

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: May 6, 2018

Lesson Title: "Displaying the Gospel"

Lesson Passage: 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

ABOUT THIS LESSON

In the lesson passage, Paul discusses the nature of his ministry, apparently in response to criticism from his opponents. Renouncing ulterior motives and deceptive practices, he bases his ministry on the undistorted gospel of Jesus Christ. His ministry is characterized by servanthood, as revealed by his sufferings.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOAL

(1) Name five characteristics of authentic Christian ministry, as described by Paul. (2) Explain his reference to "treasure in earthen vessels."

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Ask class members to imagine that they have been invited to give a talk on the subject, "The Ideal Christian Minister," at a church-sponsored breakfast for graduating seminary students. Let them suggest points that should be included. Jot these on the board. Indicate that the lesson passage for this week would provide an appropriate biblical text for such a message.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Use this outline to guide your discussion of 2 Cor. 4:1-18:

The Test of Ministry: Truth (4:1-2)

The Goal of Ministry: Enlightenment (4:3-4)

The Attitude of Ministry: Servanthood (4:5)

The Power of Ministry: Christ (4:6-7)

The Minister's Vision: Eternal Life (4:8-18).

2. Lead a discussion of each point. Include the following ideas:

THE TEST OF MINISTRY: TRUTH (4:1-2). Apparently, Paul's opponents (false apostles) were willing to compromise the gospel and engage in undercover shenanigans in order to curry the favor of the Corinthian deceivers. Ironically, they seem to have accused Paul of doing the very things they were doing. This is why he renounces "the hidden things of dishonesty" ("secret dealings of shame") in v. 2. He is referring to "things one may do, but will do only under cover, and with shame if found out" (C. K. Barrett). NOTE: The Greek word for "deception" (rendered "craftiness" in KJV, v. 2) means literally "readiness to do anything, to stop at nothing." Paul refused to do things in secret, or to "soft-pedal" the gospel. Truthfulness was the criterion by which he wanted his ministry to be judged in the sight of God (v. 2).

THE GOAL OF MINISTRY: ENLIGHTENMENT (4:3-4). The ultimate purpose of the gospel ministry is to bring "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (v. 4) to darkened minds. Paul attributes the blindness that keeps some from coming to the light to the influence of

the devil, "the god of this world" (v. 4). But, as George Beasley-Murray has pointed out, "Paul used the present tense: those who are blind to the gospel are on the road that leads to lostness; but they have not reached journey's end, and they may yet be guided to the way that leads to life."

THE ATTITUDE OF MINISTRY: SERVANTHOOD (4:5). "Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (v. 5). It would be hard to find a better summary of the nature of true Christ-centered ministry. Paul's primary purpose was to see to it that Christ is truly recognized as Lord of the church; his primary function was to be a servant (*doulos*, "slave") to Christ. "But to be the slave of Christ means concretely to be the slave of those who are Christ's, a readiness to spend and be spent up (2 Cor. 12:15) on their behalf" (Barrett). **ILLUSTRATION:** Mother Theresa once said, "I am a pencil in the hand of God, writing His message to the world. But, to write a message, a pencil must be used up."

THE POWER OF MINISTRY: CHRIST (4:6-7). Verse 6 describes the treasure of incomparable value possessed by Paul and all Christians, "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." Verse 7 makes it clear that this treasure is the source of power in ministry, and that the minister is just a "jar of clay." Just as one would never suspect that a cheap earthenware jar contains precious diamonds, so would a casual observer never suspect that the poor, pitiable figure of a man like Paul could reveal the glory of Christ. **COMMENT:** Some ministers seem to have an urge to enhance the jar and display it prominently.

THE MINISTER'S VISION: ETERNAL LIFE (4:8-18). *Read Barclay's paraphrase of vv. 8-9:* "We are sore pressed at every point but not hemmed in. We are persecuted by men but never abandoned by God. We are at our wit's end but never at our hope's end. We are knocked down but not knocked out." *Suggest that vv. 17-18 summarize the theme that runs through the second half of this chapter:* The burdens of this life are far outbalanced by the "eternal weight of glory" which is to come (v. 17). The tangible experiences of this life are temporary; but the things that cannot yet be seen are eternal (v. 18). (*Refer to Hebrews 11:1.*) *Comment on verse 16:* Every one experiences the gradual deterioration of the "outward man." This is especially noticeable in times of serious illness and with advancing years. But the "inward man" can be renewed day by day, when we are open to the grace of God.

CLOSING THE LESSON

Conclude with these thoughts: There are some within the community of faith who have a special sense of calling to be pastors, missionaries, religious educators, and the like. But, in reality, we are all "in the ministry," the continuing ministry of Jesus Christ in the world.

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