

With the recent string of hurricanes and the shooting in Las Vegas last week it seems that tragedies are becoming increasingly frequent. We are reminded that Jesus is coming back soon, and that's a good thing. The world desperately needs Him to fix its brokenness. Last week we saw in Hebrews 10:25 the exhortation to meet with and encourage one another all the more as we see the Day approaching. If Christians in the first century saw that Jesus' return was near, then how much more should we be anticipating His return 2000 years later? We should be praying for Jesus to come back soon, because we know just how great He is. But not everyone accepts Jesus. Why is it that when different people hear the same message some will respond to an altar call and some won't? We would love to have a manual that teaches us how to get everyone to accept the gospel. But in 2 Corinthians 4, Paul tells us that it's not up to us to make them believe, but only to present the message.

Paul preaches the gospel, but doesn't get discouraged if people reject it. Recall in vv. 1 and 16 the phrase, "we do not lose heart," is repeated. Paul doesn't become discouraged even when facing internal obstacles, like strife within the church, or external obstacles, like persecution. He just remains focused on preaching the gospel of God's mercy. So how can we be encouraged when our unbelieving relatives or friends continue to reject God? Paul says that we must recognize that the response of the listeners is in God's control, not in ours. We deliver the message, but we aren't responsible for making them believe.

In v. 2 Paul describes the message he delivers. It's a plain and open message. It's not secret, and there is no deceit. We don't know much about the practices of the mystery religions of Paul's time, but we can look at some cults today that have secret knowledge reserved for those who advance in rank. This isn't the way of the gospel. Everything is presented upfront. The entire Bible contains this one message that Jesus is the Son of God, who has come to save you. If Paul can say he preaches so openly back in the time when access to written Scripture wasn't readily available, then how much more open is the message today, when the Bible is accessible to everyone? The message is plain and simple. It's an attractive message that offers eternal life. And nobody was more articulate at explaining the gospel than Paul. So why do some still reject?

We see in vv. 3-6 that those who reject cannot see the truth of the gospel. Verse 4 tells us that they are blinded by the god of this age (who is Satan, the usurper of the world). This blindness is what we call depravity (Psalm 14:1, Romans 3:22-24). Humanity's depraved and sinful nature causes people to continue to do what they want. They are blinded so they can't see the light of the gospel. But if they could truly see, then they wouldn't reject Jesus. The message is simple. God wants us to have eternal life with Him, so He sent Jesus to save us from death. If you have faith in Jesus, you will have life. God's grace is given freely. We don't have to do anything to earn it. What's so off-putting about this message? Pascal's wager states that if we believe and God doesn't exist, then we lose very little. Perhaps we give up the ways of the world, but at the same time we gain the community of believers along with the hope and comfort of faith. If God does exist, we also gain eternal life. On the other hand, if God isn't real, unbelievers may gain fulfillment of worldly desires, and after death they have the same fates as believers. But if God is real, they will be eternally condemned after death. Unbelievers have much more to lose if they are wrong than the believers have if they are wrong. Believing in Jesus seems like the obvious choice, but unbelievers cannot see because Satan has blinded them. But we see in v. 6 that people only believe if God removes the blinders. We must continue preaching, and when God removes the blinders, then they will believe. It's not God's fault that they are blind, but we must pray that He enables them to see as we keep delivering the message.

In v. 6, Paul quotes from Isaiah 9:2, which describes the hope of light in the darkness. This darkness is described in Isaiah 8:17 as God hiding His face from Israel, who rejected Him. Throughout Israel's history they were so rebellious and wicked that God's face was hidden from them. We see in Numbers 6:23-26 that for God to turn His face on you and shine upon you is a good thing. And in 2 Corinthians 4:6 Paul says that the gospel message is that even though we deserve punishment, God turns to us and shines His face upon us with no strings attached. This is a message that everyone needs. So let us keep spreading the message and praying that God removes the blinders, while trusting that He is in control of the results.