

## 2 Corinthians 4,1–7

*Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*

Four matters to be dealt with from our passage:

1. A ministry based upon God's mercy
2. A frank ministry based upon faith and a good conscience
3. Ministering a message, not from man but from God – the Gospel
4. A ministry in weakness and strength

In this letter the apostle Paul defends the ministry which has been bestowed to him by God. He has enemies who try to oppose and neglect him in different ways, it is a great challenge for him to defend the Gospel and the ministry.

First of all he puts emphasis upon that it is not a ministry established by any man. No, it comes from God. ... *since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.* It is a ministry based upon God's mercy. God's call to salvation and to the ministry is of uttermost importance for him. In the book of Acts this event is accounted for not less than three times (ch 9, 22 & 26). God has intervened in the life of Paul in order to save and use him as an apostle for the Gentiles. He has received *grace* and *apostleship* in order to call people from darkness to light, from Satan to God – to establish obedience that comes from faith. God is there, and He is not silent. He has spoken, he has acted – the Word became flesh, God became man in Jesus Christ. It is the mercy of God. Later on in 2 Cor it is called the ministry of reconciliation: *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled*

*to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Dear friends, we have also by His mercy, through baptism and faith been called, into salvation and to a ministry. ... *since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.*

Secondly, we have been given a frank, an open ministry based upon faith and a good conscience. Paul favours transparency; he has no hidden agenda. ... *we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.* A contrary attitude is marked by compromises and accommodation, efforts to make skillful selections from the given revelation, the Word of God. This is a serious attitude, you do not make a play with God! You might be struck by blindness: *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* Paul urges Timothy ... *holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith.* And Peter in the same manner: ... *keeping a clear conscience.*

Remember – a frank ministry based upon faith and a good conscience.

Thirdly, the given message is not from man, but from God! ... *what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.* For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. God is the Lord of creation and salvation – the two main themes in the Bible. The significance of man, due to the fall into sin, is marked by selfishness – being self-centred, taking the position from God – the wish to be like God. Salvation from God means that we are saved from ourselves, our sins – and set free through Christ, the Saviour, into a new life. The Gospel proclaims the suffering, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, who ... *was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.* Ministering a message, not from man but from God – the Gospel. What is it all about, its essence? Paul says: ... *what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.*

A message, not from man but from God – the Gospel. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel, Paul says!

Fourthly, the servants of Christ perform this ministry in weakness and strength. There is something contradictory, a paradox. ... *we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.* The treasure is the true Gospel – the servants have it in jars of clay. Paul gives account for this several

times in this letter – the glorious ministry with its hardship:

*... We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you (2 Cor 4).*

*... as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything (2 Cor 6).*

Can you see the contradictory position, the paradox? You somehow are a loser – in yourself, but a real winner – in and through Christ! Later on in this letter Paul puts it this way: ... when I am weak, then I am strong ... *My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness*, says the Lord.

Remember: A ministry in weakness and strength.

Summary:

- A ministry based upon God's mercy
- A frank ministry based upon faith and a good conscience
- Ministering a message, not from man but from God – the Gospel
- A ministry in weakness and strength

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.*

A devotion at the Consistory meeting in Helsinki, Finland on 19 of August, 2011

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