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## Faith – The Power of God’s Word

2 Corinthians 4:1-6 | Sunday, June 10, 2018 | By Brian Brookins

# FAITH

## THE POWER OF GOD’S WORD

### 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

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.

We are wrapping up a study on the topic of faith. This morning we come to a topic that I believe is extremely helpful. It’s a focus on the power of God’s word, that God’s word is inherently powerful. Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Genesis 1:3: “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” Paul uses that picture from creation – God creating the physical universe out of nothing – to help us understand how we are personally transformed and changed. God’s word comes into our souls and creates, recreates, and brings change. God’s power enters into our lives so that when you follow Jesus Christ, when you trust in Jesus you are a new creation. You are recreated or newly created as a follower of Jesus Christ, as a Christian, as a child of God.

I find it helpful sometimes when we are struggling with a specific area, a specific difficulty, or personal challenge, to go to passages of scripture that deal with that and to just read them and meditate on them and allow the power of God’s word to affect our hearts and our thinking.

Let me give you a couple of examples. If, for example, you are struggling with anxiety or fear... I’m sure there’s no one here who ever has anxiety or fear, but if you were, you could go to Matthew

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6:25-34. You just read those passages of scripture, meditate on those passages. I’m wanting you to get a vision for the fact that you may be tempted to read that and think, “Okay, Jesus is telling me in these verses that I shouldn’t worry. I shouldn’t worry because the Father takes care of me and the Father knows me. There are examples of the Father’s care all around me. I should seek the kingdom of God first. I should not worry about tomorrow because today has enough trouble. I could take all these truths, then just feel guiltier. I am telling you that God’s word is so powerful that as you read it, God is creating that in your soul. Receive it in faith. It’s not a gimmick. It’s not magic.

I was with a young man recently who shared with me about an intense battle with lust. I want you to go to 1 Thessalonians 4 and meditate on verses 1-8. You could also go to Proverbs 5. I said, “When you read 1 Thessalonians 4, you are going to hear a harsh warning against sexual immorality. You are going to hear the Apostle Paul telling you there, ‘Listen, as a follower of Jesus, possess your body with self-control. Don’t be controlled by your passions.’” But if you understand from a biblical perspective that Jesus has forgiven you for sexual sin, he recreates you. He remakes you. He redeems you sexually, and his power is at work in your life. You learn to embrace those passages in a spirit of humility and brokenness and repentance, but also a confession that, “Yes, Jesus, this is what you are doing in me.”

That’s part of the reason why when we want to grow in faith, it’s so important for us to commit to this time. “Every week I’m gathering for pastors at my church to speak and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, the powerful word of God. The word of God is adhered to and taught and spoken with conviction and power, the power of the Spirit. It’s personally being applied to my life in a community.” This is why it’s important for us to, in the rhythm of our own lives, just open God’s word and go through God’s word and take it in, because God’s word is powerful. It brings change.

All too often our approach to the word of God is: “Okay, I’ve got to do this. I’ve got to do this.” No, “Do to me, God. Come in and do to me so that I may do.” A Christian is acted upon by God and by God’s word, so that we read Romans 10:17: “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” This is how faith rises in our hearts as we hear the word of God.

Let’s jump in. There are four principles from this passage. They are kind of navigational principles. They help us find our way and navigate in our journey of faith. This passage teaches us that:

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### I. Our hearts are veiled in darkness.

This is the condition of our hearts. In verses 3-4 he says that even if the gospel is veiled -- it’s shrouded, it’s cloaked, it can’t be seen -- the good news of who Jesus is, of how Jesus himself brings us back into relationship with God, forgives us for everything we’ve ever done, thought, all our actions, all that’s in our hearts, we are cleansed because of the gift of Jesus Christ. If we are blinded to that, if the truth of that is veiled, Paul writes in verse 4, “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.”

Paul is describing here a blindness to the truth. He does this in many places in scripture. The natural condition of our hearts is that we don’t see God for who he is. We don’t see the world accurately and we don’t perceive ourselves accurately.

You say, “Wow, Brian, that’s heavy. You are telling me that my heart is dark.” Well, this is how freedom begins. It’s understanding that when I come and open God’s word, that this was my condition completely apart from Jesus – a veiled heart. And I’m looking for God to come in and shine in my heart. Just understanding that process, that dynamic – it’s liberating.

About 15 years ago, maybe more, I woke up in the middle of the night, got up, and collapsed. I completely fainted. My wife heard me hit the floor. She came; she called 911, and out of that a whole bunch of medical tests were run. They did some heart tests. Some of the results of that said I was fine; it was a minor condition. But there was also some cloudiness in terms of the initial diagnosis. I remember going to bed at night thinking, “Oh goodness, I’m dying. I’m dying. My heart is going to quit any minute. My heart is not right. I’m going to die. I’m going to die.” It was not a pleasant experience.

All of a sudden there was this anxiety and fear over death. I’m sure my wife was at some point thinking, “God, just take him. Take him, take him.” Right? I’m just confessing to you some of the fractured ways that my own mind works, because we live in a fallen universe. That’s the reality. So, I suddenly began to go to the Lord in prayer, began to meditate on his word.

Here is what God exposed in my own heart. This was the heart of my fear. It was: “My kids need me. My kids are young and they need a dad. I see their vulnerability. And my wife needs me. Lord, what will happen?” God met me with two truths. You see, a whole pattern of thinking is supporting

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and undergirding these anxieties. There is a whole system of thought. But God’s word (2 Corinthians 10) is powerful to pull down strongholds, patterns of thinking, lies.

God gave me two truths that were just liberating.

- 1) I’ll be a father to your children if I decide to take you, and I’m a better father than you are. I will care for your children.
- 2) When you die, things get better – for you and everyone else. Not for the second part, sorry. To die is gain.

Christians, hear this truth: If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, the moment you die everything gets better! The honeymoon begins! Right? Then what’s the next fear that comes in? I’m okay when I die, I just don’t like the dying part. Will I have this affliction? This disease? This pain? Okay, God meets us with this truth: “I will give you grace for whatever I ordain for your life. But I give it to you then. I will not give you grace now for something that you are creating in your own imagination.”

For the sake of biblical clarity, the Bible describes three struggles that we are involved in: ourselves, the world, and Satan. There is a condition of our own hearts where we need to be made new, and our own inclination is away from God. Then, the flow of the current of the world is away from God, and if you just flow in that current it will carry you away from God.

I had a friend who was an African pastor. I didn’t know him well, but he had a TV delivered to his house. It came in a great big box there in Africa, and on the box it said, “Bringing the world into your home.” He told the guys: “Pack it up. Take it away.” That’s a true story. I hear that and think, “He’s saying something, isn’t he?” Now, we have the world in our pocket, on our phone, constantly. I just started trying to turn off my notices, because the world is always popping up with headlines. I say, “Ooh, wow. Look at that.” Then social media – it’s all multiplied over and over and over again.

So, three struggles. One of the military principles is: “Never fight a war on two fronts.” Well, as a Christian you fight a war on three fronts. Then Satan. Paul emphasizes that aspect here. There is actually a spiritual force working against you, lying to you, blinding you to the truth. Judas spent three years with Jesus, three years with the Son of God in the flesh, and in the end as the keeper of the purse, he believes that money is better than Jesus and he is blinded to the truth.

The Apostle Paul himself, knowing the Old Testament as a rabbi, persecuted the Church, blinded to who Jesus is, until one day Jesus met him and spoke to him and the light of God shone in his soul

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and lifted the veil. So, it’s not unusual for us to feel when we are battling a condition, a propensity, an inclination, a sin, to say, “I feel powerless in this fight.” Sometimes, not always but sometimes, there really is a supernatural aspect. The word of God is greater than any spiritual force that opposes you.

### II. God’s word shines in the darkness.

This is glorious, isn’t it? Verse 5: “For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.” Can I just say this as an aside? I hope you have your face down in your Bible for a second. Look at verse 5. This is a great verse for you to pray for your pastors here at Riverside. We proclaim not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. That’s what a true spiritual leader is.

I caution you: Please be aware of pastors who are always telling you about their own personal revelations and their gifts and their unique anointing and their capacity and their ability and their unique blah blah blah blah blah. You don’t need a better human being. You need the Son of God. You need a better pastor who says, “You know what? I’m on my knees, crying out to God for his grace for my soul, for your soul, and I believe that Jesus is all you need.” You want to see Jesus elevated and God’s word believed. Pray for your pastors. Pray that we will have the grace not to make it about us. Pray for me specifically in that regard.

God word shines and pierces in the midst of the darkness of our own condition. No matter who you are today, no matter what brings you into this, the reality is there is the opportunity for God’s word to come into your heart and to shine and to bring the light of God and to make all things new. There is complete forgiveness in Jesus Christ and the promise of new life.

You may have someone in your life that you are hoping will come to Jesus, who will come to a place of faith in Christ. You may find that they are just too difficult. Well, if we are blind to the truth, then we are all impossible, right? God’s word meets us. No one is beyond the reach of God. So we celebrate that God’s word shines in our heart.

### III. Jesus is the word.

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It is very important to get this principle. When you say, “What is this message? What is being communicated?” it is Jesus Christ. Paul tells us that just as God spoke and brought out of nothing the physical universe, his word enters into our hearts and gives light. And that light is the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. So Jesus is revealed, unveiled, and we see the glory of God. This is how life comes. This is really where we begin with God.

We begin to see, “Wow, look at God! God is glorious! God is awesome! I’ve always had these thoughts, these images, and these ideas, but God is so much more and different in many ways. Look at how he has revealed himself in his Son. His Son came to this earth to make him known and I begin to see his glory!”

Immediately, in that moment of revelation, illumination, our perspective changes. This is why when we spend time with God personally, privately, it’s so good to begin just with praising God. Jesus himself taught us to pray: “Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” We want to begin with God. We want to get oriented to a place where, “Wow, I was just so consumed with this, so distracted by this, but you reign. You are God. You are awesome.” Then all of my own perspective and my own need begins to take shape.

I would encourage you, if you open a passage of scripture on your own, just begin with this simple question: “What does this teach me about God? What does this reveal? What does this say about God?” That’s our first movement. Many times the second movement right behind it is twofold. It’s repentance – when I see God I see my own need. And it’s praise. It’s adoration. It’s thanksgiving. It’s awe, in terms of who God is. Jesus is the culmination of everything said to us in God’s word. He is the good news and he is the word.

If the first question is: “What does this passage teach me about God?” the second question is: “How does Jesus help me to respond?” My focus is on God. Now, Jesus provides everything for me to repent, to praise, to obey, to respond in faith. He is my provision. He has taken the old Brian to the cross, my own selfish ways, my own self-absorption, and pride, and anger, lack of self-control, and harshness...should I go on? Are you going to stop me? All of that he has taken to the cross.

There is this temptation for me to say, “Okay, I’ve got to reform myself.” I cannot reform myself. Jesus takes that to the cross and there I see my sin on Jesus. My sin has been placed on him and the righteous Son of God – his righteousness is placed on me. The Father accepts me and sees me

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in the Son. Can you see the glory of God? Can you see the love of God? Can you see the wisdom of God shining in the face of Jesus?

I come to Jesus and I say, “Lord, I’m getting a glimpse of God. I’m getting a glimpse of you in this passage. I see your gentleness, your patience revealed in this specific passage. Then I see how impatient, how unloving, how selfish I am. I receive forgiveness. Jesus, you are my provision. And as much as I say I’ve got to do better, as I purpose to do that, I do it in faith because you are recreating yourself in me.” That’s glorious – a glorious truth we find that Jesus is the word.

The fourth principle is this, and there is a lot of application here:

#### IV. Declare the unaltered word of God.

That’s how Paul phrases it here. I’m going to add: Receive the unaltered word of God. Or just make specific what is implied here. Because of principles I through III, what we need is not clever communicators. What we need is not our own manipulation of the environment. What we need is just the word of God. Paul says in verse 1: “Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.” We do not shrink back. We do not act cowardly. That’s what that phrase means.

Verse 2: “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.” This is just a wonderful description of what Christian leaders need to embrace – just the open, clear, full communication of the word of God. It’s powerful and it brings change.

Look at the four together, if I could just give them to you in shorthand:

1. Our hearts are dark.
2. God’s word pierces the darkness.
3. Jesus is the word.
4. Speak and receive the word.

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I do want to say here: Don’t get weird on #4. There are some people who have this understanding of faith where they are always trying to speak things themselves into existence. They take this truth, but then misapply it, I think. You meet very well intentioned people. They have all the symptoms of the flu and you say, “Oh wow – are you sick?” They say, “No, no. I’m not sick. I don’t have anything. I just have a few symptoms, but I’m not sick.” Well, you look sick to me. It’s okay to say to God, “I’m sick. Heal me.” We get weird. The reason is, we are putting our faith in our faith, or our faith in ourselves, rather than our faith in God.

You see it in your children. If you have children and you hear their prayers and questions, they will ask you things like this: “If I’m asking God to forgive me and I forget a sin that I’ve committed and I don’t ask for that specific sin, will he forgive me?” You see, their focus there is on the process. Their focus is on them and their repentance, where we turn repentance itself into this way that we garner God’s acceptance. No, our faith is in God. Trust me. You have sinned and forgotten some of your sins. Just settle it.

So, if I may, in our last 45 minutes together, I would like to give you a thought in terms of how this works, both in terms of your initial response to Jesus and how you live it out on a daily basis. Undoubtedly, there are a number of you here who say, “I really have not begun with Christ,” and God’s word is shining in your heart. My encouragement to you would be to say yes to the Lord. Respond to that message and trust in Jesus Christ.

Others are like, “Okay, I’m on that journey, but tell me how this looks more in terms of everyday life.” I want to give you a couple of verses, first of all Romans 12:1-2. Romans 12:1-2 is a passage of scripture that summarizes everyday life for the Christian. This is how we get up and live as Christians. Paul says, “I appeal to you therefore, by the mercies of God...” In response to the gospel, in response to God’s grace, in response to God’s forgiveness of you, which he describes in chapters 1-11, 11 chapters to tell you about the good news of Jesus Christ, “I beg you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

Here’s how we worship. We just say, “God, I’m yours. I’m on the altar. Brian is dead. I live for you. It’s not me, it’s you. I’m yours.

Verse 2: “Do not be conformed to this world.” Do you remember the three struggles in our passage? 2 Corinthians 4 emphasizes the spiritual force against us. Here he emphasizes the temptation to just fall in with the world. “Don’t be conformed to the world, but be transformed (key

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phrase) by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

This is what he describes. You are being renewed in your mind and you recognize that that’s not going to follow the shape and the contours of the world, and that that’s a process. As I live it out, as I test it, as I work it out, it’s going to be refined in my life.

Would you turn to Ephesians 4:17? We are going to end with this passage. I want to ask you to turn to the passage because sometimes it helps to really see what we are talking about in a parallel. At the end of this passage we will read: “and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds.” Here is what I want to call attention to in that phrase. The word of God is renewing you. You cannot renew yourself, but you are told to what? Be renewed. So you are participating in the process. You are receiving the word of God. You are receiving God’s work, and God is doing this deep renovation of your heart and your mind. “...to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Again, new creation theology. I am created by God in Jesus, the word of God coming in and bringing change. Go with me to verse 17. Let’s look at this passage. This paragraph gives you a perspective on living the Christian life. It’s so helpful. Paul writes: “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do (as those who don’t know God) in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding...” Do you see the parallel? Light/darkness? What’s happening in our minds? “... alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.” Hold your finger right there.

So, in 2 Corinthians 4 we saw the emphasis on the spiritual struggle. Romans 12, the world. Here, the emphasis is on the hardness of our own hearts. All three perspectives are put before us in these three passages. “They have become callous...” He is describing here our own spiritual condition apart from Jesus. “...and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But this is not the way you learned Christ! – assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus.”

We see all those principles from 2 Corinthians 4. Now you can just lay them right over. Jesus is the word. The truth is Jesus, presented to you and me in the word. “...to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in

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the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” God’s word, coming to you, meeting you, renewing you.

“Okay, Lord, my condition apart from Jesus was one of darkness. Now, you’ve come in and you’ve shown the light. But there’s a process. I have to be renewed in my thinking.” So many times if we will just step back from the moment of conflict, step back from the trial that we are experiencing and say, “Okay, Lord, I want to ask your Spirit to shine your truth in my own heart,” God promises, “I will give my strength to the humble.” What happens is you are positioning yourself to receive the help of God. This will transform your marriage. It will transform your parenting. It will transform your singleness. It will transform your career.

Early in our marriage, I called a friend who had done our premarital counseling. I said, “Jeff, man, we are in a tough spell here. I’m coming back for a refund on your premarital counseling. It didn’t work.” I said, “You know, my wife is telling me that I’m prideful and that I’m not very sensitive to her needs and I’m not caring for her and that it’s all about me. She even had the audacity to say, ‘blah blah blah blah.’” Then there was this long pause on the phone.

“Well, Brian, have you ever thought maybe there’s some truth in all that?” “I called you for help!” Right? The most liberating moments in my life have been the most excruciatingly painful. They prompt me to say, “Okay, I can’t control everything around me, but God wants to do something new in me. And the need is so much greater than I’m even aware of.”

Let’s pray. Lord, thank you for the good news of Jesus Christ.