

No Quitting!
2 Corinthians 4:7
Part 4

We are **2 Corinthians** and are presently in the midst of a fairly lengthy defense by Paul of his apostleship, most likely precipitated by charges against him that when he confronted the Corinthians with their moral failures in the so-called “severe letter,” a letter we have talked about. He did so in a way that some within Corinth deemed improper. In other words, they felt he was too bold, that he was too harsh.

Paul in response to this charge has been defending his boldness. He began his defense in **2 Corinthians 2:12** and continued his defense all the way up to **2 Corinthians 3:18**.

In this section of Scripture Paul laid down a foundation of biblical and theological truth that he hoped would explain to his readers why he had been so bold in proclaiming and defending the message of the new covenant, which is the gospel of Christ and the truths related to it.

Paul then after laying down this foundation of biblical and theological truth continued his defense of his boldness in **2 Corinthians 4:1-18** by declaring to his readers that no matter what might be thrown at him and his associates in the prosecution of the ministry that they had been given that their boldness would not be diminished and that they certainly would not lose heart.

Paul was not a quitter when it came to boldly proclaiming and defending the message of the new covenant, nor was he a quitter when it came to boldly proclaiming and defending the truths related to that message. Losing heart was not an option for Paul.

And may this also be true for us as fellow servants of the new covenant. May we also like Paul, when push comes to shove, not be found to be quitters, but rather let us by the grace of God be unrelenting in prosecuting the mission that has been given us and may God once again use this message this morning to help us to do exactly that.

So, what is the question that we have been seeking to answer in our current study? What things, according to 2 Corinthians 4:1-18, did Paul endure while boldly proclaiming and defending the message of the new covenant that manifested his no-quit attitude? This is the question that we have been seeking to answer and will continue to seek to answer this morning. So, what was the first thing that Paul indicated that he had to endure that manifested his no-quit attitude?

The first thing that Paul endured that manifested his no-quit attitude was rejection (2 Corinthians 4:1-6). And where did we see this in the passage that we have been studying? We saw this in **2 Corinthians 4:1-6**. So now let me read this passage for you.

“Therefore, since we have this ministry [the ministry of the new covenant], as we received mercy, we do not lose heart.” In other words, Paul was saying in light of the fact that they had been given the ministry of the new covenant as an act of God’s mercy there was no way they were going to quit. But even though they were not going to quit there was something else that they had chosen to do in order to validate their ministry and their message. And what might that be? Let me now read for you **verse 2**. **“But we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”** In other words, these ministers of the new covenant, unlike their opponents in Corinth, had chosen to conduct their ministry in such a way that it validated not only their ministry but also their message. Unfortunately, even though their ministry and message had been validated by the way they were conducting themselves, it still did not mean that everyone who came into contact with them embraced their ministry and message. In fact, there was a great deal of rejection, which Paul went on to explain in the next verse. So now let me read to you **verses 3-5**. **“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, (4) in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (5) For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake.”** The reason for all the rejection that he and his associates had been experiencing, even in spite of the fact that their ministry and message had been validated according to Paul, was that Satan, the god of this world, had blinded the

minds and the hearts of the unbelieving making it impossible for the light of the gospel to shine into their hearts apart from the sovereign intervention of God which was in fact the very thing that Paul explains happened to them in **verse 6**. So now let me read that verse for you and see if this is not so. **“For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”** Paul in this verse, speaking from his own personal experience, detailed for his readers the fact he and his associates would never have seen the truth concerning Christ if God had not chosen to lift the veil that covered their darkened hearts and minds so that they through the light of the gospel might come to know the glory God in an intimate and personal way in and through Christ.

So, what is the first thing that Paul indicated that he and his associates endured in order to boldly proclaim and defend the message of the new covenant? Rejection!

We are now ready to move on in our text and consider the second thing that Paul and his associates found themselves having to endure while boldly proclaiming and defending the message of the new covenant. And what was this second thing?

The second thing that Paul endured that manifested his no-quit attitude was a variety of different sufferings (2 Corinthians 4:7-18). So let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 4:7-15** and see if this is not so. **“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; (8) we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; (9) persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; (10) always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. (11) For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (12) So death works in us, but life in you. (13) But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed, therefore I spoke,’ we also believe, therefore we also speak, (14) knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. (15) For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.”** Clearly

Paul in these verses has changed his focus from the rejection that he and his associates had to endure in **2 Corinthians 4:1-6**, as faithful ministers of the new covenant, to a greater breadth of sufferings which would once again provide him and his associates the opportunity to manifest his no-quit attitude.

As we begin our study of what Paul had to say about this greater breath of sufferings that he and his associates had to endure we will only be able, this morning, to examine **verse 7**.

And what is my hope for our examination of this one single verse? My hope is after we have examined this verse we might better understand why suffering, on a variety of different levels, is not only inevitable for every true minister of the new covenant but why it is so very necessary if God is going to get the honor and praise that is due His name. This is my hope for this message this morning.

So how does **verse 7** begin? It begins with the conjunction, **“but,”** which introduces a contrast between what he has just said and what he is about to say. So, what is this contrast that was introduced by the conjunction, **“but,”** at the very beginning of **verse 7**?

Let me now read the verse for you. **“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.”** So, what is the contrast that was introduced by the conjunction, **“but,”** at the very beginning of **verse 7**?

The conjunction, “but,” introduced a contrast between the “treasure” that Paul alluded to at the end of verse 6 and “earthen vessels” where the treasure was kept. So this is the contrast that Paul introduced when he began **verse 7** with the conjunction, **“but.”**

So now we need to go a little bit further in our understanding of this verse and this contrast by asking another question. If the treasure of **verse 7** is a reference to what Paul had just spoken about at the end of **verse 6** then what was the treasure that was kept in these earthen vessels that Paul spoke about in **verse 7**?

The “treasure” is the “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” for this is what Paul referenced at the end of verse 6. And, just by way of reminder, what exactly is that? What is “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ?”

The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ is a reference to the gospel. This is the light that Paul was referring to. And why can I say this? I can say this, first of all, because it is in and through the light of the gospel that the glory of Christ who is the image of God can be seen, based on **2 Corinthians 4:4**. And because Christ is the image of God, once we see His glory in and through the gospel, we will also see the glory of God the Father in and through the gospel which is exactly what Paul said at the end of **2 Corinthians 4:6**.

And, in fact, apart from God the Father sovereignly choosing to lift the veil that covers the minds and hearts of unbelievers so that the light of the gospel might shine into their darkness, they will never be able to see or they will never be able to know either the glory of God the Father or the glory of God the Son.

Therefore, in light of this, there is nothing that we have in our possession that is of greater value than the gospel of Christ for it is through the gospel that people come to know both God the Father and God the Son and it is this knowledge that makes life worth living. And what does God want us to do with this magnificent and glorious treasure that is able to do something that nothing else in this world can do, or in other words, what does God want us to do with the gospel?

God wants us to preach the gospel (Mark 16:15). Let me read for you the words of Christ as recorded for us **Mark 16:15** and see if this is not so. **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”** The treasure of the gospel is meant to be shared with others and to be shared boldly with others. So now we come to a very important question.

So how should we, who have been given such a glorious and magnificent treasure and who have been commanded by God to share this treasure with the world, view ourselves based on the words of Paul in **2 Corinthians 4:7**?

Those who have received the gospel and have been commanded to share the gospel should view themselves simply as earthen vessels. Isn't that exactly how Paul and his associates viewed themselves? Absolutely! What does **verse 7** say? **“But we [the servants of the new covenant] have this treasure [or in other words, the gospel of Christ] in earthen vessels.”** So if Paul and his associates viewed themselves in this way doesn't it make sense that we also, as fellow servants of the new covenant, should view ourselves in this way? And I believe the answer would have to be absolutely! We should view ourselves in the very same way as they did, or in other words, simply as earthen vessels.

So, what would be the significance of this? Earthen vessels, or in other words, clay pots or cheap pottery were the throwaway containers of the ancient world. Their life spans were generally just a few short years at most. They were used to store and transport water, olive oil, wine, grain and perhaps even at times family treasures, and when they were broken it was not a big deal. There were inexpensive and easy to replace.

And as such Paul used the metaphor of earthen vessels to picture the inherent frailty, weakness and mortality of those who had been entrusted with the glorious treasure of the gospel of Christ.

What an amazing contrast. On the one hand we have the gospel of Christ which is a glorious and magnificent treasure that has been entrusted to us so that we might share it with the world that is in such great need of it, but the very ones to whom God has entrusted this gospel are frail, weak and mortal, no more than earthen vessels or clay pots.

So why did God entrust such a great treasure to us who in and of ourselves are so frail, weak, and mortal? Let us continue to read the verse. **“But we [the ministers of the new covenant] have this treasure [or in other words, the gospel of Christ] in earthen vessels [human bodies that are frail, weak and mortal], so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.”**

So why did God give us, as ministers of the new covenant, this treasure if we as earthen vessels are so frail, weak and mortal? It seems like a prescription for failure.

God gave the ministers of the new covenant the treasure of the gospel and commanded them to share it with the world even though they were weak so that there would be no question about whose power was accomplishing the work. And whose power would that be? It would be the surpassing greatness of the power of God that would be recognized as accomplishing the work in light of the fact the supply of power overwhelmingly surpassed the obvious weaknesses present in the various earthen vessels that God had chosen.

What we need to understand is that we are never powerful in ourselves, we are only earthen vessels; weak, frail and mortal and therefore it is only as we acknowledge our weakness and seek His power in doing His will in all the matters of our lives that His power will be able to dwell in us and flow through us. And this is something that Paul certainly did understand, which is the reason why he had no problem embracing his weakness.

Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 12:9**. **“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore [Paul goes to say], I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”** Or other words fill me so that it might flow through me. Did Paul have any problem embracing the fact that he was weak? No, in fact he boasted in his weaknesses, in other words, that the greater his struggles to stay afloat in seeking to the will of Christ the greater the opportunity for the power of Christ to be manifested.

May God give us the grace as earthen vessels to recognize our weakness so that when we go forth as ministers of the new covenant we might go forth in the surpassing greatness of His power rather than in the power of our weakness.