

**How Can the Average Person
Know the Bible is True?**
2 Corinthians 4 1-6

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Its Thanksgiving weekend. It's a great opportunity to stop and give thanks. But what does that mean. I looked up thankful on my computer dictionary. It says to be thankful means to "feel or show gratitude." So I looked up gratitude to see if it went deeper in helping me grasp this. It said gratitude is a "feeling of thankfulness." Thanks a lot. So I went to some of the online dictionaries for some other definitions of thankful. Here's a good one. To be thankful is to be "conscious of a benefit received."

So today, what benefits are you conscious of that you have received? What would be your top 3 reasons to be thankful today? Has everyone got three in their minds? Ok now, did the Bible make your top 3? When I thought about this for myself, my top 3 immediately went to my family, health and God. Probably somewhere within the God category I would eventually get to the Bible. But I have to admit it's not right up there on my thanksgiving list.

But should it be? Might our view of the Bible and our experience with it affect whether or not it would register on our Thanksgiving list. We've been talking about the Bible through all of September. We first asked the question "What view do you hold of the Bible." Then we asked the question "Why do we need a Bible?" Last week, we asked "What does the Bible say about itself?" We looked at one passage which displays Scripture's view of itself. "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." So the Bible claims to be God's Word or from God. Since God always speaks truth, it follows that the Bible claims to speak truth.

But **how can the average person know the Bible is true?** It's a pretty important question. Is the Bible true in it's portrayal of God? Does the Bible have solid grounds to make claims about the world and our lives?

John Piper points out that this question is not like asking "is it true that the moon goes around the earth? Whether you believe it or not, it has almost no effect on the way you live. Nor does this question determine where you will spend eternity – in heaven or hell. But the Bible does address these things. It teaches about vastly more important topics than the moon's revolutions. It teaches the way to escape God's wrath and enter into eternal life. It claims to teach the only way. It portrays a totally authoritative Jesus who says, "I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the

Father except through me (John 14:6).” It makes the radical claim that “There is salvation in no one else – for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).”

So how can the average person know the Bible is true? One way is to consider something called Apologetics. It involves giving an answer to the questions raised about the faith. There has been some tremendous work done in this area. It is especially necessary in an educated, literate culture like ours. Some have focused on presenting the historical evidence for the empty tomb and for Christ rising from the dead. Some have pointed out the strong ancient manuscript support behind our modern day Bibles. Some have worked in the areas of logic and philosophy to present a reasonable faith. I mentioned a few weeks ago my appreciation for the work of the Intelligent Design movement who have done scientific research that critiques macro evolution as an explanation for the origins of this world. I personally have benefited much from these studies I experienced a strengthening of my confidence in God and His Word.

However, there is a reality we must keep in mind when it comes to apologetics. Many of the arguments are pretty complex. I remember listening to a talk given by Christian Philosopher William Lane Craig about the movie “The Theory of Everything.” That movie was about physicist Stephen Hawking and his relationship with his first wife. To understand Craig’s speech, I had to listen to his talk about 10 times. Many apologetic arguments require knowing a lot of background information. Though these can be a great resource in dealing with university students and the highly educated, they can exclude a lot of people. In fact most people in the world, Piper points out, especially in less-educated, developing countries have neither the training nor the time to pursue such arguments in support of their faith. So if we conclude the only way to confirm the Bible’s reliability is through complex apologetics and arguments, we’ve excluded a majority of the world’s population. The jungle dweller in Papua New Guinea, the 5 year old child in a rural village in India and the average Canadian working at their full time job or looking after their family does not have training in philosophy or time to dig down into deep apologetics. Yet the Bible assumes that those who hear the gospel may know the truth of it and stake their lives on it. The Bible assumes that through the written word of the apostles, a person may come to know eternal life. In John 20:31, the disciple John writes – These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” So that sounds like a child, or a jungle dweller or average person with no apologetic training can come to Christ and trust the Words of the Bible to be true.

According to the Bible, people don't have to be educated historians, NT manuscript experts or have degrees in Philosophy before you can come to Christ. Please hear me. I so appreciate all the people who do invest their lives and careers in such work. But we must guard against thinking only the enlightened or educated can get to the truth.

So today, we're going to look at a passage that presents a profound answer the question "how can the average person know the Bible is true?" It points to something that anyone in any stage of life and in any circumstance can actually experience. It points to something you and I can experience to gain confidence in the reliability of the Bible. It immediately applies to our lives today. For no matter where you're at today in life, you can find hope, direction and support in the Bible. The more convinced we are of its truthfulness, the more likely we will turn to it to hear from God for life today. So let's go to this short passage and see a way to know the Bible's truth. (2 Corinthians 4:1-6; page 819)

2 Corinthians 4:1-6 (ESV)

4 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. ²But 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. ³And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴In 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. ⁵For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶For 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.

This passage comes right after the one we looked at on Welcome Sunday - 2 Corinthians 3:7-18. On that Sunday, we learned the apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians during a very difficult time in his life and ministry. He had almost died. He and Timothy had survived their ordeal only because of God's rescue. But Paul also experienced intense personal struggle with some in the Corinthian Christian community. Some have made many accusations against Paul. This letter turns out to be a defense of his ministry. But he doesn't defend himself just to be defensive. He defends himself to show the authenticity of the Gospel and the solid ground on which their hope stands. He believes the attack on his message can threaten people's souls. So he writes this difficult letter.

We saw in chapter 3 Paul compare ministry under the Old Covenant to ministry under the New Covenant. He argued that though Old Covenant ministry had glory, New Covenant ministry had greater glory. He referred back to Exodus 34 that described Moses' encounter with God on Mount Sinai. After Moses talked with God, **Exodus 34:29 tells us "he did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking to God."** So Moses skin actually glowed from being

in God's presence. This scared the people and they were afraid to come near him. So Moses put a veil over his face. Then the people wouldn't see the glory of God because of the veil.

Then back in Second Corinthians 3, verse 14 and 15, Paul reveals non-believers today have a veil over their hearts. But when anyone comes to Christ, verse 16, the veil is removed. So now we believers can, with unveiled faces behold or see the glory of God. When we see His glory, we are being transformed from one degree of glory to another. That's where that passage ended with verse 18. We now it on the front page of our bulletin as our theme verse for the year.

So in chapter 4 Paul continues to talk about his ministry. In verse 1 he says "Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart." This ministry is Paul's ministry under the New Covenant. But I think we can also apply this to our ministry today – whenever we serve someone else out of our love for Christ, we engage in ministry. But I also think we can extend it to living the Christian life. And notice he says, we do not lose heart. Many of you can relate to discouragement in ministry or your Christian life. We can grow tired and lose heart in the midst of difficulties. But Paul gives a solid reason why we need not lose heart.

How did he get this ministry? How did it come about that he ended up as an apostle? Verse 1 – by the mercy of God. God showed Paul mercy by stopping him in his tracks on his way to arrest Christians. Jesus revealed Himself to Paul as the Messiah and Son of God. He immediately called Paul to Himself and to ministry. So he remembers that it is only by God's mercy that he even has this ministry and his life.

Paul did not lose heart because of God's mercy. When we get discouraged in ministry or the Christian life, we need to recall God's great mercy towards us. It helps to remind ourselves where we might have ended up if God had not shown us mercy. With that mercy in mind, we gain courage to go forward.

But Paul would not take advantage of God's mercy. He would not use his ministry for personal gain. He would minister with integrity. Apparently this was an area of weakness among those who criticized him. Their ministry lacked integrity. So in verse 2 he talks about renouncing disgraceful and underhanded ways. He refuses to practice cunning or to tamper with God's Word. That's what his critics did. They used tricks or some sort of deceit to carry out their ministry. They tampered with God's word. The word describes the dilution or watering down of wine. So these teachers would either water down God's Word or insert something into it that people wanted to hear.

Paul would have none of that. Instead, by “an open statement of the truth he would commend himself to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.” He will simply proclaim God’s truth openly even if people don’t want to hear it or live by it.

Apparently, a lot didn’t. For in verse 3, he says “Even if our gospel is veiled.” So it’s a little strange to talk about “our gospel.” Usually, the New Testament talks about “the” gospel. But it seems that some charged that Paul and Timothy’s Gospel did not produce good results. People were not responding to their message. But Paul explains why this is happening.

He picks up the veil image from chapter 3. “And even if our gospel is veiled (just like Moses’ face was veiled so the Israelites couldn’t see clearly), it is veiled to those who are perishing.” So yes, people may not respond to the Gospel because their hearts are veiled. They can’t see clearly. And they are perishing.

You know those 250 people we’re asking the Lord for by 2025? You know people in your life who don’t know Christ. They’re not on another path that will lead them home. They’re not just going a different way. They’re perishing. They are on their way to the devastation of divine judgment because they are still in their sins.

But Paul goes further to explain what’s happening in verse 4. “In their case, the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.” So the god of this age is Satan. He works hard to blind unbelievers from seeing the light of the gospel. The mind is a battlefield. To prevent people from seeing the light of the gospel, he blinds their minds.

But lest we conclude that unbelievers are just helpless victims of Satan’s blinding work, we do need to take in the whole counsel of God’s Word and remember God holds people responsible for their choices & their sins. Jesus makes a this point about lost people in his conversation with Nicodemus. John 3:18-19: Jesus says “Whoever believes in the Son of God is not condemned but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment the light has come into the world, **and people loved the darkness** rather than the light because their works were evil.” So they weren’t in darkness only because of Satan’s blinding. They loved the darkness. There is personal responsibility there.

Yet thankfully, Paul’s writing in 2 Corinthians 4 doesn’t end in verse 4. Verse 5 shows the way of hope for unbelievers. “For what we proclaim is not ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.” So here’s

the way to get out of darkness. Someone has to proclaim the Word. Someone shares the light. We preach not ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord. That means you and I must proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord. We proclaim the Gospel and leave the results up to God.

Then verse 6, which is the key verse that leads us to answer the question, “How can the average person know the Bible is true.” “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine in the darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” God said “let there be light” at the beginning of the Bible. That was an act of new creation. When God opens our eyes to the light of His Gospel, it’s another act of new creation in the life of the believer. Notice “God has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.” There’s God’s glory again.

Notice the parallel with verse 4. There Satan blinds the mind of the unbeliever to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel. Here God shines in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge. So Gospel and Knowledge are parallel. In verse 4, Satan blinds unbelievers from seeing the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ. In verse 6, God shines the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. In verse 4, Satan wants to blind the unbeliever from the glory of Christ who is the image of God. In verse 6, God shines the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

So somehow through God’s shining in our hearts, the believer personally grasps or sees God’s glory or Christ’s glory. When we see God’s glory, according to verse 18 above, we are being transformed just like when Moses saw God’s glory on Sinai, his face was transformed.

But how does this point to the truth of the Bible? How does this strengthen our confidence in the Bible’s reliability? The glory of Christ in the Gospel is an objective reality. It is not in us. We don’t make it up. It is there. It is meant to be seen. It is real evidence upon which saving faith can rest.

The average person can know the Bible is true by receiving spiritual sight to see in it God’s self-authenticating glory. We receive spiritual sight when God shines His light into our dark hearts. Then we can see the light of the gospel of the glory of God in the face of Christ. When God opens the eyes of our hearts to spiritual truth, we begin to see what unbelievers are blinded from seeing. We begin to see God’s glory revealed all over the Scriptures.

But what is God's glory? It's too vast to capture in a simple definition. 18th century pastor Jonathan Edwards wrote "God's glory is the beauty, excellency, perfection, loveliness, divinity and holiness of God." It includes the glory of the Gospel and its soul saving power. It is that which is inescapably divine.

So what does this have to do with knowing the Bible is true? The Scriptures are full of God's glory. They display the absolute uniqueness of God. So when our eyes are opened to see that which is inescapably divine, we see God's glory.

This is the critical addition necessary to reasonable faith. We need spiritual faith in addition to reasonable faith. In one sense, demons have reasonable faith. They know who Jesus is. When Jesus confronts the demons possessing two men in Matthew 7, they cry out "What have you to do with us, O Son of God?" They had a reasonable faith. But they didn't have a saving faith.

A saving faith requires reasonable faith and spiritual faith. John Piper puts it like this. "Well-grounded faith is not only reasonable faith (based on real evidence and good grounds), but also spiritual faith, that is, it is enabled by the Holy Spirit and mediated through spiritual perception of divine glory in the truth of the gospel."¹

This means that when we receive Christ and God shines in our hearts "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," our Bible reading can be completely transformed. We're not just reading some history book or a collection of moral lessons or the religious history of Jews and Christians. We go to a book where the Holy Spirit can open our eyes to see the beauty, perfection, holiness, truth and excellency of God. Every page contains a potential discovery of some different aspect God's glory in Jesus' life or through the prophet's voice or in the plagues against Egypt that exposed their false gods.

In seeing God's glory, we are convinced not only in mind but our soul that this is true so we can say "I've just encountered the one true God. I've just seen His glory in my Bible reading and with that I go forth into my day".

It happened to me this week when I was reading Isaiah 62. I was pretty tired mentally as I began the day. It is a challenge facing your own weakness. Sometimes I think who am I to even think about being part of this Vision 2025. I am getting older. I don't know if I have what it takes. I don't know if I'm doing it right. I was 43 when I came to this church. I'm 55 now and a lot closer to 70 than I am to 30. So these kinds of thoughts are going thru my mind. Isaiah 62 talks about Zion or Israel's coming salvation. The nation has been defeated and left desolate. But Isaiah 62 talks about God restoring

¹ John Piper, *Peculiar Glory: How the Christian Scriptures Reveal Their Complete Truthfulness*, Wheaton, Illinois, Crossway, 2016, 138.

His people. In verse 4, the Lord says “You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called “My Delight Is in Her, and your land (shall be called) Married.” I thought to myself that’s nice for Israel and for God’s people. But then came the next phrase, “for the Lord delights in you.” I know that Isaiah 62 is a message directed to a people not an individual. But in that moment after seeing God’s glory in His ability to restore a broken nation, I sensed the Spirit impressing on me that God wanted to speak that phrase to me that morning. “The Lord delights in you,” so keep going in His strength. Keep on.”

That’s just me an average person more convinced of the Bible’s truth after yet another encounter with God through it. I pray that we collectively will turn to the Bible and ask God to reveal another glimpse of His glory in whatever we read that day. Then our spiritual faith will grow along with our reasonable faith to become a solid well-grounded faith anchored in God Himself.

I think there are several ways we can apply this part of God’s Word to our lives today. **1 - Remember God’s mercy so you don’t lose heart.** If you are a Christian, it is because of God’s mercy. Your ministry is because of God’s mercy. So if His mercy saved you from perishing, He certainly has the power to deal with whatever discourages you today.

2 - Refuse to compromise to get results. A lot of people opposed Paul’s message. But he refused to do anything disgraceful or underhanded so they would like him more. We need to live with integrity if people around us are going to even consider our message.

3 - Recognize the spiritual realities of non-believers around you so you can pray specifically. 4:3-4. They are perishing. The gospel is veiled to them. The god of this world has blinded their minds to keep them from seeing. They love darkness. This points to why our 2025 Vision is chiefly dependent upon God. He must rescue them from perishing. He must unveil and open their eyes. He must come in and reveal truth to them.

4 - Proclaim Christ to them not yourself. Even though the way we live is important, it cannot be the ultimate proof for someone else’s conversion. If they build their faith on our lives, that’s a flimsy foundation. Jesus Christ the Lord must be their foundation.

5- Continually ask God to reveal His glory to you through His Word. We will never come to the end of discovering God’s glory revealed in His Word. We won’t even come close. You can read or listen to God’s Word and He can open the eyes of your heart to see His glory.

Friends, on this Thanksgiving weekend, we have much for which we can be thankful. But the number one reason on our list needs to be God and His Word.

Maybe you're here today and God has revealed to you that verses 3 and 4 are your reality. You are perishing because the gospel is veiled. And the god of this world has blinded your mind from seeing the light of the gospel and the glory of Christ. And it's also true that you love the darkness. But some light has cracked through this morning. Even though you're not sure of what it all means or how it will affect your life, you know you must go to this light.

To do that you need to first acknowledge your love of the darkness. Admit that you have loved and lived in the darkness thinking it will be the way to life and satisfaction. But now you will turn away from trusting your life to darkness and instead put your trust on Jesus? Will you turn away from trusting yourself and finding your own way to save yourself? Instead, you turn to Christ and admit you need a Savior. If you sense God's call to you right now, I invite you to repeat this simple prayer.

- Lord God, I confess I have loved darkness.
- But it is destroying me. I am perishing by traveling this path.
- So now I turn away from that and I turn to you.
- I put my trust on Jesus and all He has done.
- I turn to You Jesus as my Savior and Lord.
- Please come in as Lord of my life.