

## 2 Corinthians 4

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 07 February 2017 11:33

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### “...we faint not...”

Christians who have event-free lives are unique. They do not experience upsets, calamities or serious attacks. They enjoy what they do and say, and believe as they wish. They recoil from those who seem to be always ‘in the wars’, because surely, they think, such troubles come only to those who are ‘backsliding’.

In this chapter as in many other places, we find Paul saying the opposite. We can *expect* troubles when we are saved! As a rule of thumb, the closer we walk with God the greater becomes the number and severity of the attacks. They will come from all sides, sometimes all at once. The aim is to crush your faith and to get you to let go of God’s hand.

The worst thing we can do when this happens (which will be often, if we are genuine believers!), is to run away, to crumble under the pressure, or to go off at a tangent. Christians who experience these troubles, and who resort to anxiety or depression, have lost the fight already. It is a form of running away from life and from God. We do it because it is infinitely easier to fall apart than it is to stand and face the fight squarely. There is nothing wrong with fear when a battle comes – but there is everything wrong with running away.

If we resort to anxiety, depression, or the myriad other neurotic traits, then we are making ourselves weak. We are giving in to our ‘old man’ who cares nothing for God. He will trip us up at every opportunity! These negative traits are reactions rather than true responses. It is ‘knee-jerk’ to fall into a home-made soup of anxiety. As Christians we have something far better, but how many of us bother to use it or even acknowledge it?

It is better to fight and fall in battle, knowing we have trusted God and given our all for Him, than to run away and fail miserably, giving a bad witness to the faithfulness of God. Those who act this way are of no use to man or beast. They will go on to make a lifelong series of errors, all based on misery and anxiety. They will not know the victory of being a Christian, nor will they ever come to experience the true ‘freedom in Christ’. They will only see a depressing line of attacks and failures.

The true Believer will accept he is a warrior for the Lord, ready to fight and willing to give his all, even to death. It is the fear of being hurt that brings the harm, not the attacks themselves. When

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there is ice on the road, my wife is the most timid of creatures...picking her way in tiny steps and tensing every muscle, requiring support from me at every inch. I tell her to stride out confidently, because she is more likely to fall in her timidity than she is if she strides!

It is like this with the Christian life... *so what* if a clear and bold statement brings a vast army of attackers? Remain silent and you will not be attacked... but stay silent and you will have renounced the power of the Lord. Play the man! Go down fighting! Do not run away from your responsibilities. Stand and fight!

I have repeated this story before, but it is worth repeating: when my son was in school, he desperately wanted to join the rugby team. So, I took him to the local park to practice. We threw the rugby ball back and forth for a while and then I began to throw it at him hard. Each time, he ducked and got out of the way. Eventually, I told him that he was keeping himself out of the rugby team, because he was afraid of getting hurt. As you know, rugby is a tough game and injuries are common.

My son bravely started to stand his ground, getting bowled over by the force of the ball thrown at him. Within a few weeks he was chosen to play for the rugby team! He became a tough little fellow and his team won the schools' cup. Along the way he received quite a few bruises and cuts, but he lost his fear of being hurt, and remains fearless to this day, as an adult... and he still receives injuries!!

Many Christians are afraid of getting hurt, usually by their fellow Christians, who exert undue pressure. They show distaste for Christians who are fearless and bold, so everyone tends to keep their heads down, refusing to stand and fight. Therefore, they remain anxious when fights come, and run away, by hiding or becoming anxious and depressed. But, the more they become anxious, the more they inwardly hate themselves, and so their condition gets far worse, as their spiritual strength is sapped away.

This holding back prevents a full and fruitful Christian life. It puts human feelings before godly will, and many opportunities are lost because of this. God cannot use anxious and spineless Christians. Just as Gideon challenged the cowards in his army, so God says to us "If you can't take the strain, please go away and hide". He would prefer us to stay out of His sight, than to quake and complain in a monotony of depressive tones. This is by no means an acceptance by God of our human frailty! No, He looks upon these times as a sad reflection of our sin, not of our faithfulness.

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Paul knew immense fear and attacks, yet he continued, always onward. He was very afraid, yet he carried on regardless. This is the definition of a true brave man or woman. In this way we do not lose our fear, but we learn how to harness our fears and hand them over to God. Those who do not, resort to human failure every time a fight looms, or a problem arises. They will always demand their own way, and when they do not get it, they become sinful and sullen. Is this what YOU are like? If so, stop it right now and start to live as God demands. Then, not only will you be obeying God, but your life will become a great deal better.

### Verses 1-4

1.

“Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;

2.

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.

3.

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

4.

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.”

Because we have been given the office of apostle, says Paul, and we have ‘received mercy’, *eleeo* (compassion; help from God in their afflictions), we will ‘faint not’, *ekkakeo* – not be weary or without a spirited response, preserved from *kakos*, evil things, what is harmful. Here we read Paul's answer to those who would stop the Christian fight or who would fall back as cowards and hide from life's troubles.

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When one experiences constant troubles, especially, as some do, multiple troubles all the time, it is tempting to just 'let go' and simply give up. This can take a number of forms, from snapping and shouting in anger, to physical abuse, and even on to suicide. Others take the more 'popular' route - depression or anxiety attacks. None of these routes is acceptable or good, but are ruinous of the Christian life and spirit. They are also a very poor witness. It is significant that when David knocked on the gate of the king of the Philistines and suddenly realised his folly, he resorted to pretending to be mad. When he did that, the king ignored him!

This is what happens to Christians who resort to neuroticism... doctors have no time for them and become exasperated, relatives begin to fall away as the 'sufferer' degenerates socially, and others cannot be bothered to sit with a person whose only topic is stress, moaning and symptoms! Overall, those who display neurotic traits tend not to be taken seriously, but are ignored or categorised as having little ability to talk or think properly... which is true. And, once a person is diagnosed as neurotic, doctors will put everything down to mental inability, from that moment on. Is this godly? Is this good? Is this commendable? Of course not.

Paul received immense help from God, mercy and support. God does not give support to everyone, but to those who are faithful, even if their faith is as small as a mustard seed. Those who cannot be bothered to live godly lives are put aside until they repent. Those, like Paul, who push forward in true trust, regardless of personal injury or slander or feelings of inability, are given overflowing mercy and grace.

Because of such mercy, Paul "renounced... hidden things...". To renounce, *apeipomen*, is to forbid or speak against, to give up something. You will note this is not the passive and silly idea we find during the period known as 'Lent' (a non-Christian festival, by the way); it is far more active and positive. *Apeipomen*, is to give up something and to speak against it at the same time, showing a distaste for it. Thus, it is a warning to others as well as a personal declaration of intention to do good.

Paul said he gave up 'hidden' things, *kruptos*: things done in secret, concealed from men, inwardly enjoyed even if not known to others. These hidden things included dishonesty, *aischune*; disgraceful behaviour that brings dishonour and shame. This kind of shame is said to lead to *aischos*, disfigurement (of soul) or disgrace.

Paul also renounced "walking in craftiness", or not being occupied with *panourgia*, cunning and false wisdom. I can think of many Christians who will pontificate grandly on any scriptural

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subject even when they have no idea what they are talking about! This is false wisdom, a kind of arrogant ignorance that is the foundation of their approach to life. They become very skilful at this, and rather than show their ignorance, they become quite treacherous in order to maintain their position as a soothsayer.

Really, they are as bad as the ones who handle *“the word of God deceitfully”*. These people preach and teach to

**doloo**

– catch the unwary and corrupt them. They often use scripture loosely, to make others think they are genuine, but this is just a

**dello**

; a decoy. The major charismatic teachers do this all the time. Many Christians think of these men in a sympathetic and merciful way, but I am not convinced this is right. I am, rather, convinced that most of these leaders know what they are doing and deliberately ensnare their victims, for purposes of riches or power. Even if they do not, they are still culpable in God’s eyes, because we all have God’s word plainly in view. (Note: I am personally knowledgeable of these people, being given ‘insider information’. Many have appalling characters).

Paul rejected use of these sins and so encourages the Corinthians to do likewise. Instead, he calls for a *“manifestation of the truth”*. He wants them to **phaneroo** – openly declare the **aletheia**, what God requires and what men must do, as God commands it in His word. Time and again I come across Christians who, without a shred of learning, pronounce haughtily that I am wrong in a matter, when their own understanding is human and wilfully misinterpreted! I may have studied the subject for a long time and give only the scriptural interpretation, but these folk prefer their own ideas, which often have no resemblance to what scripture says. Paul says the Corinthians must reject this notion and only speak and teach what is true.

To speak the truth is acceptable, but Paul prefers us to actually *love* the truth, **alethes**. If we love the truth, then our every waking hour will consist only of seeking for the truth and expounding it, not with pride, but in humility and love for the Lord and the benefit of others.

When we act as Paul is teaching us, we will commend ourselves to others, who will see God’s truth in us. That is, other men will **sunistao**, approve of us and even stand by us, because their souls or consciences, **suneidesis**, will recognise

what is good in our words and actions in the

**enopion**

or presence of God. Our lives will be open books before others and before God, and this is

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often a compelling reflection and encouragement to others to live properly.

But, on the other hand, says Paul, if our “gospel be hid” from anyone, it is because they are “lost”. This underlines the doctrine of predestination very clearly. Paul is saying that though the Gospel is indeed the ‘good news’ it is only good news to those who are elect. To those who are not chosen, the Gospel is a stumblingblock. The Gospel is thus ‘hid’, **kalupto**, veiled, preventing knowledge. I have heard some wonderfully creative meanings given to this term, but they all avoid the issue, that God chooses who will be saved and rejects others. God actually ‘hides’ the Gospel from those who are “lost”,

**apollumi**

, perishing, to be destroyed.

Some will go to the next verse and point out that Satan does this, not God. This is correct, but Satan must firstly be given permission by God to do what he does. Then, he acts upon the ‘lost’ as God’s envoy (as in the example shown in Job). So, the “god of this world” blinds men. Note that ‘god’ is ‘**theos**’, the same word used for God. **Theos** can mean the true God, or a false god, such as Satan (the context decides who it refers to).

Satan is the god of this world, **aion**, acting upon this earth, not in heaven, and until the age has finished, when a new earth and heaven will be created, in which Satan can have no part. In other words, **aion** qualifies **theos** in this text as meaning Satan, by restricting his activity to earth... a restriction that does not apply to God.

Satan has “blinded”, **tuphloo**. This links with the rest of the text: “the minds” of those who do not believe.

**Tuphloo**, used in the New Testament, interprets as the darkening of the mind or as losing the ability to discern, making a man

**tuphlos**

: “mentally blind”. Interestingly, this mental blindness makes the ‘mentally disabled’ person

**tuphoo**

, arrogant and unwilling to learn the truth, even when it can be shown from scripture what the truth is. Scripturally, to be

**tuphoo**

is to be stupid or foolish.

Satan, then, stops those who are not elect, from seeing the truth of the Gospel. He prevents their minds from understanding, by blotting out **photismos**, enlightenment by the “glorious

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gospel of Christ”, Who is the “image of God”, the

***eikon***

. In this way, Satan stops the truth of Christ from shining upon them... he stops them from being beamed-upon, or irradiated,

***augazo***

, with the truth, which brings daylight,

***auge***

, to the soul.

This is a very clear teaching, reinforcing the act of election and predestination, and rejecting the heresy of Arminianism and personal choice. The man who is unsaved, is unsaved because Satan blinds him, and Satan can only do this by God's permission or command.

### Verses 5-10

1.

“For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

2.

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.

3.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

4.

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

5.

Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;

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Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.”

As Paul says, he is not trying to teach them his own philosophy; he is only telling them what Christ says. In so doing, he and the apostles become their **doulos** or servants. This is not to be taken to mean that the apostles, or any pastor or preacher, can be ordered around by other Christians. It means that they are the property of God, and they act on Christ's behalf to further His kingdom. They are **deo** – fastened to Christ, bound to Him and obliged to act for Him.

God commanded the light to shine out of darkness at the beginning of the world. It was self existing light, not reliant on any other created thing. The Gospel is such a light, self existing and without reliance on anything human. It is **phos**, an heavenly light that can penetrate into or out of any darkness... so long as God **wishes** to enlighten it. The darkness in this text is

**skotos**

, spiritual ignorance along with ungodliness and immorality, leading to eternal misery.

At the start of this article we spoke of neurotic Christians who prefer darkness to light. They enjoy their misery more than they enjoy the presence of God in their lives. That is why they choose the darkness. But, if they would only let go of this preference, God's **phos** would shine into their lives and transform them!

**Skotos** does not necessarily mean a life is crammed to the brim with what human beings call 'immorality' or 'sin'. It includes *anything* that is rejected by God, such as a refusal to act in a godly manner, the rejection of God's commands or counsel, and so on. These need not be obvious to others. So, those who act neurotically are actually challenging God to judge and punish them, by refusing to allow Him to shine into their darkened minds and hearts. They are foolishly tempting God and are arrogant enough to claim that their 'condition' is part of God's plan, or that He 'loves them as they are'!!

When God comes into our lives He automatically shines a light into our souls. It is simply not possible to claim God's love and acceptance when our hearts and minds live constantly in a state of darkness (as in depression or anxiety). We are told in this text that He shines His light in

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our hearts to *give light*. This light enables us to see the truth and to act upon it. It does not prevent us from acting, or from living in the light.

What is this 'light'? It is the **gnosis** or knowledge of the glory of God. This is a general and all-pervasive understanding of God's plan and ways and the ability to live accordingly. This glory cannot be discerned in someone whose minds and hearts are darkened by depression or anxiety! (Remember, we are talking about conditions that are initiated by the person, not about conditions that are caused by physical illnesses or chemical imbalances). There is nothing glorious about a man who lives his life in a darkened room, or in utter melancholy, bringing others down in spirit as well as himself.

When God commands the light to shine into our hearts, it cannot be stopped. The light of God comes to us through the "face of Jesus Christ". The 'face' is **prosopon** – His very person and everything He stands for and the entry point to His thoughts and actions. The man who is shrouded in depression or anxiety cannot see Christ's face, and so is unable (willingly-so) to know His thoughts or leading.

Paul, in all humility, then admits that whilst the light of God and the glory of the Gospel are wondrous, the Gospel is a treasure, thesaurus, kept in vessels of earth. By 'treasure' is meant a vast storehouse containing untold wealth and precious things. They are not, however, guarded by angels with flaming swords, but are deposited in the hearts and minds of 'earthen vessels' – fallible (**ostrakinos** – from the idea of terra cotta tiles, **ostrakon**, which are easily broken) human beings. Note that preachers are merely the vessels or **skeuos**, meaning chosen men of quality, yet having the frailty of human beings.

Paul says that this is deliberate, so that the grace of God can be seen to be wholly of God. Men cannot be the source of grace, because of their failures and sins, which highlight the fact of election and God's own choices. Paul, as usual, points us away from himself and toward God alone.

He then puts our 'troubles' in perspective. He tells the Corinthians that though he and the other apostles are 'troubled on every side', they are not distressed. Surely this is a contradiction in terms? Paul says that they are **thlibo** – afflicted and hard-pressed in every way, *pas*. Yet, they are 'not distressed', **stenochoreo**, or 'reduced in spirit'. It is an observable truism that those with the least reason to complain will complain bitterly, but

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those whose lives are filled with calamities are the ones who smile the most and complain the least. Some can have the worst of times, yet will not complain or draw attention to their state. They will not sink to neurotic traits and hide away. But those with the least of troubles will give in to their perceived problems rather than fight them.

Paul says they are perplexed, **aporeo**, without anything to support them and not knowing what to do next. Yet, they were not in despair, **exaporeomai**, totally lost and renouncing all hope. We can all be like this – no matter what troubles we have, we can stand firm and with honour, not resorting to anxiety or depression; and we can be left with nothing and yet never lose our hope in God. Those who do so often imagine their position to be worse than it really is. They take their eyes off God and use their own ideas and ways out of the situation, thereby cutting themselves off from God's hand. That is when they become depressed and anxious. Like Paul, we must stand firm in trust, and not allow our circumstances to crush us. If we do, then we are obeying Satan, not God.

Paul was persecuted but not forsaken; **dioko**, put to flight and chased after by violent men, but he was not **egkataliepo**, abandoned and left helpless by God. David was hounded by Saul for many years and was sometimes at the end of his tether, yet he trusted completely in God, Who never let him down or to be without. Paul was cast down, but not destroyed; he was **kataballo**, humiliated and thrown down, but never **apollumi**, killed or made to perish.

Instead of being depressed, Paul was always *“bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus”*. That is, he was **periphero**, bearing every moment, in his own self, the **nekrosis** or death of Christ. He was not trying to act on his own behalf, but for Christ, Who died for us all. And so it was *Christ* Who bore the brunt of our ailments and sorrows, not us.

By bearing these tribulations that Christ went through, Paul was more able to let Christ's light shine through. Because Paul's own life as so full of woes, the woes served to contrast with the pure light of God. This is so different from those who are constantly depressed or anxious – all they show others is blackness and despair, defeat and sorrow! They do not, and cannot show

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others the light of Christ or the victory He always gives to those who trust.

### Verses 11-15

1.

“For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

2.

So then death worketh in us, but life in you.

3.

We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak.

4.

Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.

5.

For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.”

Christ tells us that a seed must die before it can spring into new life. Paul is saying something very similar in this text. Though we are **zao**, living, we are always given over to **thanatos**, or death. That is, as Christians we can expect to suffer at the hands of wicked men, or even to die, for Jesus’ sake. This is so that Christ can be made more obvious to others. He contrasts so sharply with our mortal and suffering bodies. Note how Roman Catholic officials dress, live and act in great splendour, thereby trying to outshine the glory of Christ!

Death is the lot of the apostles, so that the Corinthians could know the wonders of salvation.

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They reaped the benefits of faith because the apostles ran the gauntlet of men's hatred and violence.

The apostles had the same 'spirit of faith' the same trust in God, and believed in what was written. They believed the same truths and preached only what they had been taught by God's word. And though they suffered at the hands of men, the apostles knew that God Who raised up Christ from death would likewise raise them up on the last day. On that day they would all stand together before Christ, faithful and true (verse 14).

Everything was for the sakes of these Corinthians and others, so that they might reap the rewards of faith. So many will be saved that their praises for God will reach heaven and overflow, *perisseuo*, to His glory and honour. God will let the apostles stand with those they caused to be saved.

### Verses 16-18

1.

"For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

2.

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

3.

While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

For these reasons, says Paul, they do not falter or give in and be left spiritless. Even if their bodies are killed or ruined, their souls rejoice and are made new, *anakainoo*, every single day! Selfish Christians think only of their own comforts and growth, but those who are mature think of the good of others.

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The afflictions of the apostles are only 'light', **elaphros**, over with quickly; they are **parautika**, only for a brief moment. They accomplish and give to the apostles an astounding amount of praise and honour that will last forever...not for themselves but for Christ, as the context suggests.

The apostles know this not by looking at what can be seen with their eyes, because all things made must be removed and die, but by looking at what cannot be discerned with the human eye – the eternal things of God. This is because what can be seen is temporal, **proskairos**, for a short season only, whereas the unseen things of God are eternal, **aionios**, and can never be taken away.

This is why Christians must not depend on what is of this earth, whether it is money, health, power, or any other humanly-gained benefit. They will all disappear – though to watch some Christians you would not think so. But spiritual things will remain forever and will bring us rewards if we are loyal to Christ and obey the Lord in all good conscience and without resorting to human frailty and emotional failure.

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