

## 5. Never ultimately discouraged

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] May we turn together to 2 Corinthians, Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 4. And if you have one of our big church Bibles, you'll find this on page 965.

Page 965. I want to read the whole of chapter 4 now, although I really only want to concentrate tonight on the first six verses of chapter 4.

But we'll come on, God willing, to the second part of the chapter next week. Just to give a little context and to remind you of where we're up to in Paul's letters, in Paul's letter here. In chapter 3, which we were studying a fortnight ago, Paul was comparing or contrasting two ministries.

One that he called the ministry of death or the ministry of condemnation. And he was helping the Corinthians to see that false apostles who had crept into their church at Corinth were actually teaching them a gospel which was no gospel at all, which in the end would bring them to death and condemnation.

And Paul was contrasting that ministry of death with the real ministry of the gospel, which he calls the ministry of the Spirit or the ministry of the new covenant. So he's been contrasting those two ministries.

[ 1 : 1 8 ] And let's bear that in mind now as we begin chapter 4. Therefore, having this ministry, in other words, the ministry of life, the ministry of the Spirit, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.

But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word. But by the open statement of the truth, we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 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.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed.

[ 2 : 4 7 ] Perplexed, but not driven to despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken. Struck down, but not destroyed. Always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

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.

So death is at work in us, but life in you. Since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what has been written, I believed and so I spoke, we also believe and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people, it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart.

Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen.

[ 4 : 16 ] For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. Praise be to God, and may his word be a blessing to us this evening.

Well, let's turn to 2 Corinthians again, page 965, and the first six verses from chapter 4 is the passage I want to focus on this evening.

And as Willie mentioned earlier, my title is Never Ultimately Discouraged. I remember being at a conference for ministers about 20 years or so ago in London, and one of the speakers at this conference was an American pastor called John MacArthur.

John MacArthur is a man who's had a very fruitful ministry at a church in Los Angeles, and I imagine some of you may have come across him or heard him. Anyway, at this conference for ministers, he said this, or something like this, I doubt if there has ever been a period in church history when Christian ministers have shown so little ability to distinguish truth from error.

Now, he wasn't talking there about Christians in general. He was talking about ministers, about pastors. And as I sat there listening to him, I thought to myself, if that is true, that Christian pastors are failing to distinguish truth from error, then we have a lot, we have a big job on our hands to get on with.

[ 6 : 12 ] The chief responsibility of Christian ministers and pastors is to teach the Bible to the church. And within that general area of responsibility, teaching the distinctions that the Bible draws between truth and error is a major part of the work.

Now, the world, the atmosphere that we live in today, does not like the clear distinctions that the Bible draws between truth and falsehood. Today's world wants to say something like this, everyone we must accept has a valid viewpoint.

We must listen respectfully and equally to every speaker, every writer, every broadcaster. And having listened to everyone with equal respect, we should doff our caps to them and thank them for the fascinating contribution that they have just made to the rich kaleidoscope of contemporary human experience.

I'm speaking with irony there, so I'm sure you're aware. Now, friends, the Bible, the Bible, as we know, is not like that. The Bible says these things are true and these things are false.

These things are right. These things are wrong. These things constitute godly behavior, whereas these things constitute ungodly behavior. Now, in 2 Corinthians, the problem that Paul was addressing throughout the letter was the problem created by a group of people whom Paul calls false apostles.

[ 7 : 43 ] Now, these seem to have been a group of people who made their way into the church at Corinth in Paul's absence. He was away working elsewhere. So they'd come in, they'd gained influence with the Christians there.

They were clearly denigrating Paul, putting Paul down, and getting the Corinthians to think that Paul was a rather weak and insignificant person who really didn't deserve to be followed.

Now, Paul knew what these false leaders were teaching, and he knew that their message was quite different from the message of the true gospel. And so throughout this letter, he's pleading with the Corinthians to come back to him, not really for his sake, but because in coming back to him, they would be coming back to the truth.

This whole letter is written to draw the distinction between the true gospel and a counterfeit imitation which will lead the Corinthians away from Christ.

Now, if John MacArthur is right, and I'm sure he is right, that Christian leaders have been losing the capacity or the will to distinguish truth from error, two Corinthians will help all of us, not just pastors, but all of us, to become more willing and more able to draw lines between the real gospel and its ungodly alternatives.

[ 9 : 01 ] Now, this is what Paul has been doing in chapter 3, which we were looking at a fortnight ago. His great distinction there, as I said earlier this evening, was between what he calls a ministry of death or a ministry of condemnation and the ministry of righteousness, which is the ministry of the new covenant.

The true gospel of Jesus Christ is the ministry of the new covenant, whereas the teaching of the false leaders in Corinth was some kind of return to Judaism, and Paul knew that that could only turn the Corinthians away from their savior.

So chapter 3 turns on Paul's distinction between his gospel, the true gospel, and the false gospel of the false apostles, which in the end will prove to be a ministry of death.

And this helps us to understand the forcefulness of the first verse of chapter 4. Therefore, having this ministry, by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.

And you see how he's contrasting this ministry, the ministry of the true gospel, with that ministry, which is the ministry of death, the ministry that the false apostles are teaching.

[ 10 : 12 ] And why does Paul not lose heart amidst all the pressures and difficulties of his life? The answer is because this ministry, the true ministry, is so wonderful and so marvelous in what it achieves.

What does it achieve? Well, look at chapter 3, verse 9. It achieves or brings righteousness. That means a status for the Christian whereby he is counted, acquitted, and justified in the sight of God.

It also brings, as chapter 3, verse 8 puts it, new life. It is the ministry of the Spirit, which means that those who receive it are born again by the power of the Spirit of God.

They're brought to life with the very life breath of God. It also achieves, if you look onto chapter 5, verse 18, reconciliation with God.

In fact, in chapter 5, verse 18, Paul calls it the ministry of reconciliation. This means that the true gospel ends the enmity or the estrangement between God and man.

[ 11 : 16 ] It reconciles lost believers to their God. Now, anyone who exercises this kind of ministry and teaches this gospel is going to be so deeply convinced of the truth and the transforming power of the gospel and so deeply persuaded that this gospel alone transforms human lives and truly brings new life and new birth to them, that he's not going to lose heart.

Whatever brickbats and fiery darts are thrown at him by the world and the devil. And you'll see Paul gives us another reason in verse 1 for not losing heart in this work.

He says, it is because we have this ministry by the mercy of God that we do not lose heart. Now, mercy from God is something that we badly need but don't in any way deserve.

It's free, it's gracious, and it's kind to those who only deserve to be rejected by God. And surely Paul must have been thinking of his own personal past as a kind of religious terrorist who violently persecuted the church as a young man.

Do you remember the words that he wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy chapter 1? Formerly, he says, I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent or violent opponent, but I received mercy, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me.

[ 12 : 47 ] You see, Paul never forgot what the Lord Jesus did for him on the road to Damascus when he appeared to him. How could you possibly forget something like that? The Lord, Jesus, showed extraordinary mercy to this violent terrorist, this hater of Christians.

The Lord saved him and pardoned him and then sent him forth to preach this gospel of mercy all over the world. Well, let's turn now to these first six verses in chapter 4.

What is Paul doing here in this paragraph? Why does he include these six verses? The answer is that by teaching the Corinthians certain truths here, he's strengthening and undergirding their understanding of the true gospel.

It's all part of his desire to persuade them that his gospel, what you might call, or what he calls this ministry, the ministry of the new covenant, is true and trustworthy.

He's teaching them how to distinguish the true gospel from counterfeit alternatives. So in these verses and the verses that follow on, he's showing them reasons for trusting him and his teaching.

[ 13 : 59 ] He's unpacking further the nature of the true gospel and of true gospel ministry, of true gospel work. So I want to take this under three headings. He's teaching the Corinthians first, about his work, second, about Satan's work, and third, about God's work.

So we'll take them in that order. First of all, in verse two, he's teaching the Corinthians about his work and the work of his fellow evangelists, which is why he uses we rather than I.

So let me read verse two again. Paul's work. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word.

But by the open statement of the truth, we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. Now, this is a statement about true Christian ministry, and it's designed to help the Corinthians to see that Paul's work and Paul's methods are trustworthy, unlike the work and the methods of his opponents at Corinth.

And you'll see that within this verse, this one verse, verse two, Paul tells the Corinthians, first of all, what he will not do, and secondly, what he always does.

[ 15 : 18 ] So first, what he will not do is to practice disgraceful, underhanded ways or cunning or tampering with God's word.

Now, when we read that, we're bound to ask, why should any preacher or pastor want to tamper with God's word or practice some kind of deceit in their teaching?

If the gospel is true and wonderful, which it is, why should anyone who studies it and thinks about it want to distort it or tamper with it? Well, the answer is that some pastors cannot get over the temptation to be popular.

They want people to speak well of them and they want to attract larger numbers into their congregations. Now, to illustrate this, let me mention a classic temptation into which the preacher can fall because he wants to be popular.

It's the temptation to play down or to tamper with the Bible's teaching on sin and God's judgment. So the man, this preacher, thinks, if I keep on talking about sin and judgment regularly in my sermons and the wrath of God, people are going to think that I'm a very gloomy, dark kind of person.

[ 16 : 33 ] They're going to think of me as Mr. Severe with a face like granite and a heart like stone, severe haircut, severe black suit, severe manner and severe and very black, very large Bible.

A kind of moral policeman of the worst kind. So, I won't keep reminding people that they're sinners saved by the mercy of God. No, no. I'll try to be more positive so as to build up their sense of happiness and self-esteem and so on.

So, I'll make my core message a message about love rather than about truth. I'll say to them, God loves us as we are. We are, after all, his children.

He coos over us and delights in us as a mother does over her newborn baby, et cetera, et cetera. Now, friends, thank God we are loved by him deeply and thank God we do become his children when we're born again.

but we cannot come to him and belong to him except via the route of repentance, understanding our sin, kneeling, therefore, at the foot of the cross, acknowledging that we are by nature all of us sinners condemned by him who need the rescue that only a crucified, sin-bearing savior can give us.

[ 17 : 52 ] and we've got to teach all these things and live them if we're to be true to the gospel. A weak understanding of sin and of judgment will always lead to a weak and distorted gospel, a gospel which has been tampered with.

The fact is, we have to look into the pit of hell and see what we've been rescued from before we understand how great the rescue is and how great the rescuer is.

we're never going to understand how good the good news is unless we understand how bad the bad news is, unless we understand the Bible's teaching about our sin.

But every preacher will know the temptation to minimize the Bible's teaching about sin and judgment. The true gospel teacher in the same way needs the courage to expose the sinfulness of practices and behavior which are hateful to God but which are so often applauded or condoned by the world.

The teacher who refuses to tamper with God's word will turn the Bible's searchlight on, just to give one or two examples, ruthless business practices, financial greed and fraud, corporate irresponsibility.

[ 19 : 14 ] the true preacher will explain why the Bible condemns murder and therefore inevitably condemns such things as abortion and euthanasia and why the Bible upholds marriage and thus teaches us to shun adultery and homosexual activity and other forms of promiscuity.

but he knows that if he teaches the Bible's teaching on these things he's going to be very unpopular with some people and he's well aware these days as well that if we keep teaching the Bible's teaching on some of these things we run the risk of being taken to court and possibly sent to prison as well.

One thing which I've become aware of I'm not a techie as you may know but even I have become aware in recent years that with the power of the internet these sermons that we preach here it seems as if it's just within these four walls but these sermons we preach get listened to all around the world Alaska and Beijing and Timbuktu and of course London and Edinburgh.

Who knows what kind of big brother might be watching us and listening to us and what reprisals might come our way. Now of course if we tamper with God's word if we fail to bring out its true force about all these things nobody will be cross with us nobody will be angry with us except of course the Lord himself.

In the end the preacher has to choose whether he will please the Lord or please the world. Think of Paul's life he spent several years of his life in prison and at the end of his life he was executed because he refused to tamper with the word of God and he is expecting the Corinthians to understand that a ministry like that a ministry of that level of integrity and honesty is a ministry that can be trusted.

[ 21 : 18 ] Now that's what Paul refuses to do. What does he do instead? Well he tells us in the second half of verse 2 but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

Now don't you think that's a lovely phrase the open statement of the truth. Nothing is covered nothing is hidden there's no cunning there's no deception. Now do you know those I'm sure you do those infuriating advertisements that you sometimes hear on the radio where somebody is advertising some product or service and because they're paying I guess a fat fee for their advertisement presumably so much money per second they try to speak as quickly as possible and get as many words as they possibly can within their allocated slot of time after which of course they speak much faster than that but after which they say terms and conditions apply no they don't they say terms and conditions apply very quickly.

Now I listen to this and I say ho ho what have we here deception the deal is not half as good as it sounds because terms and conditions apply.

I imagine myself ringing up oh Mr. Lobby it doesn't really apply to you of course because you're over a certain age and you live in Scotland you ought to live in Surrey it would be much better for you and you live out in the countryside you're open to all those country smells which are very bad for your health etc.

etc. the deal is not half as good as it sounds now going back to Paul there are no terms or conditions or high speed sales talk with the apostle Paul he states the whole truth of the gospel openly and plainly to what purpose he tells us in verse 2 so as to commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God and what he means by that is that he's looking in two directions as he preaches the gospel first at his listeners he knows that they will recognize in their hearts and consciences that he is being thoroughly honest with them now when we listen to people people that we don't know well we sometimes detect dishonesty and guile for example in the traveling salesman who comes to the door who tries to sell us a product which we think is dodgy but equally there are other people who immediately commend themselves to us as people of spotless integrity and honesty now Paul is saying this is what our gospel preaching is like and this is why you Corinthians must trust us you know that we're honest and completely open you know that we are not people of cunning and guile but secondly

[ 24 : 10 ] Paul reminds the Corinthians that he also looks in God's direction as he preaches the gospel we do this he says in the sight of God yes the listeners must respect our integrity as they see how open and honest we are but God also is watching and he weighs the hearts of men it's not enough for you Corinthians to know that our gospel is open in the sight of men you need to realize that God too looks upon our work and approves it so there's the first thing Paul's work no to dishonesty and cunning and yes to an open declaration of the truth open in the sight of God and men now secondly Paul tells the Corinthians about the devil's work in verses 3 and 4 let me read those verses again and even if our gospel is veiled it is veiled only to those who are perishing in their case the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of

Christ who is the image of God now in those two verses Paul is really developing what he was saying in the last few verses of chapter 3 about the veil which we looked at a couple of weeks ago for example back in chapter 3 verse 15 hearts preventing them from seeing what Moses teaching was all about and he goes on in verse 16 to say that it's only when a Jew turns to the Lord that's the Lord Jesus that the veil is removed and he can begin to see the truth now here in chapter 4 verses 3 and 4 Paul tells us rather more in verse 3 he says that the gospel is veiled in other perishing those who to import words from Jesus are walking the broad road that leads to destruction unbelievers who are determined to remain unbelievers in their case

Paul goes on in verse 4 the God of this world has blinded their minds now the God of this world in Paul's vocabulary means Satan we know that ultimately the victory of Jesus over Satan is absolutely assured by the Bible remember how the apostle John says in his first letter the reason the son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work Jesus is Satan's master and conqueror there's no doubt about that but until the end comes until the Lord Jesus returns Satan is at work and his work is to blind the minds of unbelievers to use Paul's phrase here in verse 4 and what is it in these verses that Satan prevents them from seeing it is the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God now that phrase sounds I think a little bit more complicated than it really is it may be that seeing the light in verse 4 and then in verse 6 shining in our hearts to give the light it may well be that both of those phrases reflect

Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus Luke in Acts chapter 9 as he records the original event says that Paul approached Damascus and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him Paul's conversion was a heavenly revelation of the truth about Jesus who Jesus really was God you see Paul had thought of Jesus as a maverick Jew a charlatan a kind of heretical Jew but on the Damascus road when Jesus revealed himself to Paul Paul realized that Jesus was in truth the glorious Christ who is the very image of God as he puts it here in verse 4 and he calls that in verse 4 the gospel the gospel the good news is to outlandish itinerant preacher as Paul had thought he was but the Christ the son of David long promised in the

Old Testament and more than that that he is glorious that he shines with the very glory of heaven that he is the very image and representation of the God of heaven but Paul's point in verse 4 is that the unbeliever cannot see this because the God of this world Satan has blinded his mind now notice that word mind back in chapter 3 verse 15 it was the heart that was veiled until the unbeliever turns to the Lord but here in chapter 4 verse 4 it's the mind it's the rational analytical process which is disabled the unbeliever looks and looks but cannot see he listens and listens but cannot understand he thinks but his thoughts make no sense to him his mind is robbed of its proper powers and Satan is the robber let me give you a striking example of this blinding of the mind in the early 19th century somewhere around 1805 there were two great parliamentarians in the house of commons who were also close personal friends

[ 29 : 56 ] William Wilberforce and William Pitt the younger now Wilberforce as you I'm sure you know was a devoted Christian and he spent much of his life's energy working both inside and outside parliament for the abolition of the slave trade his good friend William Pitt was the prime minister for more than 20 years and those were difficult years for Britain the Napoleonic wars were just beginning to get going coming to a head and there were other pressures there was a shortage of money nothing new about that but there wasn't much money there were bad harvests and all sorts of difficulties that Pitt had to contend with he was a good prime minister now because they were close friends and they'd spent a lot of time in each other's company when they were young Wilberforce longed more than anything else to see his friend Pitt become a Christian Pitt was a kind of formal Anglican as prime ministers quite often are but Wilberforce knew that Pitt was not truly converted however a day came when Wilberforce had the opportunity to invite Pitt to come to church with him in

London to hear the preaching of a fine gospel preacher whose name was Richard Cecil now the church was packed out and I think the two politicians had to sit up in the gallery together and Wilberforce was watching Pitt very carefully out of the corner of his eye as they were listening to the preaching of the gospel and apparently the preacher preached a wonderful clear gospel sermon the sort of sermon which you would think that nobody could hear and remain unconverted if they were not a Christian however as the two men left the church and walked away to their lunch together Pitt turned to Wilberforce and he said you know Wilberforce I really have no idea what that man was talking about now there was nothing wrong with Pitt's brain on the human level on the contrary he was one of the most intelligent capable people of his generation but in Paul's words here in verse four the God of this world had blinded his mind so that he could not see the light of the gospel of the glory of

Christ who is the image of God now why should Paul include verses three and four here his purpose in writing this letter is to strengthen the Corinthians confidence that his ministry is the true gospel ministry whereas the teaching of his opponents in Corinth is a false gospel in fact no gospel at all so how do verses three and four contribute to what Paul is trying to do I think in this way he's saying to the Corinthians trust my gospel it is the open statement of the truth it hasn't an ounce of cunning or underhandedness or tampering in it but don't think that everyone who listens to it will be converted by it it is the truth but it doesn't thereby bring everyone who listens to it to Christ so my friends when you preach it in Corinth you mustn't be surprised when some of your listeners reject it the

God of this world is blinding their minds you must expect a mixed response but don't for that reason think that there is anything wrong with the gospel and it's just the same for us today some of our friends will hear the gospel explained simply and clearly and yet they will still say I cannot see what you see the God of this world is blinding their minds so we must pray for them that God will lift the veil that Satan has put what we've seen so far Paul's work in verse 2 Satan's work in verses 3 and 4 now finally we'll look at God's work in verses 5 and 6 and his work as verse 6 puts it is to shine into people's hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ now we'll come back to that in a moment let's notice that verse 5 contains a sharp warning to all

Christians and especially to preachers Paul says there what we proclaim is not ourselves now when he says that he could be firing a shot across the bows of the false apostles at Corinth who were perhaps rather full of themselves and pleased with themselves but he's warning all Christians here of the danger of self proclamation and self promotion I've occasionally heard preachers and perhaps you have as well who have been lyrical in praise of their own work have you ever heard a preacher say something like this I've just returned from a wonderful worldwide evangelistic preaching tour my team and I we've come back through Asia and Eastern Europe we've held meetings at football stadiums in Latvia and Estonia and Lithuania we've preached to 75,000 people on one evening in the national football stadium and 3,500 gave their lives to Christ that night there has never been a night like that in all my life all the glory to God and all the credit to me has been the implication now friends

[ 35 : 26 ] I'm exaggerating when I say that I've never heard anybody speak quite like that but a certain type of Christian leader can get very pleased with himself and can come to believe that in some way he is the source of gospel power now as I said a moment ago it may be that some of the false leaders at Corinth were proclaiming themselves in that kind of way but Paul knows what authentic gospel work is like he says we are not in the business of proclaiming ourselves perish the thought we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and as for us we are merely your servants for Jesus sake so gospel preachers Christian leaders and ministers those who teach the Bible to others are serving the ones that they teach many of you teach the Bible to others you're serving them gospel work is servant work the word minister literally means a servant so as

Paul and his colleagues proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord what is happening simultaneously well verse 6 tells us the creator God the God of Genesis chapter 1 who said let light shine out of darkness performs a comparable creative work in our hearts he shines into our hearts which by nature are dark and chaotic just as the universe was in its primeval disorder and into the chaos of darkness in our incomprehending hearts he then gives a light and by this light we come to see the features of Jesus Christ and as we see his features his face we realize that we are looking at nothing less than the glory of God now surely the fingerprints of the Damascus road experience are all over these verses verse four the light of the gospel of the glory of

Christ who is the image of God verse five Jesus Christ as Lord not what I had thought of him but as Lord and then verse six the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ the face that he saw revealed to him on the Damascus road and as Paul looked up into that dazzling face of Jesus he saw for the first time that Jesus was nothing less than the glorious representation of the God of Israel the true God this face Paul realized was the image of God he realized that Jesus was not only the Christ of Israel but the Son of God and that revelation of the true identity of Jesus made such an impression on Paul that the truth about Jesus was burned indelibly into his soul it was an unforgettable revelation and it was that unforgettable revelation that held

Paul to his course right throughout his difficult life now he never met Jesus in the way that the twelve apostles had met him but he knew who Jesus was he knew that as he looked into the face of Jesus he was looking at verse four the image of God and verse six the glory of God Paul's work then is to state the gospel openly without trimming it without tampering with it or diluting it the devil's work his perverse work is to blind the minds of those who are perishing and God's work is to shine through that blindness and to open up to us the most important fact in the world that we know the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ now let's return finally to verse one it is because we have this ministry this ministry of the new covenant this ministry of the knowledge of

God's glory this ministry which has been given to us by God's mercy it's because of all that that we do not lose heart what an odd thing or interesting thing for Paul to say why should he be telling the Corinthians that he and Silas and Timothy are not losing heart well it may be that the false apostles at Corinth wanting to smear Paul's name they might have been saying to the Corinthians you know Paul he's a bit of a substandard creature really he's not very impressive he's not much of a speaker he's a bit weak a bit depressed probably losing heart a bit after all this time not like us with our confident approach and our sure and certain style it may be that Paul was answering that kind of criticism or maybe he was simply feeling the pace and pressure of life he goes on to remind the Corinthians in chapter 11 that he has five times received 39 lashes do your maths is that 195 lashes has anybody here received one lash for being a

[ 40 : 49 ] Christian five times 39 lashes he's been beaten shipwrecked three times imprisoned hated hounded out of cities time and again you'd be rather tempted to lose heart wouldn't you if you'd been through all of that I certainly would but the reason that he doesn't lose heart is because he has been given this ministry this true life giving gospel by the mercy of God he keeps at his work gladly without losing heart because he knows that the truth about Jesus which has been revealed to him is the truth it's the only gospel it's not like the ministry of death which is all those false apostles can offer now friends too will sometimes be tempted to lose heart we will feel the sharp edge of the world's contempt for the Bible just to give one recent example in my life and probably in yours as well do you remember that

Tuesday two Tuesdays ago I think it was the 5th of February when the House of Commons the Prime Minister and so were pushing forward their agenda to redefine marriage I found that a God with such utter contempt do they have no fear of God at all I'm sure you will have felt the same thing we will feel pressures of that kind many pressures of that kind we'll also feel the pain of so many folk living without any thought of God we'll feel the pain of seeing many churches that teach a gospel that has been adulterated or tampered with but the world harsh as our world today and the pressures that he personally faced were very much worse than any pressures we face but here he is our example to follow he didn't lose heart because he knew the gospel and he knew the mercy of

God and we can take these words of verse one on our lips and joyfully echo them even perhaps making them a kind of motto for our lives therefore having this ministry by the mercy of God we do not lose heart let's pray together we thank you so much dear heavenly father for the example of the apostle and we know that you've raised him up not only to teach us the gospel but to show us how to live the implications of the gospel out in our lives so we do pray that his wonderful confidence in the truth will be something which fills our hearts as well and sustains us through whatever pressures we might have to endure we pray that you'll fill us with the same spirit that you filled

Paul with and enable us to go on our way rejoicing and joyful just as your servant Paul did and we great name amen