

Lesson 8: II Corinthians 4:7-18

1) **7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.**

a) In this age, treasure is stored in earthen pots. Paul does not specify what he means by treasure, but he almost certainly means the "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" from verse 6.

i) History has provided us a wonderful illustration of the point Paul is making. The Dead Sea Scrolls were the most important archaeological find of the last century, and possibly of all centuries -- and for 2000 years they were stored in and protected by ordinary clay jars.

b) The term earthen vessels implies something that is fragile, inferior, and expendable.

i) We talk a great deal about the power of man, but the real characteristic of man is not his power but his weakness. As Pascal said, "A drop of water or a breath of air can kill him."

(1) 1 Peter 1:24-25 For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: 25 But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

(2) Paul depicts the treasure of that gospel stored in earthen vessels of flesh.

ii) The image of earthen vessels is used elsewhere in the Bible.

(1) Job 4:18-19 If He puts no trust in His servants, If He charges His angels with error, 19 How much more those who dwell in houses of clay, Whose foundation is in the dust, Who are crushed before a moth?

(2) Lamentations 4:2 The precious sons of Zion, Valuable as fine gold, How they are regarded as clay pots, The work of the hands of the potter!

(3) Isaiah 30:14 And He shall break it like the breaking of the potter's vessel, which is broken in pieces; He shall not spare. So there shall not be found among its fragments a shard to take fire from the hearth, or to take water from the cistern.

(4) Jeremiah 19:1, 10-11 Thus says the LORD: "Go and get a potter's earthen flask, and take some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests. ... 10 " Then you shall break the flask in the sight of the men who go with you, 11 "and say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of

hosts: "Even so I will break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, which cannot be made whole again; and they shall bury them in Tophet till there is no place to bury.

- (5)** Romans 9:21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?
- c)** Picturing himself as an ordinary, everyday clay pot containing an invaluable treasure is one of Paul's most striking visual images.
- i)** The image underscores Paul's weakness. A clay pot is prone to breakage and easily chipped or cracked. One commentator described it as "quintessentially fragile."
 - ii)** Second, the image underscores Paul's lowliness. Earthen pots were not things of beauty. Their cheapness would disguise the fact that they contained anything valuable at all. If it has any value or importance at all, it must be because of what it contains.
 - iii)** Third, the image underscores Paul's expendability. When an earthen vessel broke, it was discarded. They were too cheap to repair. Also, once hardened in a kiln, it was not recyclable. Once broken, it was useless.
- (1)** Also, according to Jewish purity laws, it was impossible to render an earthen vessel ritually clean when it became defiled.
- (2)** This does not mean that ministers of the gospel are cheap and fungible, although they often tend to be treated that way by the world and sometimes even by other Christians. But no one is indispensable in God's plan; we are all entrusted with the proclamation of the gospel, and if one falls away through death or for some other reason, then others must come forward to take his place. In that sense, we are all like clay pots; our importance comes only from what we contain and what we carry.
- d)** The image of clay jars expresses the wisdom of God.
- i)** Why put divine treasure in an earthen pot? To show that the treasure has nothing to do with the pot.
 - (1)** Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.
 - ii)** The power is in the gospel rather than the proclaimer of the gospel. The power is from God; not from man.
 - (1)** 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 But God has chosen the foolish things of the world

to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence.

- iii) Who is worthy to be a container for the glory of God and the gospel of Christ? No one. The smartest person isn't smart enough; the purest person isn't pure enough; the most spiritual person isn't spiritual enough; the most talented person isn't talented enough. We are all just clay jars holding an unspeakably great treasure.
- e) In 2 Corinthians 10:10 we see that some had complained that Paul's bodily presence was weak, and his speech contemptible.
 - i) Paul tells the Corinthians that his all too conspicuous weakness that so annoys some of them is divinely intended to highlight God's strength.
 - ii) Paul has been talking about the sufficiency, glory, and boldness of his ministry, but the danger is that one (and particularly the Corinthians) might be tempted to reverence the preacher rather than the message.
 - iii) That is why the treasure is stored in cracked, clay pots -- with some being more cracked than others!
 - iv) In this way, Paul undercuts his showy, bombastic, and pretentious rivals, whose manner was different from his own.
 - v) Acts 9:15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he [Paul] is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.
- f) Paul also affirms that God's power is manifest in humans only in their weakness and shame.
 - i) 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 provides a helpful commentary on this verse:
 - (1) 9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.
 - ii) Paul does not say that power drives out weakness. Instead, power comes to its full strength in and through weakness.
 - iii) Paul contends that he is most powerful when he is least reliant on his own

resources and power.

iv) God's power is revealed in human beings who, in the eyes of the world, are of no account. For example, a group of uneducated fishermen were by the power of God able to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth.

g) Verse 7 prepares the reader for Paul's list of hardships that follows.

i) If such a brittle vessel can survive intact after all that Paul has been through, then the credit must belong to God rather than to durability of the clay pot.

h) Sadly, some of the Corinthians had failed to perceive any of this significance.

i) Their response to Paul was little different from the world's response to the cross -- foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews. How, they ask, could such a worthless vessel claim to be a container for the glory of God?

ii) Paul is weak, disreputable, hungry, poorly clothed, beaten, homeless, and easily dismissed as refuse and the dregs of all things (1 Corinthians 4:1-13). He has suffered floggings, stonings, mobbings, imprisonments, labors, shipwrecks, muggings, sleeplessness, exposure, thirst, and hunger (6:4-10 and 11:23-27).

iii) Paul hardly serves as an attractive endorsement for the advantages of becoming a Christian.

iv) The Corinthians would perhaps more readily accept the commands and censure of someone with a more regal bearing and a greater show of wisdom, strength, and honor.

v) Thus, they have failed to see God's power at work in Paul's suffering, which suggests that they have failed to grasp the full meaning of the cross.

vi) Even though Paul may look like death, his suffering is really the way to life, and is the way that God has chosen to reveal and spread the gospel.

i) Paul's image of clay jars also emphasizes the risk of God. Perfect vessels are safe, but they bring glory to themselves. Earthen vessels are risky, but can bring profound glory to God. We are those earthen vessels --- and while we put our faith in God, God has also (in a sense) put his faith in us. We should pray that we will never let him down. Christians must never be risk adverse when it comes to spreading the gospel.

2) 8-9 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast

down, but not destroyed;

- a)** The four pairs of participles in these two verses illustrate what Paul means about being fragile and how power comes from God to save him.
- b)** The first term is "troubled" or "afflicted."
 - i)** The theme of affliction dominates this letter. The noun "affliction" occurs nine times, and the verb three times.
 - ii)** We are afflicted, yet not distressed. The word "distressed" here means confined or pressed.
 - iii)** A paraphrase might be "we are hard-pressed but never cornered" or "we are squeezed but not squashed."
 - iv)** He was hard-pressed, but not crushed internally. His internal spirit was not gasping for breath.
- c)** The second term is "perplexed."
 - i)** Another translation uses the phrase "at wit's end."
 - ii)** We should pause and note that Paul is not stoical at all about his troubles. When you asked Paul how he was, he did not say he was fine when he was not fine. There's probably a lesson in there somewhere for us.
 - iii)** But once again, God provides the contrast: Paul was perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are perplexed, but not thoroughly perplexed.
 - iv)** There is a play on words in the Greek that is difficult to capture in English, but one tried to do so with the translation "we are despairing, but not utterly desperate." Or perhaps "we are stressed, but not stressed out."
- d)** The third term is "persecuted."
 - i)** Paul was persecuted but not forsaken or abandoned by God.
 - ii)** The same verb "forsaken" translates Jesus cry from the cross in Mark 15:34 quoting Psalm 22:1.
 - iii)** Paul knows from experience that God does not abandon his own.
 - (1)** Deuteronomy 31:6 "Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you."

(2) But some might argue that God had forsaken his own people, the Jews. Paul addresses that very issue in Romans 9-11, which are explained verse by verse at www.thywordistruth.com.

(3) God does not forsake his own, and that is why Paul was not crushed, despondent, or destroyed, even when the Corinthians seemed to have abandoned and forsaken him.

(4) 2 Timothy 4:16-17 At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. 17 But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

e) The fourth term is "struck down" or "cast down."

i) The verb translated "cast down" can mean "laid low by a blow or a weapon, abused or bullied, cast off or rejected, stricken with an illness, or even slain." One commentator described it as a technical term for a wrestler that throws his opponent to the floor.

ii) Paul is cast down, but not destroyed. Phillips translates this phrase as "knocked down but never knocked out."

f) "Viewed as a whole, the hardships Paul lists have, as it were, caused cracks in him as an earthen vessel, but the vessel itself remains intact. The vessel is held together by the power of divine adhesive, and the light that shines through those cracks is none other than the light of the life of Jesus."

g) And through those cracks the divine light from the treasure within also shines outward to enlighten others.

h) If Paul were Superman he could hardly proclaim the message of the cross. His weakness and God's power working in and through his weakness highlights the cross of Christ. Christ crucified is not only his message, but it is also his model. He has become the suffering apostle of the suffering Messiah.

i) Many people today long to know the power of His resurrection, but they want nothing to do with the fellowship of his sufferings. But we cannot have one without the other. No cross, No crown!

i) Romans 8:17 "...if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."

3) 10-11 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. 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.

- a) Paul sums up his apostolic ministry with these words: "We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus."
- i) Two keys words in this clause are "death" and "carry around."
 - ii) Paul does not use the common word for death (thanatos) but instead uses nekrosis, which is a broader term applying to more than just the moment of death. It would include the process of weakening that led to death as well as the 3 days in the tomb.
 - iii) Galatians 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.
 - iv) Paul's suffering continues to reveal God's saving activity as he carries around Christ's death and displays it for all to see.
 - v) The Greek word translated "carry around" occurs only three times in the New Testament.
 - vi) One commentator offers the intriguing suggestion that Paul is using the imagery of Greco-Roman epiphany processions in which the devotees sought to attract attention and new converts to their cult with a parade.
- (1) There are parallels between verses 10-11 and the Roman triumph in 2:14.
- (a) 2 Corinthians 2:14 Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.
- b) Paul is an earthen vessel, and his life and dying point to Christ.
- i) "Physical debility and decay, instead of being in apparent contradiction to the promise of life proclaimed in the gospel, are now found to be a means by which the believer identifies with Jesus in his final hours of dying and so makes manifest the new life which was the consequence of that death."
 - ii) Paul preached Christ crucified, and his life and ministry are conformed to Jesus' humility and shame.
- c) Paul endures the suffering unceasingly or constantly.

- i) The word "always" in verse 10 is placed first in the Greek for emphasis. Paul repeats the word in verse 11.
 - ii) Paul does not consider his plight to be temporary or atypical. For Paul, suffering was business as usual.
 - iii) "For the minister of Christ, the pattern of believing, speaking, and suffering is inescapable and perpetual."
- d) Paul says in verse 11 that he was "handed over" or "delivered" as Jesus was.
- i) The same Greek word is used for the handing over of Jesus to death.
 - (1) Romans 4:25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.
 - ii) The passive voice is a divine passive -- Paul firmly believes that God's purposes lie behind his suffering.
- e) Paul says he endures the suffering physically -- in the body.
- i) Through his weakness and affliction, Paul manifests the life of Jesus in his mortal flesh.
 - ii) Galatians 6:17 From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.
 - iii) 2 Corinthians 1:5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.
- f) Paul carries about the death of Jesus for the purpose of disclosing his life in order that others might be saved. The power of God becomes even more evident and effective through suffering, and this fact makes suffering bearable.
- g) Notice that Paul writes the single name Jesus four times in this verse and the next. The relation between Paul and Jesus was intimate. The sufferings Jesus had endured were now part of Paul's own life, the same Paul who had once persecuted the Jesus' church. As one commentator graphically described, for Paul, "even to name His human name was consolation."
- h) Note also that we do not have to wait until we die before the life of Jesus is revealed in our body. Paul explicitly says that Jesus' life is revealed in our mortal flesh now. When people see a Christian, they should see Christ living in that person.
- 4) 12 So then death worketh in us, but life in you.**

- a) The "so then" in verse 12 presents the startling conclusion from verses 10-11 -- death is at work in Paul and his coworkers, and life in the Corinthians. Paul understands that his suffering is benefiting the Corinthians in some way.
 - b) Paul made a similar statement in 1:6 ("Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation...").
 - i) Colossians 1:24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church.
 - c) It is because Paul shares in Christ's sufferings that his own sufferings are a benefit to others. Paul's sufferings occurred because of his mission work. He understood that the way to find life was to lose it, and the only way to follow Jesus was by daily taking up his cross.
 - d) What helps Paul bear up under his load of suffering is his conviction that it bears fruit in the life of others.
 - e) The "life" in verse 12 is not freedom from tribulation because many of the Corinthians no doubt also suffered. It refers instead to life in Christ, which the Corinthians received through Paul's proclamation of the gospel.
 - f) Paul's suffering meant that he joined the long line of God's righteous people who have always suffered. Jesus' death on the cross, however, gave new meaning to the suffering of his disciples. No longer is it merely the suffering of the righteous. Instead, it is now becoming like Christ in his death. Jesus changed forever the meaning of suffering for the righteous.
- 5) 13 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;**
- a) In verse 13, Paul begins a section in which he explains why he continues to speak. His suffering and preaching (which are interconnected) are for the sake of the Corinthians.
 - b) Paul cites Psalm 116:10 ("I believed, therefore I spoke, "I am greatly afflicted.")
 - i) We have no record that Jewish rabbis ever took note of this text. Apart from this verse, the New Testament has only two other allusions to Psalm 116.
 - ii) The Psalmist realized his utter dependence on God for delivering him from death, and he sang praises of thanksgiving for being delivered and walking in the land of the living. Facing death, he voiced a prayer for deliverance and

God, in answer to the Psalmist's faith, responded favorably.

iii) Paul quoted this Psalm because he identified completely with the Psalmist. They both believed, they both spoke, and they were both afflicted.

c) For Paul the gospel is not some abstract theory that can be accepted and hidden away in the heart. It requires proclamation, and proclaiming it to a hostile world is perilous. Paul is a wonderful example of someone who did not shrink from speaking the gospel boldly whatever the consequences.

i) Luke 19:37-40 Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, 38 saying: "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!" Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 39 And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." 40 But He answered and said to them, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out."

ii) I sometimes wonder if we are waiting for the stones to speak up. The better option is for us to speak up and tell the world what God has done through Jesus Christ.

6) 14 Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.

a) Paul speaks boldly because of his assurance that God will one day raise him up as Jesus was raised from the dead.

b) Those who belong to Christ in this life will also belong to him on the other side of death. As Christ's death brought us life, so Christ's resurrection makes possible our life to come.

i) 1 Peter 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

c) The verb in the phrase "shall present us with you" means to present someone to stand before a judge. That is how the word is used in Acts 27:24 ("Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar.")

i) Paul declares in 5:10 that all will one come before the judgment throne of Christ.

- d) We should not overlook the phrase "with you" at the end of verse 14.
- i) Paul understands that he is intimately joined with other Christians. He does not believe that he stands on a higher spiritual plateau because of his apostolic calling or his sufferings in Christ.
 - ii) In 11:2, Paul will describe himself as presenting the Corinthians as a "chaste virgin to Christ." But here he see himself standing with them on that day.
 - iii) The Corinthians lacked a sense of bonding and community, and that is a very modern malady. The Corinthians were prone to see themselves as individuals who were economically and religiously self-sufficient and only minimally interdependent with other believers. Paul wanted to build up their sense of community, and that is a theme in both of his letters.
 - iv) They, like everyone, will answer to God individually, but one day they will all stand together before God with Paul standing with them. With that wonderful hope in common, how could social, economic, or racial differences ever separate them?

7) 15 For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.

- a) Paul's ultimate goal as Christ's apostle was to bring glory to God.
- b) God multiples his grace when more and more people become its recipients. As more and more people obey the gospel, God's grace abounds more and more.
 - i) As one interpreter paraphrased this verse: "More and more grace, more and more people, more and more praise!"
- c) The "all things" in verse 15 refers to Paul's suffering and his speaking. All the suffering he had endured was caused by his faithful preaching of the gospel. The suffering was therefore for those who heard and obeyed that gospel. Had Paul played it safe or retreated at the first sign of opposition or had he determined that no one in the cesspool called Corinth would ever obey the gospel, they might never have heard the gospel.
- d) If we are ever attempted to play it safe, we should stop and thank God that Jesus did not play it safe. Instead "he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."
- e) Paul understands that God's grace should always lead to human gratitude. The grace brings thanksgiving, and the thanksgiving gives glory to God.

8) 16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man

perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

- a)** The "therefore" or "for which cause" in verse 16 points back to Paul's remarks in verses 7-15. Paul repeats the statement "we faint not" from verse 1 and launches into a new development in his argument that explains why he ministers as he does and why he preaches as boldly as he does.
- b)** He needs to explain why, in spite of his shameful condition as one who is afflicted, persecuted, and always being given up to death, he continues to boldly proclaim an unveiled gospel.
- c)** This verse begins a section in which Paul will present a series of contrasts between the present affliction and the eternal glory that will follow.
 - i)** Verse 16: Outward Man vs. Inward Man
 - ii)** Verse 16: Wasting Away vs. Being Renewed
 - iii)** Verse 17: Slight vs. Beyond Measure
 - iv)** Verses 17-18: Momentary vs. Eternal
 - v)** Verse 17: Affliction vs. Glory
 - vi)** Verse 18: What Can Be Seen vs. What Cannot Be Seen
- d)** Who are the outward man and inward man in verse 16?
 - i)** The outward person is "that aspect of one's humanity that is subject to the various assaults and hardships of historical existence and that, because of its vulnerability to these, may be likened to earthen pots."
 - ii)** Paul's mortal existence was constantly wasting away and rushing headlong toward death. But Paul's inner existence was united with Christ and was always being renewed and proceeding toward ever increasing glory.
 - iii)** The outer person is what belongs to this world that is temporary and crumbling and is all that can be seen by those who evaluate things from only a fleshly perspective.
 - iv)** Those who saw the cross as foolishness looked at Paul and saw only the outward man. Those who saw the cross as the power of God looked at Paul and saw the inner man.
- e)** Paul is not speaking here of body versus soul.

- i)** We addressed this issue in our comments on First Corinthians. The Jews correctly viewed body and soul as a single entity. By contrast, the Greeks and the Gnostics saw the body as evil and the soul as good. They believed the ultimate goal of the soul was liberation from the body and that the body's death was the soul's liberation. This false view led some to wallow in sin because, they argued, such activities affected only the body and not the soul.
- ii)** The Biblical view of a person is very different. The separation of body and soul by death is unnatural and contrary to God's original intention in Genesis 2:7, where he made man "a living being." The resurrection of the last day will be just that -- a resurrection, a bodily resurrection. If the Greek view of the body and soul were correct, then there would no reason for a resurrection.
- iii)** The terms "inward man" and "outward man" are comprehensive and all-inclusive. They embrace everything that pertains to human existence. They are two sides of the same coin.
- iv)** Note that Paul does not say in this chapter that the body is a clay jar containing the soul. Instead, he says that we (body and soul) are clay jars containing the message of God. The contrast is between man and God, not between body and soul.
- f)** The battering that Paul had taken in the service of Christ had left him the worse for wear and made him appear a shamed figure in the eyes of the world.

 - i)** His deteriorating physical condition and shameful plight no doubt caused some in Corinth -- who took account of such things -- to wonder out loud about his power as an apostle.
 - ii)** They may have assumed that God would do a better job of safeguarding and bringing honor to an authorized messenger of the gospel.
 - iii)** Most in the ancient world interpreted affliction as a sign of judgment by the gods and as something dishonorable.

 - (1)** For example, after surviving a shipwreck and landing on the island of Malta, Paul was bitten by a viper. The islanders said "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live." (Acts 28:4)
 - (2)** Like the Maltese islanders, some Corinthians were judging Paul only from outward appearances and from a wrongheaded view about how God works in this world. In 10:7, Paul will ask them "Do ye look on things after the outward appearance?"
 - (3)** We too should not look at people from a superficial, worldly perspective. Our prayer everyday should be that we will see others, ourselves, the

world, and the church as God sees them. We often exalt the work of the world to a level of extreme importance and see the work of the church as a footnote, when God has the opposite view. We often exalt human celebrities and sports stars while discounting those faithful servants of God who work among us, while again God has the opposite view.

- (4) 1 Samuel 16:7 But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.
- (5) Matthew 23:27-28 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. 28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.
- (6) 1 Peter 3:3-4 Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; 4 But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.
- g) The Corinthians needed to understand that the Christian's heavenly, inner life is constantly being transformed into glory even as the earthly, outward life decays and dies.
- i) The present tense "being renewed" points to a continuing process.
- (1) Colossians 3:10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.
- (2) Romans 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.
- ii) Barclay: "The years which take away physical beauty should add spiritual beauty. ... No [Christian] need fear the years, for they bring him nearer, not to death, but to God."
- h) The image that Paul paints here is the opposite of the plot in Oscar Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.
- i) In that novel, a portrait of Dorian Gray became a mirror of his soul and the picture in the portrait began to show the signs of evil and decay in his life. He locked the portrait away to keep the world from learning the truth and instead deceived everyone with an outward appearance that was young, pure, and

handsome. The contrast between the loathsome visage on the canvas and his own beautiful outward appearance grew more stark every day.

- ii) In Paul's case others see him as a withered, crushed, pitiable figure proclaiming a foolish gospel. If they do not look at him with eyes of faith, they will not see the real Paul on a portrait locked away in Heaven that is ever being transformed into the likeness of Christ. As his outward life conforms ever more to the crucified Christ, his inward life conforms ever more closely to the glorified Christ.
- iii) We each have a portrait locked away in Heaven that is changing each day just as surely as our outward appearance is changing each day.
- iv) From the world's vantage point it looked like Paul was falling apart. But like Dorian Gray, that outward appearance was deceiving because Paul's true image could not be seen by worldly eyes.
- v) Colossians 3:3-4 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

9) 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

- a) Paul characterizes the present, which is marked by tribulation, as brief in duration and trifling in comparison with what God has in store for those who obey the gospel.
 - i) He is not minimizing his hardships, as is evident from the many times he lists his sufferings -- six times in these two letters alone.
 - ii) He also is not suggesting that his sufferings are brief in duration in the sense that they last only a short time in this life. They are brief only when viewed from the perspective of eternity. Paul is giving us an example of how spiritual eyes of faith should view the events of this world.
- b) Paul uses the same words to describe the glory that he used to describe his sufferings in Asia in 1:8, where he said he was unbearably crushed. The incredible, eternal weight of glory outweighs any earthly afflictions and makes them look trifling by comparison.
 - i) Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.
 - ii) No matter how many troubles and tribulations you place on the scale, the weight of glory on the other side will weigh more.

c) The phrase "weight of glory" is one of the most beautiful and meaningful phrases in the Bible.

i) Behind the Greek lies a play on words in a Hebrew idiom. In Hebrew, the noun "kabod" means both "weight" and "glory." (The name "Ichabod" for example means "no glory.")

ii) But translating a Hebrew idiom into Greek and then into English (not surprisingly) fails to convey that subtle play on words.

d) C. S. Lewis wrote a book of essays entitled "The Weight of Glory." Here is an excerpt from the first essay in the collection, which shares the same title as that of the book.

i) *"I read in a periodical the other day that the fundamental thing is how we think of God. By God Himself, it is not! How God thinks of us is not only more important, but infinitely more important. Indeed, how we think of Him is of no importance except in so far as it is related to how He thinks of us. It is written that we shall "stand before" Him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God...to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness...to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son-it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is."*

ii) *"Perhaps it seems rather crude to describe glory as the fact of being "noticed" by God. But this is almost the language of the New Testament. St. Paul promises to those who love God not, as we should expect, that they will know Him, but that they will be known by Him (I Cor. 8:3). It is a strange promise. Does not God know all things at all times? But it is dreadfully reechoed in another passage of the New Testament. There we are warned that it may happen to any one of us to appear at last before the face of God and hear only the appalling words: "I never knew you. Depart from Me." In some sense, as dark to the intellect as it is unendurable to the feelings, we can be both banished from the presence of Him who is present everywhere and erased from the knowledge of Him who knows all. We can be left utterly and absolutely outside-repelled, exiled, estranged, finally and unspeakably ignored. On the other hand, we can be called in, welcomed, received, acknowledged. We walk every day on the razor edge between these two incredible possibilities."*

10) 18 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.

- a) In verse 18 Paul focuses his attention on what is real and ultimately significant. His statement here implies that those Christians who disparaged his suffering had fixed their eyes on all the wrong things because they could see nothing of God's glory in Paul's ministry as a suffering apostle.
- b) Their culture had conditioned them to see and appreciate only a counterfeit glory and honor. Their eyesight had been damaged by their twisted value system.
- c) To the world, Paul was a miserable failure. At the height of a promising career, he left it all for a life of hardship, suffering, and persecution. Why would anyone make such a choice?
- d) The eyes of faith can see much more than can physical eyes.
 - i) What is the opposite of faith? If you ask the world, you will hear that reason is the opposite of faith -- but the Bible provides a very different answer to that question --- the opposite of faith is sight.
 - (1) 2 Corinthians 5:7 For we walk by faith, not by sight.
 - (2) Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.
 - (3) Hebrews 11:27 By faith he [Moses] forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.
 - ii) But faith is not blind. Those with eyes of faith can see things that are not seen, at least not seen by our physical eyes. Those with eyes of faith can see eternal things that are hidden to the world.
- e) If God wants anything from us, he wants our attention. A Christian must focus on Christ.
 - i) Colossians 3:1-4 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.
 - ii) Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
- f) God's people know both the brevity of this earthly life and the certainty of eternal

life with Christ -- and it is that knowledge that explains why our priorities are different from the world's. We can distinguish the temporary from the eternal. The world sees only the temporary and mistakenly believes it to be permanent.

- i) 2 Peter 3:11-12 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?