
Perspectives of the Unseen

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2 Corinthians 4:7–18

Let us focus with eyes of faith looking to the unseen eternal things of God.

[Slide 1] Introduction

If you're like me, you tend to get stuck on the things that are around you. What I mean by that is that I can get very focused. Time will pass and people will talk to me without me even realizing they were speaking. In the same way, we can get so focused on our trials and the things around us in the natural that we forget to look at what God is doing in us And in the supernatural realm.

We can also beat ourselves up for our weaknesses, shortcomings and failures. But Paul has a message of hope for those of you who may be like me. Every time you feel inadequate to a task or think less of yourself, there is a great truth in Scripture that we can all latch on to and apply to our lives. Let's take a look at 2 Corinthians 4:7-18.

[Slide 2] 2 Corinthians 4:7–13 ESV

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

[Slide 3] Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak,

[Slide 4] We carry the treasure of the eternal (vv. 7-12)

[Slide 5]a. We suffer for the gospel of Jesus.

- i. Paul opens by talking about a treasure that each of us carries. The treasure he refers to is the gospel of Christ, the good news about who Jesus is and what he has done for us. This is a powerful truth that each of us carries every day, yet few of us know its power to transform us and those around us.
- ii. This treasure is hidden in jars of Clay. The jars refer to the human body. Jars of Clay, or clay pots, were earthen vessels that had a variety of uses. These were very cheap containers but could hold very costly possessions.
- iii. Paul is not denigrating the human body when he describes us as these inexpensive and frail earthen vessels. We are of great value when we carry the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[Slide 6]iv. Clay pots were used as instruments to carry whatever cargo was needed. In the same way, we are instruments of God's Gospel and good news!

[Slide 7]v. They were common, very breakable and fragile vessels. So also, the human body is the same. Its glory isn't in shining its own light or concern for its own appearance. Its concern is what it carries.

vi. There can be no mistaking that the power is from God and not from us. The power is in the gospel, not our own abilities or resources. This power comes from the gospel and all that it entails, including the power of the Holy Spirit.

vii. Next, Paul begins to describe his own ministry and the common feelings of Christians who minister by God's power. He employs four examples of how God helps us. Each of these challenges may reflect gladiatorial or military combat.

1. **Pressed but not crushed.** "Pressed" means to push hard against, or to squeeze the life out of, as we would say. "Not crushed" means that the pressure was not so great that there was no escape. Hemmed in but not cornered.
2. **Perplexed but not in despair.** A play on words from "At a loss" to "Utterly lost" or in extreme despair. This might be better understood as Paul saying, "At a loss, but not lost."

3. **Persecuted but not abandoned.** "Persecuted" means to be pursued or hunted. While Paul was pursued from city to city he was not abandoned by God. God is always with us, especially in persecution.
 4. **Struck down but not destroyed.** Being struck down may have referred to the multiple times Paul was in mortal danger, but he was still alive and serving God. Today, we would say Paul was knocked down but not knocked out.
- viii. The principle Paul is describing here is that we as Christians face trials with the attitude that we bend but don't break. We endure the struggles but with God's power. The hope of the gospel and the help of the Holy Spirit keep us from being broken by our circumstances.
- ix. Stanley Horton explained Paul this way: "**The treasure in the clay jar of his body kept him from being broken by circumstances or by enemies.**" – Stanley M. Horton, *I & II Corinthians: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 1999), 201.
- x. When David would cry out to God because his enemies surrounded him and were out for blood, he did not place his trust in his own abilities. He put his faith in God to deliver him from all of the trials and snares that he faced.
- xi. Paul was not relying on his own abilities but on the power of God. It was only through God's power that he was able to endure the trials he faced.
- xii. We are just vessels through which God works, but we must not underestimate our value. We must be humble about our own abilities and be focused on God working through us. Our value is in what we know God can do through us.
- xiii. **Key point:** Without God's power working through us, we can't fulfill the mission God has given us. We must realize that the power of God's Gospel and the Holy Spirit's power is ministering to us and through us. God's power is just a prayer away.

[Slide 8]b. We carry Jesus' death for the sake of eternal life.

- i. The way we deal with trials and suffering shows how much we trust Jesus. Scripture teaches us to deal with trials with faith. Sam Storms in his *Meditations on 2 Corinthians* lays out some of the options Christians have about trials:

1. **Denial** that trials exist.

2. **Despair** because of the overwhelming and seemingly inexplicable onset of suffering.
 3. **Demonic** attacks against them. Every trial they face is a direct assault by Satan himself. But we know there are other reasons trials happen in our lives.
 4. **Divinely Ordained**, lovingly orchestrated opportunities for our growth, the salvation of others, and above all else, God's glory.
- ii. Paul compares his ministry to the life of Jesus and says he dies continually every day. He brings up images of Jesus dying on the cross. Later in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 Paul outlines the sufferings he has gone through in his ministry.
 - iii. "Carrying around the death of Jesus" corresponds to being pressed, perplexed, persecuted and struck down while "the life of Jesus" corresponds to not crushed, not in despair, not abandoned and not destroyed (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).
 - iv. The death and life of Jesus speak of the ways in which we suffer like he did but also have the hope of the resurrection and his eternal life within us. Paul has already talked about having the fragrance of death to those who are perishing and life to those who are being saved (2 Corinthians 2:14, 16).

[Slide 9] 2 Corinthians 2:14 ESV

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

[Slide 10] 2 Corinthians 2:16 ESV

to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?

- i. In verse 11, when Paul says that they are being given over to death, this is the same verb used legally for when Jesus was given over to the authorities (Mark 9: 31; 10:33). All of these are references to Jesus' suffering and death.
- ii. When Paul says, "Death is at work in us while life is at work in you," he speaks of his own suffering in his ministry for the sake of the Corinthians. This gets to the heart of the issue of how we view trials in our lives.
- iii. Do we view trials as a bad thing that seeks to destroy us, or as dying to ourselves and embracing God's working through us and in our lives?

- iv. When we identify with Jesus in his sufferings we also identify with his victory and resurrection power. We imitate the life of Jesus in every way and have maximum impact.
- v. The Corinthians saw weakness as a negative but God views it as a positive (1 Corinthians 1:28-29; 2:3-4). They were distracted by every bit of shiny human ability and ingenuity. The kinds of apostles they endorsed were called “super-apostles.” These men boasted about their own abilities and speech.
- vi. The Corinthians saw them as eloquent and allowed their culture of worshiping human ability to color the way they saw Christianity. Paul was showing them the opposite, God working through our weaknesses rather than our strengths being on display.
- vii. **Application:** When we feel inadequate, we should be encouraged that God’s power is working through us. The Holy Spirit wants to give us gifts to use for his glory. God has placed in you and I a power unmatched on this planet that can be used to win people to him if only we would surrender to his power!

[Slide 11] 2 Corinthians 4:13–15 ESV

Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, “I believed, and so I spoke,” we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

[Slide 12] We share the hope of Jesus (vv. 13-15)

[Slide 13]a. We speak according to our beliefs.

- i. Paul identifies with David and quotes Psalm 116:10. Because of the power of the gospel, Paul has the courage to speak out and preach even though his life may be in danger.
- ii. Paul faces some of the same dangers that David faced. His enemies chased him from city to city and were relentless in trying to destroy the works that he started. They wanted Paul’s life and viewed him as a threat.
- iii. What motivates us to speak out to others? Is it our faith? Or is it something else? Are we worried about the consequences for us and for them?

iv. Consider these motivations for speaking out and sharing your faith:

1. **Faith.** We act based on what we believe about God. We have the truth on our side.
2. **Resurrection.** We know that God will raise us up with him in the resurrection. We are indestructible!
3. **God's presence.** We are in the presence of God forever, so let's bring others along with us.
4. **Lost Souls.** We must speak to the lost around us because we have found our home in Jesus but others are still out in the cold.
5. **Glorifying God.** We speak about Christ because in doing so, many come to glory and God is glorified.

v. **Application:** Just like when we speak what is in our heart, we also speak based on our beliefs. Everything that we say comes from our belief system. Our words betray our faith.

vi. What kinds of beliefs have you been speaking into your life? Do you speak from what you see in front of you or what God says is real?

[Slide 14]b. We trust in the hope of Jesus' resurrection.

- i. Verse 14 shows the power of the gospel through the resurrection. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, neither Paul nor we have any fear of death. This causes us to be bold and courageous in sharing our faith.
- ii. The hope of the resurrection guarantees that we will be raised into eternal life and be in the presence of God for eternity. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead lives inside of us by the Holy Spirit.
- iii. Verse 15 gives Paul's reasoning for why he is willing to suffer and speak for Jesus. Because of Paul's and the Corinthians' ministry, many are coming to Christ. This causes many to thank God and worship him for salvation.
- iv. The Corinthians believe that Christ's salvation gives you power and wealth. They think the power of salvation should give them whatever they want. By example, Paul shows God working through human weakness.

Illustration: Today we have the same type of problem with many televangelists. They teach that if you are living in poverty, pain and sickness you have no faith. There is no room in their understanding of salvation for trials. Anyone who's going through economic problems or health problems does not exercise their faith.

- i. Paul mentions the thanksgiving of many as multitudes are coming to Christ. Thanksgivings increases not only as Christian pray for the salvation of many but also because many are coming to Christ, thankful for their salvation.
- ii. **Application:** Resurrection power does not just mean that we will be raised with Christ but also that the Holy Spirit works miracles and wonders through us. Mark 16 tells us that these signs will follow those that believe in Jesus. What would it take to see that happening through you today?

[Slide 15] 2 Corinthians 4:16–18 ESV

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

[Slide 16] We look to the things unseen (vv. 16-18)

[Slide 17]a. We are being renewed despite our circumstances.

- i. When Paul says “we do not lose heart” it references verses 14-15 and 1. Paul did not ignore his physical suffering but rather emphasized and relied upon the inner renewal and benefits of serving the Lord and spreading the gospel.
- ii. Christians face trials just like everybody else. It is only natural to feel defeated when we face such trials. We have a completely different attitude toward them because Jesus walks with us through them.
- iii. We are not alone when we face trials. Paul encourages us because of the power of the resurrection, the presence of the Holy Spirit in us and the daily renewal of our souls. Jesus gives us hope!
- iv. Despite our outward circumstances, Paul tells us not to lose heart. Despite what we see and observe on the outside in the physical, God is doing great things in the supernatural that will become evident in his time.

- v. When Paul talks about the outward results of living in this sinful world and the inward results of being connected to Jesus through the Holy Spirit, he is talking about the discontinuity between our physical and spiritual reality.
- vi. Outwardly our bodies are wasting away but inwardly we are being renewed every day. Because of the sin in this world, our bodies experience the physical decay that is all around us.
- vii. For Christians, the inward life is a completely different story. Because of the presence of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, we are being renewed each day. God encourages and builds us up, promising an eternal inheritance.
- viii. When we look at the unseen and eternal rather than the visible and temporary, we must choose to view our circumstances in the proper light. God is using trials for his divine purposes in and around us.

[Slide 18]ix. In spite of my circumstances and what I see on the outside, God's unseen work in and through me is greater than what I see in front of me. The reality is that his unseen work is the final word.

- x. Day by day or moment by moment properly conveys the idea that for every bit of physical weakness there is renewal in our soul.
- xi. What are you believing God for? What seemingly impossible mountain stands before you? Trust God to overcome it on your behalf!

[Slide 19]b. We ignore the temporary and embrace the eternal.

- i. We endure trials and sufferings because it is worth it in the end to see other people accept Christ. There is nothing like watching someone come to Christ.

[Slide 20]Illustration: One of my favorite things to do was to run. I'm not the fastest but I really enjoy running. The first lesson you learn is to push past the point of the pain of your muscles releasing lactic acid and feeling like they are on fire. But you have to push past the pain to gain ground. Every action we do as Christians counts toward the salvation of others.

- i. Paul ends this section by talking about light and momentary troubles. "Troubles" refer to pressure in the physical sense. These troubles are light and momentary because of the inner renewal we experience.

- ii. Paul uses wordplay here to contrast the weight of our earthly trials with the weight of heavenly glory. The word, “light,” refers to being light in weight. Our afflictions are light in weight compared the weight of glory that awaits us.
- iii. The “weight of glory” is literally “weight of weights,” a Hebrew construction (Hebraism) referring to the Old Testament description of God’s presence as physically weighing a person down.
- iv. “Momentary” is only used in the entire New Testament here. It stresses the temporary nature of adversity for Christians. Eternity weighs more than my current circumstances.
- v. Glory is tied to suffering in the Bible (Romans 8:17). It is through suffering that God shows his glory and power. The way we react to suffering and act through suffering points to God and his grace.
- vi. Our trials are working the weight of eternal glory in us. As we endure the light weights of our troubles we are working toward the weight of glory. Keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus during trials gives us the strength to endure.
- vii. The important qualifier is that we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen. Our trials are only light and momentary when we fix our eyes on Jesus and focus on his unseen purposes and goals.

Illustration: The 6th sense. We operate on the 5 senses in the natural of seeing, feeling, hearing, tasting and touching. But we need to use the spiritual sense of faith. Faith allows us to see the unseen spiritual realm all around us. We can better understand what God is doing and why we are going through these trials. He gives us spiritual eyes to see the true reality we miss when we only focus on the physical world.

- i. The physical world is in decay and falling apart. Neither it nor our trials and suffering will last forever. Although we don’t see it now, the spiritual realm will last forever and we want to be part of that kingdom.
- ii. How then are we to deal with suffering? Can God rescue us from it or must we go through it?
- iii. **Application:** Sometimes in the Bible, God rescued his people from trials. But many times saints went through trials. Jesus was always with them every step of the way

and gave them the strength to endure. Holding onto Jesus gives us the ability not just to face trials but to be victorious in them.

Conclusion

God is using us in a special way to proclaim his Gospel. We go through trials of all sorts when we stand for him and glorify him. We must see with God's eyes rather than our own to be effective for him. He has his purposes for allowing us to go through trials. He is receiving glory when we remain faithful to him. We must not give up!

God is on our side and Jesus is always walking with us. We need to see ourselves as God sees us. Ask God to renew you every day by the power of his Holy Spirit. Staying close to Jesus and keeping your eyes on him will give you strength you never knew you had. Don't allow your trials to steal you away from Jesus. Keep on keeping on and you will see eternal victory!