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Light out of Darkness

4: 1-6

Light out of darkness DIG: In a world obsessed with image, it can be difficult to remain authentic. Why is absolute honesty essential for those who serve God? What shameful and underhanded methods are Messianics and Christian missions accused of using? What are some of the ways the Devil blinds people to God's truth? Why does Paul compare himself (and all believers) to jars of clay? What enabled Paul not to lose hope? How could Paul say that everything he had endured was for the Corinthian believers' benefit?

REFLECT: What things do you do that keep you from losing heart? What is the treasure you have from God? What are you supposed to do with it? How does knowing that you possess this ultimate treasure allow you to view your trials and struggles in a different light - as Paul was able to do? In this passage, Paul makes a big deal about speaking for and about God. How much do you do this in your life? How could you do more? What are some of the things you can do right now to shine Messiah's glory into the world?

If one truly wants to encounter the God of Isra'el, then this has to be done via the Messiah He has sent.

Therefore, points back to **Paul's** defense of **his** ministry (**to see link click [Ak](#) - Paul Defends His Ministry**). **Since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.** Paul had no reason to **lose heart (Galatians 6:9)**. He had been saved on the road to Damascus by **Yeshua Himself** (see the commentary on **Acts [Bc](#) - Sha'ul Turns from Murder to Messiah**), and called to be **an apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13, 15:16)**. He knew that **he** was running **the race to win** an eternal crown (**First Corinthians 9:24**). Even though it wasn't an easy task, there was no reason to **lose heart (4:1)**, no matter how much **he** was slandered by **the false apostles back in Corinth** (see **[Af](#) - The Problem of the False Apostles**).

Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that **You** are the constant companion of everyone who loves **You** from their heart. Thank **You**! Nowadays it is easy to **lose heart**. It is no longer allowed to speak up for **Your** truth. When **You** love someone as much as I love **You**, it's so natural to want to talk about how wonderful **You** are, and the wonderful things **You** say in **Your Word**, but today, much of **Your** truth is twisted and many who follow **You** are denied the right to talk of **You**. Praise **You** that **You** are still in control, always with me, watching over every detail that touches my life. **For You have said, "I will never leave you or abandon you" (Hebrews 13:5).** **Your** presence and companionship is such a joy! No reason to **lose heart** when we can look into **Your** loving eyes and squeeze **Daddy's** hand. Friends and family may not be nearby or they may fail us, but **You** are right by my side all the time! **You** are ever faithful! Love **You** so much, dear **Daddy**. In **Your** holy **Son's** name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen

As David Stern describes in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary* of **Second Corinthians**, like **Paul**, Messianic Jews and Christian missionaries to Jews are frequently accused of using unethical and underhanded means to "win converts." As a rule, the charges lack evidence and are based on misunderstanding; but since they are often believed anyway, they deserve to be examined and refuted. At the same time, it is good for us who are B'rit Chadashah believers to be reminded of the standards we can legitimately be expected to observe.

Messianic Jews and Messianic Gentiles (I consider myself a Messianic Gentile) and Christian missions should refer to **4:2** both in defending against charges of unethical methods and in guiding their own behavior. On the one hand, there is no guarantee the people who call themselves Messianic or Christian will in fact behave ethically; but on the other hand, there is no reason to put up with unsupported charges and rumors of ethical misconduct designed only to discredit Messianic Judaism, Christian missions, and most of all, **the Gospel!**

But first, the problem, which is that many official and self-appointed spokesmen for the Jewish community and for some streams of Christianity circulate reports intended to insulate the Jewish people against **the gospel** by creating the impression that Messianic Jews and Christian missions **use shameful and underhanded methods employing deception or distorting God's message**. More specifically, such charges have included the following:

1. Enticement to convert: Messianic Jewish congregations and Christian missions are accused of supplying money, food, clothing, and services like schooling or child

care, making their receipt conditional upon the recipients' converting to abandoning their Jewish faith without making it clear that the recipients (especially minors) will be exposed to hearing **the Gospel** and being encouraged to convert. The charge is so widely believed in Isra'el that from time to time Israelis will show up at the missions expecting help in emigrating to America in exchange for converting to Christianity. It produces such widespread fear of conversion that the unscrupulous can use it as a threat by saying something like, "Unless you [the Israeli authorities] do what I want [give me a house, a loan or a car] I will convert to Christianity."

The Good News commands hospitality and kindness; therefore, believers can be expected to be friendly and give generously. But the friendliness and the giving are to be without expecting anything in return (**Matthew 5:42** and **46-47**), least of all anything so intangible as trusting in **God** and **His Messiah**. Only **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh**, not believers, can move an unbeliever to undergo this radical change of heart. Besides, it demeans **the gospel** to force it on anyone – **the Good News** either commends itself or it doesn't. **So if indeed our Good News is veiled, it is veiled only to those in the process of being lost. They do not come to trust because the god of this world has blinded their minds, in order to prevent them from seeing the light shining from the Good News about the glory of the Messiah, who is the image of God. For what we are proclaiming is not ourselves, but the Messiah Yeshua as Lord, with ourselves as slaves for you because of Yeshua. For it is the God who once said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has made his light shine in our hearts, the light of the knowledge of God's glory shining in the face of the Messiah Yeshua (4:3-6).** How is **Satan the god of this world**? The phrase **god of this world** indicates that Satan is the major influence of the ideas, opinions, goals, and views of the majority of people.

The phrase **the god of this world** indicates that **Satan** is the major influence on the ideals, opinions, goals, and views of the majority of people. **His** influence encompasses **the world's** philosophies, education, and commerce. When people live as if there is no **God**, they by default follow **the god of this world**. The unholy thoughts, destructive ideas, wild speculations, and false religions of this world have sprung from **Satan's** lies and deceptions.

Satan is also called **the prince of the power of the air** in **Ephesians 2:2**. He is **the ruler of this world** in **John 12:31**. These titles and many more signify **Satan's** capabilities. **He** wields a certain amount of authority and power in **this world**. **He** is not a king, but a prince, a ruler of some sort. In some way **he** rules

over the world and the people in it, in fact **the whole world is under the control of the evil one (First John 5:19).**

This is not to say that **Satan** rules the world completely; **God** is still sovereign. **Satan** is not **God** – capital **G** – **he** is a god—small **g**. **God**, in **His** infinite, inscrutable wisdom, has allowed **Satan** to operate in this world within the boundaries **God** has set for **him**. **Satan's** limits are clearly seen in **Job 1** and **2**. There, **Satan** must give an account of **himself** to **God**, and it seems that **he** must have **God's** permission to carry out **his** plans. At no time can **Satan** do all **he** wants, for **God** restricts **his** actions.

Satan may be **the god of this world**, but his domain is limited to unbelievers. Born-again children of **God** are no longer under the rule of **Satan**. **God the Father** has **rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves (Colossians 1:13)**. The apostle Paul was sent by **God** to turn people **from the power of Satan to God (Acts 26:18)**. Unbelievers, however free they may think they are, are caught **in the snare of the devil (Second Timothy 2:26)** and lie in **the power of the evil one (First John 5:19)**.

As **the god of this world**, **Satan** exercises his power over the unbelieving world to keep them from **Jesus**. **Second Corinthians 4:4** indicates that **he** is responsible for the spiritual blindness of people without **Christ**, **“The god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.”** **Satan** snatches the Gospel from people's hearts. **Whoever hears the message about the Kingdom, but doesn't understand it, is like the seed sown along the path - the Evil One comes and seizes what was sown in his heart (Matthew 13:19)**. **He** promotes false philosophies and **doctrines of demons (First Timothy 4:1 NKJV)**. **Satan's** philosophies are the fortresses in which people are imprisoned, and they must be set free by **Christ**.

As **the god of this world**, **Satan** has spread **his** lies far and wide. Many of his lies have been successful in taking root and deceiving millions. Here are a few of his more popular lies: **“God** doesn't exist,” **“God** doesn't care about you,” **“God** cannot be trusted,” **“Jesus** did not rise again,” **“You** can go to heaven if you're good enough.”

As **the god of this world**, **Satan** puts forth **his** agenda, and **the unbelievers** in **the world** follow it. Thankfully, our **Lord** is greater than **the god of this world**, as **He** proved every time **He** cast out **a demon (Mark 5:17)**. **Jesus** came to open

eyes that are blind, to free the captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness (Isaiah 42:7). The god of this world is no match for Him because when Jesus returns the prince of this world will be driven out (John 12:31).

2. Preying on the disadvantaged: Messianic Jewish congregations and Christian missions are accused of concentrating upon the disadvantaged – the young, the old, the poor, the physically handicapped, and the psychologically distressed – and tailor their techniques to them, rather than presenting their case openly and frankly in a rational manner that can either be accepted or rejected by an adult in full possession of their intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and financial powers.

When **the Pharisees** asked why **Yeshua ate with “sinners”** (the disadvantaged of their day), He answered: **The ones who need a doctor aren’t the healthy but the sick (Matthew 9:12).** The Good News is for everyone, including the disadvantaged. The real reason for this charge, then, is to discredit **the gospel** in the eyes of the very people likely to respond to it, namely, people who have come to the end of themselves. It is reasonable to proclaim **the gospel** to people likely to accept it. Accordingly, the Jews likely to accept it are students (because they are questioning their values), the elderly (because death is more of a reality for them and they want to be right with **God** before it happens), the poor (because **the gospel** can make them spiritually rich) and the depressed (because **the gospel** offers everlasting joy). In addition, there is no shortage of rational appeals to be made on behalf of **the gospel. Messiah** doesn’t ask anyone to check their brains at the door when following Him.

3. Deceptive misuse of Jewish sacred things and terms: Messianic congregations and Christian missions are accused of misusing Jewish sacred things such as kippah (yarmulke or skullcap), tallit (prayer shawl), phylacteries, Shabbat candles, Torah scrolls, Passover materials, and Jewish liturgies, in order to create a “false” impression that these groups are Jewish and not Christian, with the intention of luring Jewish people under the impression that they are not converting and believing in **Yeshua Messiah** as their **Lord** and **Savior**.

Messianic Jews are Jews also, and have as much right to use Jewish sacred things as non-Messianic Jews do. The latter do not have a patent on them. As far as deception goes, it is the responsibility of believers to inform inquirers that **the gospel is the gospel.** Messianic believers often use “Messianic” instead of “Christian,” “**Yeshua**” instead of “**Jesus**,” “congregation or synagogue” instead of “church,” “B’rit

Chadashah” instead of “New Testament,” “TaNaKh” instead of “Old Testament,” and “**Messiah**” instead of “**Christ**.” The purpose is to steer clear of the negative connotations due to history. Not to the B’rit Chadashah.

4. Insincere Christian conversion to Judaism: A special case of deception is when Gentiles dress like Jews or even “convert” to Judaism while secretly remaining Christians with missionary intentions.

It is possible for a Gentile Christian to have, like **Ruth**, such a strong identification with the Jewish people that she wishes to be one of them, and for her to identify in this way despite the non-Messianic rejection to **Yeshua**. She could convert in all honesty if she makes known the fact that she continues to believe that **Yeshua** is **the Messiah**. Some have done that. But others have withheld that critical piece of information, and in doing so, have crossed the ethical barrier. Where conversion to Judaism is commonly allowed for such casual reasons as outward legitimization of marriage between a Jew and a Gentile, or, as in Isra’el, making it possible for a person to participate in the life of the State as a Jewish citizen, and the conversion process itself makes no demand that the convert deny **Yeshua**, then one is tempted to say that it is less critical for a Gentile Christian to volunteer that he remains faithful to **Yeshua**. Against this, it is up to the believer to uphold the highest ethical standards, regardless of how the world around him operates.

5. Distortion of the TaNaKh: Messianic Jewish congregations and Christian missions are accused of distorting the TaNaKh, the Christian Old Testament, by quoting verses out of context and even mis-translating or changing the text, in order to “prove” that **Yeshua** is **the Messiah** and that the Church is the New Isra’el.

It is important to understand that **Paul** was the target of the same accusations: **he** was said to be **huckstering God’s message for a fee (2:17)**, being filled with pride **(3:1a)**, that **he** lacked the proper official **letters of commendation (3:1b)**, **corrupting people** and **taking advantage of them (7:2)**, and misleading **them** with **trickery (12:16)**. **His** answer to these charges was that **God has shown us such mercy by changing us into His image (3:18) that we do not lose courage** to conduct ourselves in an ethical manner **as we do the work** which **ADONAI has given us**, despite the accusations, temptations and adverse conditions. Therefore, **Paul** writes: **Indeed, we refuse to make use of shameful underhanded methods, employing deception or distorting God’s message. On the contrary, we** avoid unethical behavior **we** can hold our heads high in

proclaiming **the gospel**, confident, like Paul, **we** can say: **By making very clear what the truth is, we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God (Second Corinthians 4:2; also see First Thessalonians 2:3-12 where Paul addresses similar accusations).**¹⁰⁷

To those who criticized **his** preaching as irrelevant, offensive and ineffective, **Paul** replied: **So, if indeed our Good News is veiled, it is veiled only to those in the process of being lost (4:3).** Fallen, dead in **their sins**, and spiritually **blinded**, those who reject **the Good News** are headed for eternal doom (**Second Corinthians 2:15; Luke 12:4-5; Romans 2:12; First Corinthians 1:18; Second Thessalonians 2:9-11**). Therefore, **the natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are discerned through the Spirit (First Corinthians 2:14).** They reject **the gospel** message because **they love the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds are evil (John 3:19).**

In addition to **their own love of sin, unbelievers** reject **the Good News** because **Satan, who is the god of this world (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11; Ephesians 2:2; 2 Timothy 2:26; 1 John 5:19), has blinded the minds of those who don’t believe, and the veil remains (see [Aw - Veiling and Unveiling](#))** as long as they do not turn to **ADONAI (4:4a).** **The Serpent of Old** controls the ideologies, opinions, hopes, aims, goals and viewpoints currently in **the world (10:3-5).** **He** is behind the world’s faulty systems of philosophy, psychology, education, sociology, ethics, and economics. But perhaps **his** greatest influence is in the realm of false religion. Of course, **the Adversary** is not **a god**, but a created being (with a choice). **He** is called **a god** because **his** deluded followers serve **him** as if **he** were one. **The Evil One** is the archetype of all the false **gods** in all the false religions **he** has spawned (see the commentary on **Revelation Dd - I Saw a Woman Holding a Golden Cup**).

It is that massive and pervasive influence over society by which **the Deceiver** deludes the unregenerate so **they are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don’t understand this message about the glory of Messiah, who is the exact likeness of God (4:4b NLT).** Except in rare cases, **the Ruler of this world** and **his demons** do not directly indwell individuals. **They** don’t need to. **The Old Serpent** has created a system that panders to the depravity of **unbelievers** and drives **them** deeper into **darkness.** In addition to being dead in **their sins and acts of disobedience (Ephesians 2:1); veiled from the truth (3:15); loved the darkness rather than the light (John**

3:19-20); unbelievers follow the ways of this world and of the Prince of the Power of the Air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient . . . [living] in the lusts of the flesh, gratifying the cravings of [their] sinful nature and are by nature objects of wrath (Ephesians 2:2-3). They are of [their] father the devil, and [they] want to do the desires of [their] father (John 8:44). All the evil of the human heart – crime, hatred, bitterness, anger, injustice, immorality, and conflict between nations and individuals – is pandered to by the agenda of **the Lawless One**. The world system **he** has created inflames **the evil** desires of people, causing **them** to be willfully **blind** and to **love their darkness**.

The immeasurable privilege of proclaiming the glorious gospel of **Yeshua Messiah** might lead some to become proud and **boastful**. In fact, one of the slanderous accusations of **the false apostles** made against **Paul** was that **he** preached with selfish motives. **They** claimed that **he** was in the ministry for **his** own self-exaltation, self-promotion, self-aggrandizement, power, prestige, and prominence. But that could not have been further from the truth. By declaring: **For what we are proclaiming is not ourselves, but the Messiah Yeshua as Lord, with ourselves as slaves for you because of Yeshua (4:5), Paul** distinguished **himself** from **the false apostles**, who did, in fact, preach for **themselves**. Later in **his** letter **he** wrote: **We don't dare class or compare ourselves with some of the people who advertise themselves. In measuring themselves against each other and comparing themselves with each other, they are simply stupid (10:12).** Thus, **Paul's** disclaimer was both a denial of **the false apostle's** charge and an indictment against **them**.

Far from being arrogant, proud, and self-assured, **Paul** ministered in **Corinth in weakness and in fear, with much trembling (First Corinthians 2:3)**. Instead of **boasting** of **his** own abilities and successes, **he** wrote: **On my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses . . . I would rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Messiah may dwell in me (12:5 and 9).** **Paul's** vision of the glory of **Messiah** dominated **his** life, and **his** love for **Yeshua** consumed **the apostle**.¹⁰⁸



Paul paraphrased **Genesis 1:3**, noting that **God who once said, “Let light shine out of darkness,”** has done something additional in us through the gospel. **Paul** was making a connection between the creation and the recreation. Just as **darkness covered the surface of the earth** and **God’s light overcame it**, so also **the darkness** of sin covers our lives, but **God overcame it**. This had been **Paul’s** experience on **the Damascus Road**, when **a light from heaven flashed around him (Acts 9:3)**. Confronted with **the risen Lord**, **he became a new creation (5:17)**.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, **Paul** declared that through **Yeshua Messiah, the light of the world** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Gr - I AM the Light of the World**), **ADONAI has made His light shine in our hearts**. What is **God’s** illuminating work **in our hearts**? It is bringing **the light of the knowledge of God’s glory shining in the face of the Messiah Yeshua (4:6)**.

You can get attention by being slick and flashy and by cultivating a certain image, but you’ll never have a deep impact on others that way. The most powerful and eternally significant people are those who, like **Paul**, realize they are merely **clay jars** who have been filled with **priceless treasure** (see **Az - Priceless Treasure in Clay Jars**). They realize **God** is the point, not them. The Bible teaches that we exist to bring glory to **ADONAI**, to **shine** for **Him**, and point others to **Him**. Like John the Baptist, we need to say, **“He must become greater; I must become less” (John 3:30)**. Today we need to focus on the substance of our lives more so than on mere style. Spiritual depth, authenticity, integrity, faithfulness – these are the qualities that honor **the LORD** and cause others to stop and stare.¹¹⁰