

Share The Gospel
 First Baptist Church Dandridge
 April-May 2024

Session Two: Depending On God

The Right Approach to the Gospel Ministry

“Therefore, 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 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.” – 2 Corinthians 4:1–7

1. **The Temptation to Lose Heart:** As Paul explains the ministry of the gospel, he confesses that it’s not easy. In fact, the gospel ministry can be very discouraging at times. Paul mentions that to those who are being saved the gospel message is a fragrant “*aroma of Christ,*” but to those who are perishing the gospel is the “*aroma of death*” (2:14-15). This testimony indicates that the gospel is not received the same by everyone. Some believe and rejoice, while others resist and become hostile. But when we encounter resistance, we face the temptation to lose heart and give up. Discouragement is one of the enemy’s greatest weapons.

2. **How to Approach Discouragement**
 - a. **Wrong Way:** After mentioning the possibility of losing heart, Paul makes a contrast by stating, “*But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or tamper with God’s word*” (4:2). When Paul mentions “*disgraceful, underhanded ways,*” these are words used in ancient times to describe the methods of hucksters, con artists, and frauds, those who would deceive people for financial gain. Paul reminds his readers that there are such con artists in ministry, those who aim to trick and deceive people into following them, usually for financial gain and personal

power. In order to draw crowds and increase popularity, they would “tamper with God’s word,” appealing to the fleshly desires of the world.

- **Group Question:** Why do you think we might be tempted to tamper with the gospel, or use cunning methods to persuade people? Why is there a temptation to change God’s Word? What are some examples of how people do this today?
- b. **Right Way:** When we are tempted to “lose heart,” we must remember the reason so many people don’t choose to follow Jesus. Paul states, “[The gospel] is veiled 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 in the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (4:3-4). In other words, in conjunction with their fallen nature, Satan has control and persuasion over the lost. When the gospel is explained, the enemy is quick to blind them, confuse them, and make sin look more attractive than Jesus, which leads them to resist trusting in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 2:14, Paul writes, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”
- **Group Question:** How does understanding these spiritual issues help you approach evangelism? In what sense does it encourage you, and what does it lead you to do differently?

3. How to Approach Evangelism

“When they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, “Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, “Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed’— for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.” – Acts 4:23-31

- a. **Confess Personal Weakness:** As the writer says, "Sharing the gospel with someone really is an impossible task" (33). We know that part of the difficulty lies with the fallen nature of the unbeliever, and the enemy's strong efforts to blind. However, the other issue lies in our own weakness and fear. Therefore, Peter and John make a specific prayer request following their release from jail: *"And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus"* (4:29-30).
- **Group Question:** What did Peter and John ask for in this prayer? What are some things they could have asked for, but didn't? How does this prayer instruct us today?
- b. **Increase Dependence on God:** Notice after Peter and John were released, they reported all that happened to the local church. Then, *"When they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, 'Sovereign Lord, who made heaven and earth and the sea and everything in them...for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus'"* (24, 27). While there are many important details that could be covered in these words, the most important aspect is that despite what difficulties had taken place, the church continued to recognize God as *"Sovereign Lord,"* the One who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and in control over everything. Even though human hearts are *"dead in trespasses and sins"* (Eph. 2:1) and the devil has *"blinded the minds of unbelievers"* (2 Cor. 4:4), making it impossible for people to honor and obey God with their lives, God has the power to change the human heart, to remove spiritual blindness, to free them from the devil's grip. The writer notes, *"With God, of course, nothing is impossible – even bringing light and life to the spiritually blind and dead"* (34).
- **Titus 3:3–7** – *"For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."*

- c. **Engage in Serious Prayer:** Finally, after Peter and John confessed the sovereignty of God and prayed for the boldness to proclaim the gospel, Luke writes, *“And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness”* (4:31). This scene not only demonstrates a powerful prayer ministry, but it prescribes the same for the church today. As the writer notes, *“When we pray, we are putting this conviction about the necessity of God’s work into action. Prayer is our trust in God spoken out loud”* (34).
- **Prayer Fields:** A means for intentional prayer is to pray for “fields,” which refer to the various people and places we are around in life (e.g., home, extended family, neighborhood, friendship circle, church, school, workplace, sports team or hobby group, where we shop, etc. Make a point to pray for these fields: (1) for the people; (2) for God to give you the desire and boldness to tell them about Jesus.