of the God who said, “Let there be light.” There is no spiritual light other than the God who came to us as the “true light.”

Our passage is an outline for keeping the light on in the church. There are four things we must constantly keep in mind.

First, we must work hard (2 Corinthians 4:1). “Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not” --or, “we labor diligently.” I believe hard work is absolutely essential if we expect to keep the light on in the church. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has

before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). “We are *laborers* together” (1 Corinthians 3:9).

It is work to be a Christian, and Christian work is the occupation of every Believer. When Paul ministered at Thessalonica, he claimed that he “worked day and night” (2 Thessalonians 3:8). He went on to say that he did so as “an example to be followed” (2 Thessalonians 3:9).

Man is psychologically rewarded by work. Man was made to work. God said, “Six days you shall work.” Christians were made to do Christian work. For some years now, I have made it my habit to start a new project on New Year’s day. One New Year’s day I started to finish the West wall in the Austinville Church basement. A couple had given me \$200 for their wedding, so I had enough money to buy the Sheetrock. Another year, I started to work on shelving in a walk-in closet in the church office. Another year, I started making shutters for the Covert Church. Why? Because accomplishing work makes me feel like things are OK. The Bible says, “The sleep of a laboring man is sweet” (Ecclesiastes 5:12). It is the laborer who is “worthy of the reward” (1 Timothy 5:18). The light in the church cannot shine if God’s people are sluggards. The electric bill must be paid if you want to keep the light on. You cannot teach children without work, you cannot do choir numbers without work, you cannot support missionaries without work, you cannot have music without work, you cannot maintain children’s ministries without work. You cannot expect to help people in need without work.

Keeping the light on in the church is work. It is work to be a Christian, and Christian work keeps the Gospel out front --keeps it from being hid.

Second, we must work fairly and honestly (2 Corinthians 4:2). Many folk go about their Christian work in un-Christian ways. “Renounce the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2).

We must be honest and sincere in what we do and in how we do it, as well as in how we live. “For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:17). God is watching as we do our work. Non-Christians do not corrupt the Word --they don’t even have the Word. We who are Christians, must not use the Word to promote ourselves, we must not use the Word to promote slavery, racism, sexism, our political party, our business, our talent, or our financial prosperity; we must not use the Word to start wars. It corrupts the Word when we do.

In addition, we must not minister in such a manner as to trick people. The passage (2 Corinthians 2:17), refers to business people who give short measure, or water down their product. The question is, “Do our methods please the Lord?” Not our church circles. If our circles choose methods of shame, then we should choose differently. What do I mean by this? Here are some real examples: How about, “I’d like to invite you to the movies,” then, when your friend gets to the movies he or she discovers you have really taken him or her to a Christian film? I once went to a revival service where the speaker gave an invitation for all the real Christians to stand --leaving, I suppose, all the dirty, rotten heathen sitting. I stayed seated with a heathen friend I had invited; but, I didn’t go back to the meeting. People don’t come to church to be embarrassed or tricked.

Some years ago, there was a fast growing denomination that had a strategy that included sending representatives

to attend all the other area churches to discover and recruit all those in each church that might be persuaded to leave and attend theirs. It seemed crude, rude, brazen, and crass to me --still, we all endure their unscrupulous methods far too often. In addition, there are those who deliberately split churches to start other churches. These are "methods of shame."

Some years ago, Gloria and I went to a Minister's Conference at a Christian University to hear a famous minister from a mega-church in Minnesota. He bragged about closing 40 churches surrounding his --saying "If they can't do the job, I will." Gloria and I drove home in great discouragement --I think I still suffer from the experience. You see, my heart was with 40 other churches, and 40 other ministers, that he didn't seem to care much about. We do not walk in arrogance --even if it means looking like failures.

We do not walk in craftiness (trickery); we do not use Satan's methods now that we are Christians. You know what I mean, we've all heard the lines: "I'm not a salesman" (What does that mean?), "Hi, I'm working my way through college," or "I have a free gift for you." When Gloria and I were first married and I was still in college, a man came to our door and said, "Our company has selected your home as a place to display our encyclopedia set. Now, if we do decide to place them here where would you put them? He went on about our beautiful home, which was an overcrowded 29 foot house trailer, including the tongue --we found very little living space on the tongue. In the end, we would have to pay a "small daily publishing cost," which if you multiplied it out, would have come to \$545 at a time when World Book Encyclopedia was \$150.

Neither is the gospel a competition; we who preach the gospel are all on the same side. Paul noted: "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preaches Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add to my bonds: But, the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel" (Philippians 1:15-17). Which way do you think the gospel ought to be preached? It is not enough to say, "Yes, but God was able to get some good out of it." Well, so was the devil.

We have renounced the things of dishonesty; we have nothing to be ashamed of in our methods. We have only one person to please here, and it is God. "Commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 4:2). If I am straight, then the gospel will be hidden only by Satan, and not by me.

Third, we must keep focused on Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:5-6).

"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, (Why?) to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." The preaching that is not wasted is the preaching that shines on Jesus Christ. We live at a time when some people have causes so intense and so bright that you need a pair of "eclipse-glasses" to even be around them. Don't let other things overpower and outshine the very Jesus Christ who will never blind us.

Jesus Christ is the way to treat others, the way to live, and the way to heaven. There are a thousand causes in the church today that keep us from Jesus Christ. For example: Jesus Christ is not just your opinion on how to raise a family. The truth of the matter is, the people who have already raised them know enough to know they don't know much. There have never been two Christians who could perfectly agree on how to raise kids --but that won't stop some people from telling you how to raise yours. I like what Andy Rooney said; Andy said, "If you need a book to

raise kids, God help you --and God help the kids.” There are a lot of different ways to do it, that work. Don’t get to thinking that you’re the only one who knows how. And yes, we have public schools, we have, parochial schools, we have home schools –don’t turn it into a big fight. Most people are doing the best they can –give them a break!

Earlier, Paul wrote, “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18). It is Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone that can change people into what they ought to be. When we spend good pulpit time on our personal opinions about a range of subjects that have been controversial among Christians from the beginning of the church, we hide the gospel. “We preach Jesus Christ;” the “knowledge of the glory of God” is only seen when people are allowed to look “in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). Unless we let Jesus shine, we will hide the gospel. Jesus is the gospel; there is no other gospel.

Fourth, we must not get in the way (2 Corinthians 4:7). “But we have this treasure (the gospel) in earthen vessels, that (in order that) the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” We must remember that we are just people. We are not the message that people need. Here is another way to hide the gospel. Present yourself, be important, be big, brag, let your ego carry you away in evangelical importance. Remember when Cornelius fell down at the feet of Peter and worshiped him (Acts 10:25)? Peter said “Get up; I myself also am a man.” When we do that, we say “Get up,” while we’re standing on their neck-tie.

Have you ever tried to watch TV with someone standing in front of the television? I’ll bet that is how the phrase “You make a better door than a window” was coined. Don’t get in the way; don’t block the view. When we get too big, we block the view for others; then, they cannot see Christ. The Christian Church could learn a great deal from John the Baptist when he said, “I am not the Christ.” Don’t block the light.

Pay attention that the light is getting through. People shine the light everywhere but where it needs to be; but mostly, they shine it on themselves. When we present ourselves, instead of Christ, we hide the gospel. If you’re going to hold the light, shine it on what counts; shine it on something worth seeing.

Too often, the gospel comes, not in clay pots, but in thousand dollar suits. It’s nice to dress well, but we don’t need to overshadow everyone else --making them look small or inferior. I also think, “We don’t need to look more shabby than they look.” –trying to bring attention to our “superior humility” or our “commonness.” If we remain clay pots, then all the world will know that the power is not in the pot, but in the Lord Jesus. It is a new theological invention that says our witness is to be mostly talk (talk, talk, talk, talk). Joshua was commanded to walk (walk, walk, walk, walk) around the city of Jericho once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day before the priests blew their trumpets and the people shouted (Joshua 6:14-16). We must do a lot of walking before we get the right to do any talking. It is what we *are* that allows the gospel to be clearly seen. Jesus said, “You shall *be witnesses*” (Acts 1:8). It is not “You shall witness.” What you *are* counts for more than what you say when it come to keeping the gospel from being hid.

What you *are* counts for more than what you say when it comes to keeping the light on in the church. Can people see Jesus in the church? He is the light; we must let Him shine.