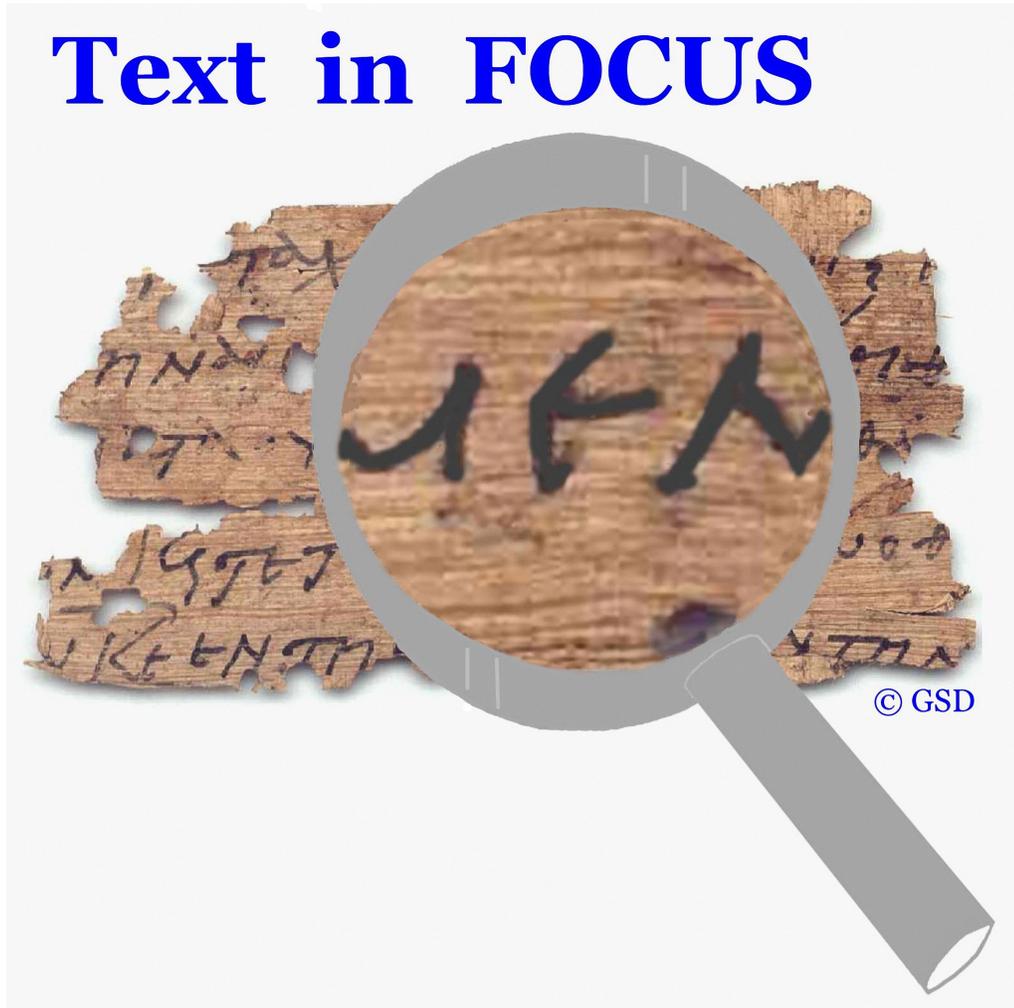


Text in FOCUS



Text in Focus number - 004

II Corinthians 4:4

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THE ISSUE

I first recall reading II Corinthians 4:4 in 1972, in my then new New American Standard Bible. The passage appeared thusly:

in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (NASB)

After I began teaching myself Greek, I realized that a more literal translation would generate this..."the god of this age...". There is a difference between "age" and "world" in most contexts. Yet note that the word for "god" has a lower case "g", indicating not the God (YHWH) of the Bible. The Greek word is θεος, and most commentaries refer this "god" to Satan; and in 1972, as a very young Christian, I thus assumed that this indeed was referring to Satan.

This morning (April 2013), I was casually reading in my Greek New Testament, II Corinthians 4. When I read verse four, I thought in my mind that God (YHWH) has done this blinding, and I kept on reading. A short time later, as I was meditating upon the text, it occurred to me, that most others thought of this "god" as Satan! Was my initial understanding in error? At first I quickly corrected myself, as I recall hearing from many other sources that this was Satan, but then I hesitated, I felt my attention was drawn to this passage. As I pondered the ramifications of both sides (God or god) I realized that there existed good arguments for both sides. Thus, the "issue" for this

paper was born. Herein I offer my solution, I feel confident that it is the correct solution, that no ambiguity exists, and that my solution may be beneficial to others, so....

THE SOLUTION

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, in the garden, they basically handed over to Satan their authority as masters of this earth. Genesis 1:26 states:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them **rule** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." (NASB)

Note too, Psalms 8:4-6:

What is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him?
Yet Thou hast made him a little lower than God, And dost crown him with glory and majesty!
Thou dost make him to rule over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet, (NASB)

The transfer of rulership from man to Satan, can be deduced from such passages as Ephesians 6:11-12, (NASB)

Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Luke 4:6,

And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. (NASB)

I John 5:19,

We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. (NASB)

Apparently, Satan was limited, as many passages show Jesus exercising power over Satan and his demons throughout the gospels. However, Satan did usurp man's original authority, Isaiah 49:24-26 alludes to this; it seems that, legally, Satan did have much power and authority. Until a believer accepts the truth of the gospel, he or she is basically in the domain of the evil one. Ephesians chapter two amplifies this fact as well as the implications of Colossians 1:13,

For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to [or better as - "into"] the kingdom of His beloved Son, (NASB)

Satan is the "ruler of this world". He is never referred to as the "god of this world" nor as the "god of this age" unless we impose that meaning upon II Corinthians 4:4. This is the only Biblical text which refers to Satan as (a) god! If indeed that meaning is valid. When translators view this text as illustrating Satan blinding the minds of unbelievers, they face little exegetical difficulties, and little explanation if any is ever needed. However, if this god is viewed as the God of the Bible, some explanation seems required. In my solution to the issue, I am fairly certain that our text is referring to YHWH, the God of the

Bible Who does the actual blinding. Explanation is required because most Christians feel that this blinding is contrary to the very nature of God, God Who, “desires (Θελει) all men to be saved...”. I Timothy 2:4a. One might even argue that it seems vain to preach salvation to others if God had prior blinded their minds, so that the truth of the gospel cannot penetrate the veil. These types of objections reveal that the objectors are merely looking at the issues at a very superficial level, that they are apparently unaware that some deeper issues lie just beneath the surface. So with shovel in hand, I ask for your permission to dig a little deeper.

SUBLIME ISSUES

Note II Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing [βουλομαι] for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. (NASB)

If God wants for all humans to be saved, who can frustrate His will? Yet the Bible is also clear in stating that most humans will not accept the truth! That the way to Gehenna is wide, that despite the fact that many are called, few are chosen. So is the Bible contradictory, is it playing some sort of a game? There are some who suspect this is just the case, that the Bible is an untrustworthy document. But another factor is involved, a very important factor

which also impacts our passage under review, II Corinthians 4:4. That factor is “election” the divine prerogative which belongs to God alone.

If someone is an unbeliever, then why bother “blinding” their thoughts or minds? There is a reason, it is not some unnecessary or redundant action on God's behalf. God is acting with intent, the blinding is necessary and important, had these unbelievers not been blinded beforehand, then the very will, the very plans of God Himself could be brought into jeopardy! Allow me to explain.

I am convinced that all humans are born with a seed within them, a seed of saving faith. Yet most folks will not express this faith, it will be—as a seed—removed by Satan, it will not root, it will not bear fruit. (Recall the parable of the four seeds). There are several great powers on earth, one being Satan and his cohorts, another being the Holy Spirit, another being the will of God, and another being the power exuded by the Word or the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that gospel which activates that special seed: much like the effects of light upon plants containing the pigment, chlorophyl, the light becomes energy. The seed is activated within the new believers bosom, and salvation results. The Word is powerful!

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
(NASB) Note: “active” is from a Greek word which is a root for our “energy”.

Now we know that Satan fails if he is found fighting against himself, (Mark 3:26). The same is true if God is found dividing against Himself. It would be to Satan's advantage if he can somehow

get God to work against Himself, like fighting fire with fire, or in this case, power with power. If God wills someone to be saved, that person will be saved. If another person, who hates God, is destined for Gehenna, via the will of God, that person cannot be exposed to a power which can save that person. Only one other power can save such souls, if they should encounter the light of the Gospel, if that light should penetrate their darkness, they could avoid God's elective will, they could become saved, *despite* God's will. Thus the saving power of the gospel could be actually used "against" the very will of God! Impossible you shout! Yes, it is because God has first also blinded the unbelievers' minds. A double security system.

In his comments upon Isaiah 6:10, 11, Edward Young states that Isaiah seems to "oppose the word of God with the word of God." (*The Book of Isaiah*, volume II, page 258). Here in Isaiah we have another example with the issue we note in II Corinthians 4:4, Here is the Isaiah passage:

And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.' "Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Lest they see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed." (NASB)

God willed that Isaiah's preaching would be in vain. These Israelites, in that age, were doomed. That was God's will. The Israelites would hear Isaiah's prophecy and preaching, but not respond, as they had first been blinded by God. All prior attempts to bring about repentance had been exhausted, now God's wrath would ensue.

Isaiah asks how long would the judgment last and God tells him, and also adds that room exists for individuals to respond, even though the nation as a whole is doomed, God leaves room for certain individuals to respond, individuals who were not first blinded. Isaiah was just such an individual.

Clearly then, in certain situations and instances, God will make doubly sure that certain persons will not see the truth, even though they would be exposed to the powerful rays of gospel light. The election process of God, is one process in which Satan cannot ever interfere with. Satan can harass the creation, he uses his minions to promote evil, and all sorts of wicked actions, but he cannot touch the election process ordained by God. Satan cannot even use God's word as a weapon against God. Satan attempted to use God's word, when tempting Jesus Christ, Satan quoted parts of Psalm 91. But Satan's quotation was not to be used as a test, and Jesus demonstrated a wonderful fact we all need to heed. Basically it is this: all sorts of things can be stated from God's word, apparent contradictions seem to abound, however, one must keep the entire context of Scripture in view. The parts are properly framed by the whole. Satan thrives on distortion, he relies upon people who know a little bit of the Word, just enough to make gross mistakes. By destroying or ignoring the contexts, Satan can make the Bible itself appear false and misleading. Satan believes strongly upon this tactic, even using it upon our Lord in Matthew four (the temptation text). There is no question but that he is very successful in using such tactics upon Christians, even knowledgeable saints. It is best to exercise patience in such situations! For example, we know the text which states that Jesus Christ is THE way and THE truth and THE life. One could arrange texts from the

Bible to illustrate other ways to get to heaven, or other ways to be saved. Recall that texts describing death are often misused, especially those from poetic books.

First: even before preaching, the election of God determines who is to be saved. There are saints in heaven who never heard the gospel, recall the death of babies, or of the severely retarded, or even of natives who had never seen or heard of the Bible (though they did believe!). Second: when an elected saint comes into contact with the gospel message, that powerful Word activates their faith, the seed sprouts! This word is so powerful, that it could sprout all faith-seeds, even those within the bosoms of the non-elect.

God prevents this from happening, by first blinding all non-elect. And I am convinced II Corinthians 4:4 makes this clear. There exists no reason why Satan would expend any effort in blinding the eyes of pagans. For one, Satan cannot alter the election process, he cannot blind the eyes of the chosen. And again as to the pagans, Satan has no reason why he would want to blind them.

Finally, "of this age" is seen 11x in the \mathfrak{R} , it is seen 7x in Nestles Greek text. It is used simply to indicate this age and not another time period. God is always God, and when Paul speaks of the the "God of this age" he means during this particular dispensation. During this present age, all non-elect have a veil over their eyes. This may or may not be true in other dispensations. For example in Matthew 13:40, Jesus is referring to the Kingdom age. Satan cannot blind God's people, in fact it would seem that Satan has little to do, in reality, in the salvation/elections affairs of God: Satan in this particular arena is an impotent instrument.

During the patristic era, many expositors, did view the God, as the God of the Bible. In addition they would often declare that the genitive phrase (τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου) “the one of age this”, or “of this age”, refers to the unbelievers, and would render the verse thusly,

in whose case God has blinded the minds of the unbelieving of this world, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. Per Chrysostom, Origen, Theodoret, Hillary, Augustine, et al.

This is a straining of the natural flow of the Greek, making the phrase a type of a proleptic genitive. There is no need to attempt this. Our hearts, minds, and understandings are all in God's control. Via the elective powers of God, He has determined, beforehand, who would not see and who would see. And so it is.

So there you have it, why I believe that in II Corinthians 4:4 the God of the age, is the God of the Bible.