

No Quitting!
2 Corinthians 4:8-9
Part 5

We 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 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 highlighting for his readers why quitting in respect to the bold prosecution of his ministry was not an option for him, no matter what might be thrown at him, no matter what he might have to endure.

So, what is the question that we, in our examination of these verses, have been seeking to answer? 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?

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**.

And what was the second thing that manifested his no quit attitude? The second thing that Paul endured that manifested his no quit attitude was a

variety of different sufferings (2 Corinthians 4:7-18). Yes, Paul's message and ministry was indeed commonly rejected based on **2 Corinthians 4:1-6**, but rejection was just the tip of the iceberg. Paul and his companions had to endure many other sufferings as well. And these sufferings are detailed for us in **2 Corinthians 4:7-18**. And these are the verses we are presently examining.

So how far have we gotten in our study? So far we have only considered **verse 7**. So let me now read this verse for you. **“But we have this treasure [in other words, the treasure of the gospel, which Paul in verse 6 had just referred to as “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ”] in earthen vessels”** [in other words, in weak, frail, and expendable human vessels].

So now let me ask you this question. Why would God do such a thing? Why would He entrust the gospel of Christ, a treasure of infinite value to weak, frail, and expendable earthen vessels or in other words to human vessels such as Paul and his associates? Paul went on to explain this to us in the rest of the verse. And what did he say? He said this ... **“so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.”**

So why did God entrust the gospel of Christ to earthen vessels such as Paul and his companions, and to ourselves as well, as fellow servants of the new covenant and then command us to share it with an unsaved world when He knows that we in our humanness are so weak, frail, and expendable? God gave us the treasure of the gospel and commanded us to share it with the world even though we are weak so that there would be no question about whose power was accomplishing the work (2 Corinthians 4:7).

We are now ready to move on in our study of **2 Corinthians 4:1-18** to the next two verses where Paul supplied various paradoxes from his own life to illustrate the point that he had just made in **verse 7**. So how many different paradoxes did he use?

Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 used four different paradoxes from his own life to illustrate how his weakness as an earthen vessel left no doubt about where the power for accomplishing the work of the gospel came from.

Let me now read these two verses for you. **“We [In other words, the earthen vessels in which the gospel has been entrusted] are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; (9) persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.”**

There we have it; four different paradoxes from Paul’s life that he used to illustrate his earlier point in **verse 7**. The fact that Paul and his associates in their gospel ministry were continually afflicted but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed clearly highlighted for his readers the fact that the surpassing greatness of the power of Paul’s ministry and the ministry of his associates, that was resulting in people being saved and lives being transformed, had nothing to do with them but rather had everything to do with God for otherwise they, in light of all that they were suffering, would either have been totally unable to find a way to proceed forward in their bold proclamation of the gospel of Christ or would have chosen to quit rather than continuing to boldly proclaim the gospel of Christ. So now let us look at these paradoxes more carefully.

And what is my hope for this message? My hope for this message is that we, as those who have received the treasure of the gospel of Christ, might understand that we have a job to do and that is to boldly proclaim the gospel of Christ and in doing so we have the opportunity the surpassing greatness of the power of God on full display. So, what is the first paradox?

Paul was afflicted, but not crushed (2 Corinthians 4:8). Let me now read for you the first part of **verse 8** and see if this is this is not so. **“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed.”**

This was the first paradox that Paul used to illustrate how his weakness as an earthen vessel left no doubt about where the power for accomplishing the work of the gospel that he was doing as a servant of the new covenant came from.

So, what is the meaning of the word “afflicted?” The word “afflicted” (THLIBO) comes from a verb that means “to pressure.”

Paul, as a minister of the new covenant, was continually pressured, or in other words squeezed, by what he had to suffer. In fact, Paul earlier in this same epistle referred to a very specific time when this was indeed the case.

Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 1:8-9** and see if this is not so. **“For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of [What?] our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; (9) indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.”** So was Paul continuously afflicted, pressured, squeezed as a servant of the new covenant? Absolutely! This was his life.

But even though he was continuously afflicted, pressured, and squeezed and so much so that he even at times even despaired of life itself, Paul was not crushed. Let us continue to read **2 Corinthians 4:8** and see if this is not so. **“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed.”**

The verb “to crush” (STENOCHOREO) means “to be confined to a narrow or tight place.” So, what was Paul saying to his readers when he used this word? When Paul used this word he was telling his readers that though he was continuously afflicted, or in other words pressured and squeezed into a very tight place by all that he was suffering, he had not been pressured or squeezed to such an extent that his ministry had somehow been contained or in other words confined. How could it be? His ministry was not being done in the power of his strength but in the surpassing greatness of the power of God.

I am sure we all remember the first chapter of the book of Philippians when Paul, writing from a Roman prison, told his readers in Philippi how his imprisonment had turned out for the greater progress of the gospel. So how did that happen? It had nothing to do with Paul. Paul was an earthen vessel, weak, frail and expendable and as such, he under those circumstances would have been squashed like a grape. But he wasn't squashed. He continued to boldly proclaim the gospel of Christ in that Roman prison and the Lord blessed those efforts. And why was this? It had nothing to do with him and his power because he was simply an earthen vessel, but rather it had every thing to do with the surpassing greatness of the power of God, which he was fully aware of and was fully dependent upon. This is why he was not

crushed, or in other words this is why he was not so confined or constrained by his circumstances that he was rendered ineffective.

Today we as ministers of the new covenant may be grievously afflicted, pressured and squeezed through all that we may be suffering no matter what they suffering might be. And it may appear to us that there is absolutely no way that God in the midst of our suffering could possibly use us but this is not so. As long as we draw breath and are seeking to fulfill our ministry as a servant of the new covenant by boldly proclaiming the gospel of Christ no matter how severe our affliction, we will not be crushed, or in other words our ministry will not be able to be confined or contained. Therefore as long as we look to the Lord and to the surpassing greatness of His power we will continue to find ways to boldly proclaim the gospel of Christ so that the Lord might continue to have opportunities to bless our ministry and to display His power.

So, what is the second paradox? Paul was perplexed, but not despairing (2 Corinthians 4:8). Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 4:8** once again and see if this is not so. **“We are afflicted in every way** [in other words pressed or squeezed], **but not crushed** [in other words not contained or confined, and then it says]; **“perplexed, but not despairing.”** So, what does this mean? We will begin by looking at the word “perplexed.”

The word “perplexed” comes from the Greek verb (APOREO) that means “to be at a loss.” In light of the many difficulties that Paul faced there were many times when he truly didn’t have a clue about what he needed to do in respect to the challenges he was facing as a servant of the new covenant, just as we sometimes do not have a clue.

I am sure that was the case according to **2 Corinthians 1:8-9** when he was in Asia. I am quite sure that as he looked at that situation he saw no way out, or in other words he was totally perplexed, very much in the same way that we might be perplexed by a particularly grievous situation. But even so, even in that situation he never found himself despairing. Isn’t that what he said? Absolutely! But what does the word “despairing” mean?

The word “despairing” comes from a Greek verb (EKAPOREO) that means “to be utterly at loss.”

So what was Paul saying to his readers when he used this word? When Paul used this word he was telling his readers that though he was at times perplexed, or in other words at times at a loss in terms of what he needed to do in matters related to his ministry as a servant of the new covenant, he was never totally or utterly at loss in these matters. How could he be? His ministry was not being done in the power of his strength but rather in the surpassing greatness of the power God. Therefore in Paul's mind even though he did not see a clear path or for that matter any path at all he knew there was a path and that the Lord Himself would direct him to it.

What does **Proverbs 3:5-6** tell us? **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean upon your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”** And this is exactly what Paul did in those times when he was perplexed, or in other words when he was at a loss. He never despaired, or in other words he was never utterly at a loss, he simply trusted in the Lord believing the surpassing greatness of the power of God would be able to get him where he needed to be.

Today we as ministers of the new covenant may be at a loss, facing some kind of problem perhaps dealing with something that has nothing to do with the gospel of Christ for which we have no solution, but what a great opportunity for us in our weakness to manifest the surpassing greatness of the power of God as we turn to Him in the time of our need just as Paul did.

So, what is the third paradox? Paul was persecuted, but not forsaken (2 Corinthians 4:9). Isn't this exactly what Paul told his readers in the first part of **verse 9**?

So, what does the word “persecuted” mean? The word “persecuted” (DIOKO) means “to pursue” or “to hunt.” So let me ask you this question. Was Paul pursued or hunted? Absolutely! Paul was continuously pursued and hunted. We see this in **Acts 9:23-24; Acts 9:28-29; Acts 14:5-6; Acts 19; Acts 20:3; and in Acts 23:12.**

But even though Paul was hunted and pursued by his enemies he was never what? He was never forsaken. Isn't that exactly what the verse says? Absolutely? But what does that mean?

When Paul said that he was “not forsaken” he meant that while he was being persecuted or “pursued” the Lord never left him.

The Lord never intended when He entrusted the gospel to us and sent us out into the world that we would do so alone. Therefore when we are seeking to do His will, whether that is in boldly proclaiming the gospel of Christ or in some other matter of righteousness, and find ourselves being pursued or hunted there should be no cause for fear. When we are being pursued or hunted for the sake of the gospel or for a matter of righteousness what a great opportunity for us to manifest the surpassing greatness of God in our calm assurance just as Paul did.

So, what is the fourth paradox? Paul was struck down but not destroyed (2 Corinthians 4:9). This was the fourth paradox.

So, what does the word “struck down” mean? The word “struck down” (KATABALLO) means “to be struck down as with a weapon” or “to be thrown down as in a wrestling match.”

But Paul goes on to say that even though he may have been struck down even through acts of violence he was never destroyed. Clearly the intensity of his paradoxes has now reached its climax.

And what does the word “destroyed” mean? The word “destroyed” (APOLLUMI) could also be translated “ruined,” “lost” or even “killed.”

Nothing that his enemies could throw at him could destroy him. When he got knocked down, no matter how violently, he was declaring that he would simply continue on.

Certainly it should be obvious to us that all the violence that Paul suffered in the cause of Christ, which he is alluding to here in this verse, could not have been joyfully and peacefully withstood if it had not been for the surpassing greatness of the power of God that made it possible for Paul to remain fearless and formidable. And the same thing can be true of us as well.

God gave us the treasure of the gospel and commanded us to share it with the world even though we are weak so that there would be no question about

whose power was accomplishing the work. This was made clear to us in 2 Corinthians 4:7.

Paul then in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 went on to give us four different paradoxes from his own life in order illustrate how his weakness as an earthen vessel left no doubt about where the power for accomplishing the work of the gospel came from. And what does this say to us?

We may be afflicted in the cause of Christ, we may be perplexed in the cause of Christ, we may be persecuted in the cause of Christ, we may be struck down in the cause of Christ but if we in the time of our need will simply humble ourselves before the mighty hand of God and avail ourselves of the surpassing greatness of His power, we though afflicted will not be crushed, and we though perplexed will not be despairing, and we though persecuted will not be forsaken, and we though knocked down will not be destroyed.

And this truth will cause us to embrace whatever rejection we may experience and whatever sufferings we may experience in the cause of Christ and seeking to live a life pleasing to him as an opportunity for the power of God to put on display.

Therefore may God give us the grace to understand that when our weakness is exposed by the difficulties of living for Christ that it is an opportunity for the surpassing greatness of God's power to shine forth brightly.