

# “Proud Ministers”

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Date: 17 December 2023

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please turn with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 4. We're quite a number of sermons into this series.

And we are just now starting chapter 4, which is one of my favorite parts of this book. So I hope that it will be just as much of a blessing to you as it has been to me.

You'll find 2 Corinthians chapter 4 on page 177 of your Pew Bibles. We've been working slowly through the book of 2 Corinthians piece by piece, trying to understand what God would have us to know from this book.

All scripture is breathed out by God, is written for our good. As Gavin just read for us, the word of the Lord will accomplish that which he purposes.

So here we sit ourselves around the word of God, desiring to hear God's purpose for our lives, and what life he would hope to bring through speaking his word into our midst.

[ 1 : 11 ] It's important to understand that the best part of what is set up here is not the things I am clever enough to come up with, but the truths of scripture.

And so to the best of my ability, my goal here is to clearly and truthfully teach you what this passage is trying to say.

So without further ado, I would ask that you please follow along with me as we read 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verses 1 and 2. Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart, but we have renounced the hidden shameful things, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. So in today's sermon, we're going to move through a common motion in the Bible.

We look, this motion is to look at something that is true, and then to look at how we should act. We look at a truth, and then we see an action that should follow because of that truth.

[ 2 : 44 ] Truth, then action. Knowing, then living. If you really want to be fancy and use the grammatical terms, indicative, and then imperative.

When you read the Bible, you should always be on the lookout for this movement, for ways in which the Bible is presenting to you a fact, a truth about God, about yourself, about the world, and then expecting a certain type of behavior from you because of it.

So if you pay attention to this pattern, it will help you to get more out of your study of Scripture and to understand more fully how God would equip you and instruct you not just to know the truth, but then to live it out.

As you find this pattern, it will make it clearer to you the necessity for both aspects.

If you have the knowing without the living, you have given lie to what you said you believe. If I say, I believe that God has come in the flesh, in the person of Jesus Christ, to save sinners, and all I have to do is repent and be saved, and yet I refuse to repent.

[ 4 : 13 ] I refuse to trust in Christ. I show that whatever I speak with my mouth, my actions do not follow. And on the other hand, I might have good behaviors, but fail to actually know the deep truths, and then I only happen to do good things by happenstance.

It is like a person who flips a coin, and whenever it's heads, they give money away. They're not doing it by the own generosity of their heart, but just by random chance.

Many people happen to do good things because of basic moral upbringing and things like that, but without knowledge of the truth, they do not actually fully live out all of the good that God has called man to do, and all of the wonders that he has put us on earth to produce, the way in which we are here to reflect our God.

So we must have the sweet combination of knowing and acting, of being clear on the truth, empowered by it, instructed by it, and then going forth and living differently in light of it.

So that will be today's outline for the sermon, Truth and Action. We will look at truths of wonderful things we have, and then we will look at how we should act.

[ 5 : 49 ] And I will show you that we should act proud of the gospel we have been given. So starting with truth. We have ministry and mercy.

Look at the start of the section, verse 1. Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy. So Paul starts off his argument by saying, two things are true.

You have ministry, and you have mercy. If you are a believer, these things are true of you. The first thing you have, ministry.

We have to recognize ministry is the service we've been called to do. We've been pulled out of normal use in the world. If God has saved you, he has set you apart for holy use in his kingdom.

He has given you a ministry. You may still happen to work a regular job out in the world, but you are called to be a minister in every aspect of your life.

[ 7 : 00 ] A representative of God. An ambassador who brings the light of Christ everywhere you go. This ministry is not just an obligation.

It is a blessing. It is a blessing. Like being asked to be an attendant to the king. Like someone on the street being made a member of the president's cabinet.

It is a high and honorable station that we have been given as believers. It is a gift to be of such service and use to the king.

That we would not just be common after our sinfulness. Vessels fit only for dishonorable use. But God has purified you.

You are the fine china of God's kingdom. The holy use. The special things that he puts out to bring himself the most glory.

[ 8 : 03 ] This is the ministry that we've been studying in 2 Corinthians over the past few weeks. All of chapter 3 is devoted to talking about this ministry we have.

If you need fuel to live out what God has called you to do. Go back through chapter 3 and look at all the things it has to say about the ministry.

It talks about the great power that we have. It talks about the Holy Spirit that accompanies us. That where the spirit is there is freedom.

That there is a vision of the glory of God. It talks about how when you have the ministry of the new covenant.

When you are a Christian and living that out preaching the gospel to people. It has real power to change lives. If you think of all of the ways in which people in the world are busy trying to make things change.

- [ 9 : 09 ] You know in some of the hardest circumstances. Addiction programs. Rehabs. You know I think foster care systems trying to unwrite years of abuse and bad lives.
- All these things are good. But they feel very powerless so often to make real changes. Yet we find in the gospel ministry.
- Power to take dead sinners and bring them to life. Resurrection power that undoes the corruption of sin. And makes saints out of sinners.
- If we have such a grand ministry. Such a grand task put before us. If we are called to be preachers, teachers and speakers about the gospel.
- We must be serious about it. If we have been given this calling. We cannot slack off and be lazy about it.
- [ 10 : 12 ] But we should look to rise to the occasion. When you feel you've been given an honor you don't deserve. The natural reaction is to desire to do everything you can to be worthy of the faith that you've been given.
- God has entrusted you in a position that you don't deserve to be in. Like John the Baptist says, he who comes after me, I'm not worthy to untie his sandals.
- Yet we have been made proclaimers and ambassadors of a kingdom we were once rebels against. We ought to live vigorously and seriously in light of it.
- Trying to fulfill this honor. But not only do we have a grand ministry. Look at the other truth that Paul would encourage us with.
- We have mercy. He says, since we have this ministry. As we have received mercy. Mercy. Mercy. Mercy. Mercy. Mercy. Mercy.
- [ 11 : 22 ] Mercy. We have mercy. Mercy. Mercy. Mercy. There is real forgiveness for you. Never forget this truth.
- Never grow out of sweet remembrances of the forgiveness and the mercy of God you have received. This is the fountain of it all.
- That God would be pleased to look at your crimes that deserve great punishment. And say, I will count none of it against you.
- And every last one against the Savior. Against the one who did no wrong. To have mercy is to not receive the punishment you deserve.
- I want you to know that you do deserve punishment. You are bad. God would be right and just to condemn you.
- [ 12 : 31 ] But if you have trusted in Christ. Instead of that condemnation, you have received mercy. Take a second and ask yourself this.
- Do I really think that I need mercy? Do you believe that you need mercy? If you answered no, I want to warn you.
- That if you do not see your need for mercy. You are far from Christ. And in dangerous circumstances. It is bad enough to be helpless and weak and caught out and under threat of death.
- It is bad to say, have a terminal illness. It is worse. It is even worse to be unaware of it and be unable to do anything to treat it or to ease it thereby.
- You will perish if you do not realize your need for mercy. But beyond that, I want you to know that you have nothing to fear.
- [ 13 : 49 ] If you have said to yourself, I don't need mercy. I want you to know that you have nothing to fear from Christ.
- We are scared to face our weaknesses. We are naturally closed about the idea of staring down our inadequacies and our needs.

It is hard to look into the mirror and to say, I am a wretched sinner who deserves to be executed for your crimes.

And it is hard to know how to even function without a positive self-image. But it isn't real happiness to tell yourself that you're all right when you're not.

It isn't real safety to pretend that you're good when your conscience deep down burns at your sins. Hiding from God because you don't want to answer about your sins is not a way to salvation.

[ 15 : 08 ] And you have nothing to fear if you come clean before Christ with all of your guilt and your brokenness. We can come to Christ in the midst of our filth.

You have nothing to fear if you come clean before Christ. And instead of being harsh and haughty and casting us away, you may receive mercy. You can admit all of your crimes to him and he won't cast you out.

You do not have to hide your flaws to be loved by Christ. In fact, if you show them to him, you will really have mercy.

If you can say with Paul, I need mercy. Then you can come to Christ and be sure that you have it. As sure as the sun rises in the morning, as sure as food is good, as sure as oceans are deep, and as sure as mountains are tall, if you come to Christ, you may have mercy.

If you have trusted in him, you will really and truly be forgiven. There is not anything that will still be counted against you. The punishment you deserve is really and truly gone.

[ 16 : 39 ] Psalm 103 says, For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his mercy towards those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our sins from us.

As a father pities those his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him. Do you hold on to this mercy?

Have you worked it down deep into your bones so that you wake up in the morning singing about it? Are you energized more by a cup of coffee or by your Savior's love and forgiveness?

It is one of the greatest joys available to be able to stare into your sin full face, to look at your failings and say, Hallelujah, every last one of them is forgiven in Christ.

Oh, what great mercy we have received so that our every crime becomes more fuel to rejoice in our Savior for his abundant mercy.

[ 17 : 51 ] Jesus had to be tortured and killed to secure you this mercy. He had to face the wrath of God on your behalf.

Can you neglect so great a salvation? What will this mercy mean for your life? This is the truth.

We have great mercy. We have a great ministry. We must remember these things and we must work them down into our hearts and use them as fuel as we consider how to live our lives.

So that the more we bite deep into these truths, the more we are spurred on to do all the things God calls us to do. That's section one, truth.

So it's truth, then action, knowing, then living. So now section two, action. Lights, camera, the stage is set.

[ 19 : 02 ] The scene has been laid. We know the truth. We have a great ministry, a great calling. We have great forgiveness. So what then?

These truths must not only live in these pages, but they must live out in our lives. Will you live your life by the words you hear in this book?

Or will you lie with a soul unstirred? Ask yourself, have I let these past sermons, the word of God, shape me?

Am I properly responding to the truth I hear every week and changing my life because of it? Or have I lied by speaking and nodding and saying I believe these things, yet walking away unchanged?

I want you to live out these things. I want you to practice them. Not because when you do it, some sort of tally on my scorecard.

[ 20 : 17 ] I want you to know there's no pastoral trading cards. There's no batting average for the number of sermons that hit home and someone actually changes because of.

Though if someone wants to create it, it'd be kind of cool. Please let me know. I want you to follow these things because in following them, there is life.

Because the instructions of Christ are life-giving. Because they change your life for the better. Because when you leave the fallen ways of this world and follow after him, you will receive the amazing blessing of being closer to the perfect Savior.

You should want to have your life changed by these words. You should come to the word of God, reading it every day, and come to the word of God every Sunday and say, I want to walk away different than how I came.

I want a bit more of the design of the good life laid out before me. Not the good life of nice cars and nice home and money to travel.

[ 21 : 37 ] The good life of fellowship with Christ. Take the leap and put these things into practice.

Jump out from the ledge and trust that what these things say are true. Reject complacency and listen to these words and live them out.

Christ faced the cross with joy. He faced a gruesome death in execution, despising it, but pressing on for the joy set before him.

He rested in truth, in God, in obedience. Do you want joy unspeakable?

Do you want to be able to face the suffering that comes in this life and still be able to say, hallelujah, what a Savior? Or are you hoping that just troubles won't come your way?

[ 22 : 45 ] And that if you just work hard enough, you'll be happy and you won't have anything to worry about? Put stores in your ship that will last through the storm.

Stockpile the love of Christ in your heart so that when bad times come, you have a wealth to draw upon and you say, it's just a car.

It's just a job. These things happen. But I have Christ. Or even to say, it's just my life.

It's just death. What's that compared to my Savior? You know? Paul writes, indeed, I count all things as garbage for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ.

It doesn't compare. And if you hear the word of God and you let it transform your life, you will find a wealth unspeakable that allows you to look out at the world and say, come what will, I can rejoice because I have him.

[ 24 : 05 ] So this passage calls us to obey the truth by living as a people who are proud of the gospel.

We are to be a people who stand tall, yet with humble hearts, ready to tell the world of the great mercy we've been given and the honor we have to speak to other dying sinners, the words that saved us.

There is a God and he has sent a son who died on the cross for people like you and me. I have five hopefully quick points for you.

They spell out the word proud, so you can use that to help remember it. And they teach us from the passage how we should live in light of the mercy and ministry we have received.

This is proud. We are to be proud of the gospel. We are to persevere in righteous, open-handed, unashamed displays of truth.

[ 25 : 14 ] We are to be proud. That is, P, persevere. The passage says, we do not lose heart.

If we have such a ministry and such mercy, we must not grow faint. We must not lose heart.

Are you tempted to slack off because the work is hard? Are you tempted to give up because the cost is so high?

Do you want to shrink back from the calling of Christ because it's hard to be rejected by people or because it hurts to sacrifice?

I know it's hard. Jesus says, take up your cross daily and follow me. There's a lot of things that I've wanted that I've sacrificed for the sake of Christ.

[ 26 : 19 ] Yet when we remember our calling, when we remember the words that started this letter, we are encouraged. 2 Corinthians 1, verse 5, For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds with Christ.

Don't lose heart. You are on the path of life. There may be stones and thorns and thistles, but you are on the path that leads to eternal life.

We walk on the path that is the ministry that God has given us. And we enter into that path through the gate of mercy.

So we've come to these trials, to these difficulties, through the gate of mercy, on the path of ministry, heading towards glory.

And if that is true, we need to not lose heart and to press on, to persevere. We persevere in righteous, open-handed, unashamed displays of truth.

[ 27 : 48 ] R, that is righteous. The passage says that we walk renouncing hidden things of shame. This is the good path we walk, heading towards the good place.

How could we walk such a path shamefully? How could we say, how could we say, it doesn't matter if I do things that are evil on the path of good?

Who could say that he has left the domain of darkness, the land of evil, has entered through the gate of mercy, is ministering goodness, walking on his way to glory, and yet be comfortable hiding shameful things?

We hide shameful things because we're scared to let them go. We know that if we bring them out into the light, we might have to get rid of them and lose their comfort.

But this is not the way of people who have been given such mercy in such a ministry. How are we who have been forgiven such sins going to turn around and live in those sins in the midst of our calling?

[ 29 : 17 ] Notice that the verse says, renouncing hidden things of shame. It is not that we Christians have nothing to be ashamed of, but we publicly renounce our sin.

We must be a people who are quick to say sorry and mean it, who are quick to say, I'm the reason that that's messed up.

Who aren't quick to blame others, but quick to see their own sins and to admit them freely. We must not pretend that we have no sin.

We must not love our sin so much that we hide it. Look at how John 1 shows this beautifully. John 1, 1 John 1 shows beautifully this calling we have to walk in the light, to not hide truths, but to speak clearly of our sin before others.

John 1 verses 5 through 10. This is the message which we have heard from him and declare to you that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

[ 30 : 45 ] If we say we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and the word is not in us. We must persevere in righteous, open-handed, unashamed displays of truth that is renouncing things that are shameful, refusing to hide them away.

Open-handed. The passage instructs us that we do not walk in craftiness. We must be open-handed with the truths of scripture.

Christianity is not spread by magic tricks, by fog machines or low lighting. Christianity is not a concert or a billboard flashing brightly to get your attention.

[ 32 : 11 ] We do not win people by really clever ploys. We persuade people with open, honest truth, laying out plainly before them the Christ we know.

We might think to ourselves, if we just have the right Bible track to give or if we just say the right words at the right time or if we hired professional musicians or if we did this or did that, we would be able to have more people saved.

This is not how God advances his gospel, not by craftiness and cunning ploys, but by the plain presentation of the truth. We can try different things to get people's attention.

But the point of it all must be the gospel. We are not trying to win them to think Christians are good.

We aren't trying to win people to just attending church every Sunday. We are here to win people to Christ, to repentance and belief in the Savior.

[ 33 : 41 ] We do not win people for, with social programs or nice clothing or fancy words.

We win them with the beauty of the gospel of grace. Every good thing we do must be for the sake of pointing back towards the good that God has done in Christ.

we persevere in righteous, open-handed, unashamed displays of truth.

You, unashamed, the passage reveals that we must not manipulate God's word. There are hard truths in the Bible, things that we might be tempted to be shamed to say.

What about the passages that talk about slaughter and death? Do you, are you scared about someone asking you a question about that?

[ 34 : 50 ] Or do you know the truths of the Bible so well that you are prepared to be unashamed about how God works in all of Scripture? Are there truths that you are tempted to round off and tuck away so that people might not be offended by them?

Is the Bible to you a great candidate for plastic surgery? A nip here, a tuck there, and then it'll be beautiful enough to win people's affection?

Or are you ready to let the word stand on its own, to win people not with a fake beauty, a worldly beauty, but with the heavenly beauty of this alien, strange word of God?

When we modify Scripture to make it appealing to the world, we take this glorious thing and we make it worldly.

we take the beautiful word of God and we make it grotesque by transforming its beauty to look like our filth.

[ 36 : 10 ] Last week, we looked into how when we look at the glory of God, we find ourselves transformed to be more like that glory. Well, when we modify the Bible to make it appealing to people, we do the opposite.

We take the glory of God and trade it in for the shamefulness of our world. We must be unashamed about Scripture and its truths.

Like a good teenager who's been well-educated and right and wrong is never tempted by foolish peer pressure. Like someone who knows there's no profit in that and no goodness for me to pursue there and so your pressuring of me does nothing.

You won't ever take away from me the truths of this Bible because I know they're so good and so I don't have to be ashamed of them even if you think I should be.

Were these words not the words by which you were saved? Was this not the gate by which you received mercy? Why would you do anything to change that which gave you life and rescued you from your sins?

[ 37 : 36 ] We will persevere in righteous, open-handed, unashamed displays of the truth. And finally, D, displays of truth.

Paul finishes his thought with the words, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

This is the heart of our task as Christians. This is the pinnacle of what we are supposed to do. We are to be a people who brings the truth everywhere we go.

The gospel should be plain in your life and in your conversations. People who know you should know the gospel.

The two should go hand in hand. When you come on the scene, so should the gospel. Our job, our role, our ministry is to display or to manifest the truth.

[ 38 : 44 ] We here are ambassadors to a world in darkness here to present to them the light. Notice the great commission that Jesus gives in Matthew 28.

And Jesus came and spoke to them saying, all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all the things that I have commanded you.

And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen. See, Paul speaks of commending ourselves to every man's conscience, that by the plain presentation of the gospel, people, we wipe our hands of any guilt for their fate.

The world is perishing, you hold the cure, and if you never tell them about it, you are guilty of their death. Like someone who is in the path of a bus, and you sit by and do nothing to warn them, you share blame for their death.

Yet if you openly and unashamedly manifest the truth before them, you commend yourselves to their conscience, holding out the cure, whether or not they receive it.

[ 40 : 25 ] Take your responsibility seriously. If you have received such mercy and have been called to such a ministry, turn around and present that mercy to others working out the ministry you've been given.

You sit here and you are safe. You have received mercy and are free. Will you sit by and do nothing while others perish without that mercy?

Will you be gifted an honored position as a messenger of God and then sit by in the luxury of his mercy while his message of salvation goes unsaid?

Educate yourself in the word because it is your job, your life, and your privilege to manifest the truth everywhere you go. He has given you mercy and a ministry.

will you commend yourself before his sight as a worker with no need to be ashamed? I pray that we will all take these words to heart.

[ 41 : 43 ] God be glorified. May we be a people proud of the gospel, honored by our call to ministry, and strengthened by the mercy we have received.

moved.