

Encouragement in our Ministry Dr. J.B. Buffington

Let's open our Bibles now to the book of 2 Corinthians 4, and we will read the first six verses. *Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; we do not lose heart. But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, 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. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* I would like to call my message "Encouragement in our Ministry." Now everybody is in the ministry if you're Christians. Everybody's in the ministry. That's the place of service. Now there are times in our lives that neither circumstances nor people will encourage us. Just get used to that and understand it. Circumstances will discourage, and even people or friends will discourage. If we do not find some way to get encouragement, we'll quit. It's strange. You see some folks who climb over every mountain of obstacles and don't quit. The lady that we heard about in the Japanese prison. All of that could not deter her from going back to give her life to the mission field. How easy some folks quit and others don't quit, and the reason they don't quit is because somehow, somehow they draw encouragement. Now, you can't live without encouragement. Nobody can live without encouragement. God is called the God of all encouragements in the first chapter of this epistle. We must learn as David did when the people spoke of stoning him, as they had gone out to war and came back and the Amalekites had taken captive their wives and their children and burned their camp. The men were in such array and distress of mind that they thought of stoning David. The Bible says: *but David encouraged himself in the Lord.* We have to learn to encourage ourselves when nobody else encourages and the circumstances do not encourage us. Here the Apostle Paul gives us three things that will encourage us in these verses of Scripture. Now if anybody needed encouragement, the Apostle Paul needed encouragement. If you remember in II Corinthians 11 of all that he suffered without the fold of Christianity, how he suffered, yet he kept going. But I suppose that which cost him the most suffering and anguish of heart was that from the inside of those who called themselves Christians. Hey, did you know that Christians can discourage you far more than the world can? I mean, the world doesn't discourage me. If people are going to discourage me, it will be God's people who discourage me. That's the reason the Bible said: *Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works.* So, what? We are to consider that all of us are prone to discouragement in every action. God forbid that I do something to discourage the saints of God. We ought to consider that. I remind you, everybody here tonight would say, "My biggest discouragement does not come from outside the church, but the biggest discouragement comes from God's people." You know we are rougher on Christians than the world ever is. I mean, we are rough stuff on believers. We ought to understand, now, that as believers we have more problems in the world because the world, the flesh, and the devil all are after us. We must. Now, suppose nobody encourages me. Suppose none of the circumstances and nobody encourages me. Hey, I have got to get encouragement somewhere, or I'll quit. Now, Paul in this epistle, as he recounts his suffering, he talks about those who questioned his motives; his character was vilified. Not only that, his name was besmirched, and his actions were reviewed with critical scrutiny. They had already prejudged and condemned him. Here he is, and he writes these things that help him. In the sixteenth verse of that same chapter, he said: *For which cause we faint not.* In Galatians 6:9 he said: *And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.* In Hebrews 12:3, he said: *For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.* Now, where do we faint? We faint in our thinking. Then, he said: *despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:*

That word "faint" simply means "to let us not lose heart." Are you losing heart? Are you discouraged? Are you defeated? Let Paul give us tonight as an encouragement from the Word of God that thing that will help us in getting our feet on the ground.

First of all, look at verse one of 2 Corinthians 4: *Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not*; Now, he does not faint because of the glorious ministry that he's received. If you had good news that would spare the lives of millions of people, the bearer of such news could not afford to quit if everything in the world was in opposition to him. And Paul said, "We have received this ministry," a ministry of reconciliation, a ministry of grace and not of law, a ministry written in the heart of men and not on tables of stone, a ministry that is unveiled and not veiled, a ministry of righteousness and not a ministry of condemnation. What a ministry! A ministry whose covenant was ratified by the blood of the Son of God and not ratified by the blood of bulls and goats. *Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not*; Now, this ministry we received is a ministry of mercy. We'll not love the Lord much unless we magnify and realize we're recipients of mercy. Mercy is for those that do not deserve it. And we will not sing, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound," unless we realize that we have been made the recipients of mercy. The blind man in the street had no hold on the Lord Jesus, and he cried, "Have mercy on me." I'm obligated to take care of my family, but listen, the family down the street, I'm not bound to take care of them. If I do so, it's an act of mercy; I'm not obligated to them. And here this Gospel is a Gospel of mercy in our salvation. When Paul talked about the matter of his salvation, he said: *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.* It was the mercy of God that knocked at your door. He didn't have to knock at your door. It's the mercy of God that made you know that you were lost. It's the mercy of God that turned on the light in your soul and helped you to understand that Jesus Christ was the only way of salvation. It's the mercy of God that brought about the new birth. It's the mercy of God that put you in the family of God. It's the mercy of God that justified us. It's the mercy of God that preserved us and sanctified and glorified. It's the mercy of God that has kept us at this day and hour. Listen, mercy received in our salvation experience, mercy. We don't sing about mercy. Most of the songs today are written, and I don't particularly care for most of them; they are all about what I'm going to do. The songs of revival times is what He did and what He promised to do, "How firm a foundation ye saints of the Lord are laid for your faith in His excellent Word. What more can He say than to you He has said, you to whom Jesus for refuge have fled." God did it all. "Jesus paid it all; all to Him I owe." And you can have your song, "If anybody makes it, surely I will." You can take that song; I don't like it. I'm here today by mercy. You're alive today by mercy. It's the mercy of God that you were not born in some cult home. It's the mercy of God that allowed you to be born in America where you could here the Gospel. It's the mercy of God that we can meet here tonight and hear the Word of God without being molested, and when we come back to realize that we are recipients of mercy, this glorious ministry, a ministry that dispenses mercy to those who do not deserve it. The cults dispense the matter of merit to those who merit it, and the cults never deal with lost people. They pray on the house of God. Listen, mercy receives. Have you forgotten when you got saved? When I think back about going through high school, I never had a serious thought in my life, I don't think. If it was a serious thought, it was a serious thought about foolishness. I mean, I was serious about foolishness. I mean, it was full time for me. If I was going to school, I was seriously determined that I was going to have a good time. And I was a member of a church; I don't remember when I joined the church. I don't remember when I was baptized. I have no memory whatsoever; and yet, I was a Christian, and I was saved. I don't remember a Sunday school teacher. I do not remember a Sunday school lesson. I do not remember a message ever preached from the Word of God. And you are with the buddies in school that say, "Hey, how are you doing?" And you say, "Oh, ha ha, ha." "Where are you going?" "Going to hell if I don't change. Got a reserved seat on the front row. Ha, ha, ha, ha." A lot of people are still doing that. Mercy woke me up. God wasn't obligated to knock at my door, and God wasn't obligated to convict me, and God wasn't obligated to sober me. Neither was He obligated in the matter to sober you up. And the Bible says in Romans 9:18: *Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, . . .* I'm simply saying that God's mercy is sovereign. You don't earn it. You don't deserve it. And Paul said, "Hey, I'm a recipient of mercy; I was a chief enemy of Jesus Christ. I didn't believe in Him. I believed He was an impostor." And he set out to persecute the saints of God. And he said, "Hey, well wait a minute. God not only saved me the pattern, but God turned around and

sent me back with a mercy to serve Him.” Now, look at it. It’s not only mercy in service, but it’s mercy in this matter of service. Look at 1 Timothy 1 again, verse twelve. Did you know that when God gives you a bus route, you don’t deserve it? We better get back to this idea, “If God called me to preach, I don’t deserve the privilege of standing before you to preach.” God gives Brother K.B. here the ministry of music. He doesn’t deserve it. And if we realize we don’t deserve it, we quit getting our feelings hurt. You don’t deserve it. Look what Paul said about not only saved by His mercy but mercy in service. Look at verse twelve: *And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.* Here he said, “I was a blasphemer; I was a persecutor; and I was injurious.” And before me tonight are men and women and boys and girls from every walk of life; in this audience tonight, if you could put together all of our sins, there’s every sin known to man that’s been practiced by folks in this service tonight. Now, He takes us and saves us by mercy and then turns around and in mercy gives us something to do. Now, when we get back to the matter of being overwhelmed that we are recipients of God’s mercy, that He was not obligated to us, and in our misery, He came to us and saved us, and then when He saved us, He turned around and gave us something to do. Next to my salvation, boy, when it dawned on my heart, that God had something for me to do, 2 Timothy 1:9: *Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus, When? before the world began.* And long before God spun the Milky Way into existence, God knew you. God knew me, and God ordained and God set aside a place of service for you and for me, a holy calling, an eternal calling. Hey, when that gripped my heart and mind, I was overwhelmed, and I wanted to preach more than anything else in all the world, that God would take a country boy, and God would use him. Sometimes people think I walk around and strut. I beg your pardon, you don’t know me. You don’t know me. And how many times Dr. Raymond Hancock and other servants of the Lord, friends in the ministry, we’ve been way up in the air in some jet going somewhere to preach, and I nudge him and say, “How in the world did two farm boys get up here and go preaching across the country?” How in the world that from the farm that God took me and gave me something to do, not only saved me, but gave me something to do. And oh, hear me, the thing that kept me out of the ministry for many years was not rebelling against the call, but I was ignorant, and I didn’t understand the call, and I wanted to be dead sure that God was in it and not just something that I dreamed up. And I stayed out because of that, and that was ignorance on my part. Now, look at Ephesians 3. And the thing that will keep us going is the fact that we are saved by mercy, but also that in His mercy, He gave us something to do in His vineyard, and oh, would to God, that we’d lay a hold of this verse in Ephesians 3:8, and we could put our ministry into this verse. Look what he says: *Unto me*, you can read that and put the inflection on “Unto me.” *Unto me who am less than the least of all saints, What? is this grace given*, Now, it’s unmerited favor. What’s the grace given to me for? *that I should preach* And you could put that I should teach, that I should sing, that I should be an usher, that I’d be a custodian, that I’d be a bus worker, a bus pastor; listen, that I be faithful in the house of God. *Unto me who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given that I should preach*, What? Look at what he says now, *among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ*; The Gentiles, they were the dogs; the Jews called them the dogs. And Paul never got over his salvation. He never got over the fact that God gave him something to do. And when we get over our salvation and get over the fact that what He gives us to do, “Oh it’s not very much.” Hear me, hear me; I want to tell you something. Oh, it grieves my heart. God gave you a place in the choir. I want to tell you, that’s important. If you sit in that place, that’s as important to God as this place is here to God; that’s the will of God for you; that’s the will of God for me. We’ve got to look at the big stuff; it’s not big stuff. It’s the little stuff that determines our character and not the big place. That little, tiny place, that place in the seat with the usher, that place on the bus route, that place wherever you find it, a place given to God. That’s important. David said: *I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.* He said I’d rather be a custodian; I’d rather be a janitor in the house of God. Hey, a janitor in the house of God is important. That’s the will of God for Jim Jenkins, and he does that to the best of his ability; he’s rewarded the same as I’m rewarded for doing that. God didn’t call me to be a janitor. I have done it; I’m not beyond doing it. I’ve cleaned the johns. I’ve swept the floors. I’ve polished the sinks. And I’m not too good to do that, but

that doesn't help me be in my place of ministry. And you mean to tell me God will reward a fellow for cleaning the johns; yes, He will. "Oh, they're not important." How would you like to fire Jim Jenkins and just let the building go to pot? You'd be calling, "Hey, somebody please clean out that bathroom." It's important. And we've got this business it has to be something big to be important; no sir, it's the little foxes that spoil the vine. It's the little unfaithfulness and the little spot and what God gives you, that's all He gives you, and if all He gives you is a place to sit in the choir and sing, I want to tell you, that's a big place. And if you want to be kept going, then we have to come back to the fact that we receive this ministry, this glorious ministry, a ministry of mercy that saved us and a ministry of mercy that turns around and gives to those who used to be opposed to Christianity and enemies of God a place of service in the Lord Jesus Christ's vineyard. That will keep you going. I'll tell you the very fact God called me to preach just keeps me going. "I don't feel like it." It doesn't make any difference. It keeps you going. And Christians, we better find something to keep us going. And Paul said, "We're not going to faint; we're not going to lose heart because of the fact this glorious ministry that we've received keeps us going."

Secondly, look at 2 Corinthians 4:2. Here's something else that will keep you going. *But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, 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.* A clear conscience will keep you going, a clear conscience. Now, Paul gives first of all the power of a clear conscience. Look at 2 Corinthians 1:12, he says, *For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience.* He was under fire, and he said, "My rejoicing is this that my conscience says amen to my actions," and when your conscience says amen to your actions, I'll tell you, brother, that gives you something that will not make you quit. When Martin Luther stood with truth about the reformation (*and the just shall live by faith*) and when threatened about this matter of quitting and stopping, and here he had truth and his conscience was clear, and he said, "Here I stand, so help me God, I can do no other." And when a man's conscience says amen to his actions, a clear conscience will make you stand and stand and stand, but a troubled conscience will make you quit. Now, his testimony, "Paul, what do you mean by a clear conscience and your conscience saying amen?" Romans 9:1-3: *Paul said, I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:* Paul said, "My conscience says amen to what I'm about to say." Paul said, "I have a burden to see my lost people saved so much that I could wish myself damned in order that they be saved," and he said, "My conscience bears me witness and the Holy Ghost that I'm telling the truth." Hey, when a conscience on the inside says, "Amen, that's right," our action of life or our declaration in life, that's the power of a clear conscience. Paul says in 1 Timothy 1:19 that's part of our equipment. If we are going to fight and war, then we have to keep our conscience clear. 1 Timothy 1:18-19: *This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:* When you tamper with conscience and do not keep the conscience clear, brother, you shipwreck your faith. Now, he tells about some in that same epistle, he said: *Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;*

Young people, could I tell you something so simply and yet so plain and so fervently, you play fast and loose with your conscience — you tell lies, and tell lies deliberately; and you deliberately set out to deceive; and you sear your conscience where it no longer condemns you — you are in trouble. It's a warning signal. You take out the fire alarms in the building, and fires get started, and the buildings burn down; there's no alarm to set off. And there's some people who do not have an alarm system in their body concerning pain. And pain is necessary. Pain warns us. Pain warns us that something is wrong, and when that warning system is taken from the body, you can have terrible things wrong, but there's no warning system. And young people, when you play fast and loose with your conscience, you get to the place where you can lie and deceive and smile about it and go to sleep, and it doesn't bother you, but you are in trouble. You're in trouble. And Paul said, now that's the way we have good warfare, the matter of a power of a clear conscience.

Secondly, he gives the cost of a clear conscience, and it's simply worded like this; it's living the Gospel we preach. We can't preach one way and live another, practice something else. And here he said, "Brother,

our lives have to manifest,” and our lives have to be the Gospel in shoe leather. And look how he names it, and in saying so, he’s saying a false life is as bad as false doctrine. Ananias and Sapphira had a false life. All right, now he gives three or four things. First of all, the cost of a good conscience is verse 1: *But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty*, the renunciation of hidden things of dishonesty, and the word is shame. You renounce the things that are unseen to mama and dad and husbands and wives and other believers. You renounce those things, the hidden things of darkness. You say goodbye to the wicked thoughts and the wicked deeds and the underhanded actions and the underhanded thoughts. He said, we have renounced those things that we could get away with, and nobody knows about it. You have to renounce those things, and so a clear conscience is a conscience of renunciation. And Paul said now, we have done so and the secret thoughts, the feelings and desire and underhandedness and methods and arts that men hide through their shame, things that will not bear the searchlight of the Word of God. We ought not be afraid; when I’m afraid of a passage of Scripture, then I’m afraid of the Light. We run from the light. When we run from the light, there’s no place to go but into the darkness. The Light, the Word shines; and we ought to be willing to face the light. *Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.* And if we’re concerned about fellowship with God, we want the Light to search us. If we’re concerned about holding on to our sin, we do not want the Light to search us. It just depends upon what you want, love of sin or God’s fellowship. And he said, we’ve renounced those things that cannot stand the searching of the Light.

And secondly, not only renunciation of hidden things of dishonesty, but not walking in craftiness. That means to practice trickery or cunning. No disguise, no base in wicked designs, no pretense, he said we’ve renounced that business of walking in craftiness cunningly. Ananias and Sapphira were sure cunning. I mean everything was of darkness, and nobody knew about it, but God knew about it, and God exposed them that day, cunningness, craftiness. And I remember back in a church that I pastored years ago, and I’m telling you, you talk about cunning and craftiness. Folks, you don’t understand what kind of church you have. You don’t understand what you have here. I’ve pastored churches, and hear me, the first place in my ministry that I ever slept right was this church when I came here. My wife will bear me witness and my older daughters will bear me witness that after Sunday, my wife had to massage me from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet to get me unstrung so I could turn loose and go to sleep. Why? Continual pressure. And you came to the house of God and there was pressure, and you never knew where it would come from or who would start it. They’d come Sunday morning to see who had the biggest crowd that morning, and if the crowd was down, a man would stand up and say, “I make a motion the pulpit be vacated. Can I have a second for the motion? All in favor.” And they broke every rule, and I said, “You can’t do that. You can’t do that.” And the Word of God began to plow close to their corn; and oh, what did they do? They said, “Well, if we can’t run him off, we’ll starve him to death; and so they quit giving. And they’d stand up in front of the church and weep and cry and say, “We need to take care of our pastor.” They were first class hypocrites. And they said, “We want to take the offering first, and we’ll go back and count it, and we’ll let you know before the service is over how much the offering is, so you’ll know that we must take care of our pastor.” That’s a good motive; I mean, that’s a good speech. You say, “Amen, Amen. That’s wonderful. Bless your dear hearts.” But I noticed as they walked down the aisle, and it was a little church, and the vestibule had a room on this side and a room on that side, and they went in the room on this side, and they counted the money. And then they came out, and I would notice that they had come out because I was watching. And they’d come out smiling. They weren’t smiling because of the fact that they had enough money to pay the pastor’s salary; they were smiling because of the fact they were practicing underhanded, cunning works of darkness. And then they’d come back and put on a sad face and say, “We didn’t get enough to take care of our pastor.” And then I found out, do you know what they were doing? It was in the Southern Baptist Convention. They were putting their money in the plate and designating 100% of it for the cooperative program and nothing for the local church. That’s cunning craftiness. That’s playing like you care when you don’t care. That’s playing a game. And Paul said, “Our Christianity is not playing a game.” Listen, our Christianity is not cunning craftiness, where we play politics, and we sit up and we watch this movie. Listen, that’s not Christianity. Our light is known and read of all men. Paul said, if we don’t have a clear conscience, we’re going to have to renounce the hidden things of

dishonesty, and then we'll not be walking around in cunning craftiness. Sometimes people get the idea, "Boy, I'm sharp, and I'm smart, and I'll put something over." Oh no, you don't put anything over on God. God writes it on a record, and God knows you and God knows me, and there's no fooling God.

Third thing, look what he says. Not only that, but he says *nor handling the word of God deceitfully*. You are not to take the Word of God and tamper with it. The Word of God is God's message; don't water it down! Let it say what it says. Don't water it down by compromise. Do not make it say what it does not say. Do not make it condone my sin. If I want to read the Word of God to condone my sin, I can turn to the book of Ecclesiastes and to the chapter where it says that there is *a time to kill . . . a time to plant . . . and a time to hate*. And people do not understand that that is written by a man away from God. Now, if I want to find verses that justify my sins, I can turn to the Word of God. And what am I doing? I am handling the Word of God deceitfully. I'm not using this for the purpose for which it was designed. Jesus said: *Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life*. Listen to me, the Word of God is given to bring us into communion and fellowship with God. That is the chief purpose. Let me give you an illustration. Turn to 1 Corinthians 14. I'm sure the man's saved. I heard a man on the radio, and I cannot conceive that a man would take the Scripture and make it say what he said it said, after saying it didn't say that, first of all. I sat in my car, and here's a college graduate. I said, "I do not believe that anybody with a college education that can read can take the Word of God and try to make it say what I want it to say." I better not take the Bible and try to make it say what I want it to say. We better let it say just what God says and only what God said. The Word of God, God says don't add to it; don't take away from it. Every word of God is pure. Now, turn to 1 Corinthians 14. I had the radio on, and I was driving down the highway. And in this chapter, in verse 34, it talks about women keeping silent in the churches. That's not talking about you can't teach or can't sing. But, here it talks about the exercise of the gifts. 1 Corinthians 14:34-38: *Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant*. Now look at verse 39: *Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues*. And the last verse: *Let all things be done decently and in order*. Now, watch. After Paul wrote the fourteenth chapter, he wrote everything — what you could do, what you couldn't do. Do you understand? And this pastor preached through this, "This is what you're not supposed to do." And he named them; you're not supposed to do that. And he said, "But now, let's look at the summary. Paul said: 'Let all things be done.'" I am not believing this. After he said, "Don't do that." He said, "The last verse says let all things be done; just make sure they are decent and in order." Let the women speak in tongues. Let them preach. Let them do all that. Hey! There's no way in the world a college graduate could ever read and understand that here it says, "Don't, don't, don't." And then turn around and say it's all right if you do it, just as long as you do it decently and in order. Hey, that's trying to make the Word of God say what I want it to say. And hear me, I better not play with the Word of God to make it say what I want it to say. I want it to say what God says. If God said it, God will say "Amen" to it, and the Holy Spirit of God will use it. But if I tamper with it, the Spirit of God is not going to use for conviction and edification the verses that I squeezed out of it what's not in there. Paul said, we aren't to tamper with the Word of God. We're not playing.

Now, back to 2 Corinthians 4 again: *nor handling the word of God deceitfully*; and lastly he says the cost of a clear conscience is an open life before man in the sight of God, the latter part of the verse: *but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God*. And Paul is simply saying, look at the first chapter, verse twenty-three; he said: *Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth*. When they misjudged his motives, he said I called God to witness, and my life is an open life before men in the sight of God. As a Christian, our life has to be open; it is open, known and read of all men. And we are being read all the time, and we've got to make sure now that we are open manifestly, open before every man's conscience in the sight of God. God is looking. Paul

said, "Boy, the law preachers can't make me quit; they can't discourage me." Why? "Because I have a glorious ministry of mercy and salvation and mercy in giving me service. Something that keeps me going is not only a glorious ministry received, but secondly a clear conscience keeps me going. My conscience is clear before God and man.

Number three, an unfailing Gospel. Does the Gospel work? Verse three through verse six, somebody had asked the question, "Hey, Paul, if your Gospel is so glorious, why doesn't everybody get saved?" And he answered just as simple, "There is enough soap to wash the world, and there are a lot of dirty people around." Does the soap fail? No, soap doesn't fail. You have to use water and apply it, and soap cleanses where soap is used. Hey, does the Gospel fail? No sir, the Gospel doesn't fail. We saw a couple weeks ago that it is the Savior of life unto life for some and the Savior of death unto death for others. To some it releases, and to others it adds condemnation. But, it moves on triumphant. You say, "Hey, the church has failed." I beg your pardon. "The church is dead." I beg your pardon. You can't kill the church. You can try, but you can't kill the church as long as the Head is alive. And the Head is in Heaven. And Jesus said: *the gates of hell shall not prevail against my church*. Hear me, the Gospel is triumphant. And when the smoke of the battle is all cleared away, has the Gospel failed? No! The Gospel hasn't failed. The social worker says the Gospel has failed. Hear me, the Gospel never fails. Because they think it has failed, you know what happens? They go to social work. The Gospel hasn't failed. Now, let's read it, 2 Corinthians 4:3-6: *But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* And so they say, "Whose fault is it?" Paul answers and responds immediately. He says, "It's not the Gospel's fault." Paul wrote to the church at Rome and he said: *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power (It's dynamite!) of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.* He said the Gospel has not lost its power. It still works. It worked at Rome; it works in the life of the Jew; it works in the life of the Gentile. Not only that, he said not only at Rome, but it worked for me. *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, . . . A Christian is something that the lights came on! It's like the creation. God said: Let there be light. And then, we were in darkness. The Bible says in Ephesians 5: For ye were sometimes darkness, Not only were we in darkness, we were darkness. One day in our darkness, God said, "Let there be light!" And the light came in, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. What a view! What a refreshing thing! What a soul-absorbing thing, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Glory, God's glory, I beheld His glory, His glory shown in my heart. Paul says it's not the Gospel's fault; it has power for Jew or Gentile, rich or poor. It's the dynamite of God; it saves those who believe. He said it's not the Gospel's fault because it worked for me. Then again, he moves on, he said not only is it not the Gospel's fault, but also it's not the messenger's fault. You can go soul winning sometimes, and the devil can brow beat you about this matter. If you've gone forth honestly and sincerely bearing precious seed trying to get somebody saved and you come back, you did not fail. Look what Paul said, verse five: *For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.* He said it's not the Gospel's fault, and it's not the messenger's fault. Now, it could have failed, and it would have failed if we had preached ourselves. But we went out and preached Jesus Christ is Lord *and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.* He said, "We went out; it's not my fault. I gave the message. I pointed to the Holy Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." And hear me, it's not the messenger's fault, and neither is it the message's fault. The Gospel hasn't failed, and the messenger hasn't failed. And then quickly, it's not the messenger's fault. Well, whose fault is it? Look at verse four. Why is the Gospel hid? *In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.* Now, it's Satan's fault. He is the god of this age. Last week, we saw the heart of the Jew with a veil over his heart, and as long as they tried to stay under the law, the veil was on the heart. There is not only a veil brought about by the law, but there's a veil over the hearts and minds of men put there*

by the devil, *blinded the minds of them which believe not*. In John chapter one, it says: *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, . . .* Suppose I sat here tonight, and I said that I came to bear witness of the Light. Well, you say, “Well, we see the Light.” If you could see the Light, then you don’t need to bear witness of the Light. But to bear witness of the Light, that means that people are blind. And here in the world, people are blind. They don’t see God; they see evolution. They don’t see God; they see Mother Nature. Everywhere is the handiwork of God, and the child of God sees God everywhere. *The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.* God’s witness is everywhere. We are here to bear witness to the men in darkness. There is a light; the light shines; that’s the light. Only people who are blind can’t see the light. Now, when he blinds people, they are willing subjects. Turn to John 12, and here are some verses. If you are foolish and light-minded and careless, hear me young people, you will not sit under my ministry without being moved. “Oh,” you say, “I don’t feel anything.” Brother, this is something you don’t feel. You cannot sit under the preaching of the Word of God without being hardened or softened. You’re not going to sit there and write notes and tear up songbooks and giggle and laugh and live a life of deception; you’re not going to do it and get away with it. You pay a price either of softening with the Word of God or hardening of heart. Look at John twelve. Here are some verses that ought to curdle the hearts of those who are haughty and think they’re smart and cute. Listen to this, John 12:35: *Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: You better take advantage of light! for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.* You can’t find your way. *While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.* Watch now, in verse 21 they said: *Sir, we would see Jesus.* He gave them light. He admonished them to walk in light while they had light. Now, watch now in verse 36: *While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them.* Hey, you’re in trouble when God the Son, the Light of the World, hides Himself from you. “Oh,” you say, “I can do whatever I want.” I beg your pardon, you don’t get saved when you want to. It is God who initiates this salvation business. It is God who makes you think about getting saved. It is God who sobers you. It is God who convicts you. You’re not going to say, “God, I’ll get saved when I want to.” I beg your pardon, you’re conceited! He hid himself from them. Read on, verse 37: *But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? Some folks don’t believe it. Why? But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: . . . and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe,* Would not believe ends in cannot believe. Is that what that Book says? Do you know what we need in America? We need to close the doors and preach the messages of the fear of God so that people tremble. We so want people to get saved that we think God will take you any way in the world. No, He won’t take you any way in the world. He will take you when you come as a self-confessed sinner. He’ll take you that way. Read on. *Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart;* If you will not believe the Word of God, brother, it blinds your eyes, and you will not see with eyes that God gives you. You turn away from it, and you get to where you can’t see. And you wont believe, and you’ll get where you can’t believe. That is what that says. Read on. *He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.* And he said while God’s blinding some people, and the devil’s blinding some people, some people are seeing the glory of God. What’s your reaction to it? Now, back to 2 Corinthians. J. Vernon McGee, I like to read his commentaries. I enjoy his simplicity and depth and his honesty. He talks about here: “I am reminded of a group of minors who were trapped in a mine in West Virginia after an explosion. Finally, the rescuers got food over to them, and then they got an electric light over to the place where they were trapped. A young miner there was looking right into the light and said, ‘Why don’t they turn on the lights?’ All of the men looked at him startled. He had been blinded by the explosion.” Satan blinds many folks. They say, “Why don’t you turn on the light? I don’t see the Gospel at all.” And it’s not the Gospel’s fault, brother; the gospel is shining in all its blazing glory. But the problem is

not the Gospel; the problem is the willful blindness of the human heart. *But if our gospel be hid (veiled), it is hid (veiled) to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not,* Now, let me just name some things, and we will be done. Here are some tools that he uses to blind. He has only three sets of tools. *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.* Those are the only three tools that he has to work with, but oh how many sub-points there are under those. Tools that blind men to the Gospel, first of all is worldliness. I mean they are wrapped up in this world. It's all over the world. There is a love of some favorite sin. Paul stood before Felix, and he had a woman that he was living in sin with, and as he preached the Word of God, the Bible says *Felix trembled.* Hey, she didn't tremble. Love of some sin will keep a man blind in the Word of God until the light goes out. Love of some favorite sin, worldliness or following the crowd, "I'm afraid of the peers that I run with." or raising objections to the truth. You've heard, "You don't know that the Bible is the Word of God. It's been translated and translated." A man told me that the other day, and I said, "Did you search that out for yourself, or did you take somebody else's word for that?" He said, "That's just the idea of my own. His problem was not logical. It was a hiding place. It was an objection to truth. And when men come to the Word of God, they are prejudice against the Word of God. They don't pick up a book on evolution and are prejudice against evolution. But, you read a book on creation, and you're prejudice against the Word of God. Objections to truth will blind your heart. The devil will use that. Then, the matter of twisting truth. Peter said: *as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.* "Oh, God's a God of love, the Bible says. You know, God never sends anyone to hell; he's a God of love." You've twisted truth; you only got half of that. It's a holy love. "I know the Bible; you don't have to tell me; I've read it." False grace, that's self-righteousness. Now turn to two passages of Scripture. Turn to Matthew 11:20: *Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not:* Jesus came to where most of His mighty works were done, and they didn't believe Him. Was there anything wrong with His message? No sir. Was there anything wrong with the Messenger? No sir. But they did not repent, and oh how He preached to them. Now, look as He concluded His message in verse 25: *At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.* You don't get anything out of this Book when you come as a scholar. You don't get anything out of this Book when you come knowing it all. You don't get anything out of this Book unless you come like a baby, "Teach me, teach me, teach me, teach me." You've hidden them from the wise men, the PH.D.'s, and revealed them unto babes.

Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. Now, turn to 2 Corinthians 2:14-16. Does the Gospel fail? No. You know, sometimes we go somewhere, and we pour our souls out. We may pour our souls out and do more praying, and we may go somewhere else and there's very little prayer. I'm telling you, the singing comes loose at the seams. And we poured out our heart; nothing happens. And we leave defeated. God didn't command you to make the seed grow. Look at 2 Corinthians 2: *Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life.* He said the Gospel moves on. At the head of the caravan of the triumphal precession of the returning King are those who have been enlightened and pardoned and forgiven and set free to become citizens. Behind them are those who are destined to condemnation and destined for death. And God's Gospel rides triumphantly through this twentieth century. And brother, there is a *savour of life unto life. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* That comes behind: *But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.* Behind that crowd back there who are willingly subjective, subjective to Satan's propaganda. Encouragement! Paul said, "Now, you cynics are not going to discourage me because the Gospel is triumphant. You law preachers are not going to discourage me because I have a ministry of grace." He said, "My clear conscience keeps me moving on."

