

Men's Sunday Night
The Book of 2 Corinthians
"Finding Strength in Weakness"
Lesson 4 – 2 Corinthians 4:1-5:10
"Courage for the Conflict"

The key theme of this section is repeated in 2 Corinthians 4:1 and 4:16: "*We faint not!*" Literally, Paul said, "We do not lose heart!" There were certainly plenty of reasons for discouragement in Paul's situation, yet the great apostle did not quit. What was it that kept him from fainting in the conflicts of life? He knew what he possessed in Jesus Christ! Instead of complaining about what he did not have, Paul rejoiced in what he did have; and you and I can do the same thing.

Why would Paul keep on preaching, with all the dangers and toils involved, if he were not sincere? A man with lesser motives, or a less spiritual view of the ministry, would have given up long ago. Paul looked upon his ministry as a stewardship: God gave it to him, and God also gave him strength to continue and not faint. The Gospel was too glorious for Paul to give up! It was too great a privilege for him to be a minister of the Gospel to risk falling by the wayside.

If Paul were out for personal gain, as they said, then why did he suffer so much? The man who compromises the Word of God will not suffer; men will welcome him and honor him. But people were abusing Paul, rejecting him, and making life difficult for him. They were treating him the way men treated Christ. Paul's willingness to suffer for Christ is one of the greatest proofs of his sincerity as a servant of God.

2 Corinthians 5

In this chapter, Paul is still discussing his ministry and answering the accusations of his enemies. He points out that his ministry is serious, not careless, that he works from honest motives and not fleshly desires. But Paul is not selfish, his Christian service is motivated by more than a hope for the future. He seeks to please Christ and be acceptable to Him right now. Paul wanted to be found "*well-pleasing*" to Christ (v. 9). Knowing that his works would some day be revealed and tested, Paul wanted to live the kind of life that pleased and honored Christ.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-6. Pray and answer the following questions:

If you know what it feels like to be falsely accused or misunderstand you can identify with Paul. He has been comforted by God and encouraged by some of the events in Corinth, but his stress level is still high. In this section, Paul gives us a glimpse of the perspective on himself and his circumstances that sustained him, and offers promise to sustain us.

1. Paul knows that through God's mercy he serves the new covenant made possible in Christ. What practical application does this have on his attitudes and the methods he uses?
2. If 2 Cor. 4:1-6 was the only written record you had of the Bible, what would you know about our Lord?
3. It seems clear from verses 3-4 that not everyone believed who heard Paul preach. What do the unbelievers fail to see and why?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-15. Pray and answer the following questions:

To have God's glory in the heart and privilege of sharing it through the gospel is a priceless treasure. The container for the treasure is "jars of clay," which God's servants are. As humans, we are earthen vessels, plain old clay pots (v. 7). We may cover our human frame with fancy clothes, surround it with glittering possessions, transport it in fancy cars, or rest it on a seat of power, but in the end, we are still just human beings. Certainly, we have dignity and value in God's sight, but as believers we hold something of greater value; the treasure of Christ's grace and light! Faith must not be anchored in the brilliance of humans but in the power of God.

4. What is the treasure that Paul is referring to?

5. What is the point of putting the treasure in easily broken “jars of clay” instead of enduring, costly bronze vases?

6. From verses 7-15 how would Paul answer the person who say’s “Christianity is a crutch”?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. Pray and answer the following questions:

Paul refers to his afflictions as light. Light? He was stoned, beaten, shipwrecked, thrown out on the open sea, cast into dungeons. “No problem, he says.” By Paul’s mind being set on heavenly things, he truly believed “What we endure presently, is light compared to the weight of God’s wonderful glory.”

7. How did Paul encourage the Corinthians to carry on despite difficulty?

8. What helps you to focus on what is “unseen” and “eternal” rather than being consumed by the “seen” and “temporary”?

9. What are some ways God helps us through difficult times?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:1-10. Pray and answer the following questions:

Like a jar of clay, Paul gladly carries the precious treasure of the message of Christ. Under crushing affliction, he fixes his eyes on what is unseen and the eternal rather than his circumstances. In this section, Paul continues to explain what motivates him to tell everyone about Christ. As an ambassador sent with a most important message, Paul delivers the message and strongly encourages us to respond appropriately to God.

10. Paul continues the thoughts begun in 4:16-18 about a Christian's future. What do you learn about the "earthly tent" and our "heavenly dwelling" in verses 1-5?

11. What comfort or satisfaction can we conclude from knowing that the Holy Spirit guarantees our future in heaven?

12. How does this passage give us hope for believers who have passed away? How should we view death?

Journaling

Compare your notes and daily Scripture references. Take some time to pray and meditate on what God showed you in a practical way this week and how you can apply it to your Christian walk.
