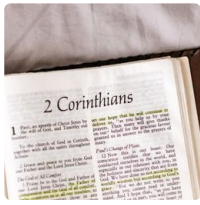


# OpenTheo

## 2 Corinthians 4



### 2 Corinthians - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg continues his study of 2 Corinthians, highlighting the importance of accountability within church leadership and organizations. He emphasizes the role of conscience in guiding individuals in their ethical and moral decision-making, and cautions against micromanaging the lives of church members who are doing fine without it. Gregg also draws parallels between Genesis and the development of Christian life, and stresses the value of suffering and resilience in renewing the inward self.

### Transcript

2 Corinthians 4 Alright, we'll continue our study now in 2 Corinthians, beginning at chapter 4. Chapter 4 begins with the word therefore, which means it's not really a new beginning, it's just a continuation of what has been said in the latter part of the previous chapter. You'll remember that in the previous chapter, Paul is saying that the only credentials that he needs to appeal to, rather than letters of endorsement from men or churches, the only credentials he really cares about are the credentials of the Holy Spirit's work through his ministry, which is most effectively seen in the hearts, the changes in the lives of the people that he has ministered to, the Corinthians being notable examples. While he makes, as it were, in chapter 3 a bold declaration that the Spirit is his endorser, and that what he has accomplished in the Corinthians speaks volumes more than any letters of accommodation could, as if he doesn't want to have that sound proud, or as if he is taking credit for it, and says that this is not something he has been personally, or could personally have done.

He has no sufficiency in himself, his sufficiency is of God. And, of course, he goes into that long discussion about the covenant, the new covenant, he's a minister of the new covenant, and that new covenant changes hearts. It transforms people from glory to glory into the image of Christ.

The Corinthians are an example of persons who are in that process as a result of Paul's ministry of that covenant. So he says, therefore, in chapter 4 verse 1, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. Now, Paul has been facing things that he said were recently above his strength to endure, beyond measure.

He suffered in Ephesus, or in Asia, and he said that he despaired even of life. He basically says that he has been pressed, he's been under pressure, he's been under the gun, he's received opposition. And yet, he doesn't lose heart, he says, as he receives mercy from God not to lose heart.

Now, receiving mercy, I think, is, in his mind, meaning not something just that God forgives his sins, but receiving mercy is more substantial, something God is giving him, is mercifully giving him the sustenance to manage and to not lose heart in it all. After all, he does have those encouragements that come from seeing his converts going on with God and the work of God in their lives. He says in verse 2, we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Now, when he says we have renounced the hidden things of shame, and not walking in craftiness, or handling the word of God deceitfully, he says we don't have any secrets. We don't have secret sins. Maybe someone is suggesting that we do.

We don't handle the word of God in a crafty manner, to take advantage of people, to make money off them, or anything like that. And we don't have secret sins. Of course, many people who outwardly seem very righteous do cherish secret sins.

And there are perhaps among us some who, all others look on us, or you, and think you to be very righteous, but you know of sins in your life which they don't know about. Paul says, if you could see right through me, you wouldn't see anything. You wouldn't see any of these secret sins.

We have renounced such things, these hidden shameful things. And renounced must mean, you know, before God. Before God, I have forsaken these things.

I've distanced myself from these things. I've decried them and renounced them. And I don't indulge them.

My handling of the word of God is not deceitful. What I do, he says, is just manifest the truth. I just tell the truth.

I don't put on any masks or any disguises. I just put myself out there. What you see is who I am.

I don't have any secrets. I'm transparent before you. And what I speak is just what I understand to be the truth.

And I just commend myself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. Now this statement I take to be very important. In the day in which we live, we're often told that we need to be more accountable to people.

And by more accountable, many people mean to a particular organization or leaders of an organization. By organization, I mean what most people call a church. There is the assumption, widespread in churches today, that belonging to one of these churches and making yourself somehow accountable under the authority and under the supervision of the leaders of such an organization is the only way, really, to live a Christian life safely and honestly.

There is the assumption, widely taught, that if you're not adequately accountable, you're not safe. Because in the multitude of counselors, there's safety and it's important to have people who are aware of what you're doing and you're walking in the light. And if there isn't someone watching over you, then you're likely to fall.

You're a lone ranger out there and the devil will just pick you right off. Shoot you right out of the saddle because you're not with the army. You're a lone ranger.

And therefore it's not safe to not have an accountability factor between yourself and some church leadership or church organization. And beyond that, it's not only that you might fall into trouble if you're not accountable, you're already suspect if you're not accountable. If you're not attached to some church, it's not just that you're in a dangerous situation and you might fall.

The assumption is that at some level you're already falling and that's why you're not in a church. At some level you have something to hide. You're lurking in the shadows.

You don't want people to find out something about you. And that's why you don't join a church or make yourself accountable. Believe me, I've heard this from many sources.

I've heard it about myself and I've heard many other people say it about other people. I remember once, I heard an advertisement on a Christian radio station years ago that this Christian organization that was promoting Christian musicians who were undiscovered musical talent or whatever, they were taking audition tapes from people who would be interested in a part-time music ministry. I was already in other ministry and I didn't want to be in full-time music ministry, but I thought, well, I haven't done much music lately, I'll send them a tape of some of my music, so I sent them one.

And they contacted me and said they were interested in going further and they had me fill out some paperwork and attend a seminar and some things like that with a bunch of other people who were also music ministers. And I think there were about 200 or 300 people at this seminar and they said, of those of you who are here, 20 of you will probably be picked for our organization to work with you and promote you. And they said there's different levels of involvement and different levels at which we will promote you.

They contacted me after this and said that I was one of the ones that they wanted to work with and they sent me some paperwork. And among the things they asked was,

who's your pastor? And at that time, I didn't have a pastor locally, and so I gave the name of a friend of mine who's a pastor, who I'm very close to. He happens to be in another state, but he's closer to me than I've been to any pastor I've ever known.

And he was a pastor, so I gave him as my pastor. Obviously, that's a rather unconventional thing to do, is to name somebody as your pastor who lives in another state from you, as you're supposed to, by conventional wisdom, have a pastor in the same town you live in, or at least a nearby town where you can commute to church. And so they called me about that.

They said, we're not quite understanding who you claim to be your pastor. It sounds like you live in Oregon and you said your pastor lives in Santa Cruz, California. I said, well, that's true.

And they said, well, where do you go to church locally? I said, well, I actually am not a member of any of the churches locally. At that time, I was commuting to the coast twice a month to preach on Sunday mornings at a church that had no pastor. I did that for a year and a half.

It was a two-hour drive each way, so it was too far for me to really be involved in the life of the church, but every alternate Sunday, I was preaching for them as they were looking for a pastor. And I said, well, twice a month, I'm preaching in a church, so I'm not a pastor there, and they don't have a pastor. And the other two weeks of the month, I just attend churches where I'm friendly with the pastors there.

I have a lot of friends there, so I just attend church there. And they said, but you're not committed to any of these churches? And I said, well, no, I can't very well be committed to the local churches because I'm twice a month out of town preaching. In fact, some of the times I'm not preaching at that church, I'm out of town because I'm preaching for YWAM or someone else.

And you can't be involved in that many churches and be fully committed to one. But I said, I don't have any problem with that. I'm doing okay.

I'm not backsliding or anything like that. And they said, well, this is not acceptable. You have to have a more adequate structure of accountability.

I said, well, what constitutes an adequate structure of accountability? And they said, well, you have to be part of a church and have a pastor. I said, well, I can appreciate the fact that you don't want people who are working with you to be flakes or heretics or anything like that. But while it's true I don't go to a church and don't have a pastor, I have many pastors who are close friends of mine.

And I have lunch with them, not unfrequently, and visit with them in their offices frequently. And they come and speak at my school and I go and speak in their church

and so forth. But I'm not really in their church.

And they said, well, that won't do. You have to have a more adequate structure of accountability. I said, well, let me get this straight.

If I would go and join a church in town, and even if the pastor never knew me, but I was a member in his congregation, would I have an adequate structure of accountability? And they said, yes. I said, well, I'm afraid I don't understand accountability that way. And they said, well, we won't be able to work together then, so we didn't.

And I thought, that is the weirdest thing. However, it's not weird in the mind of many people. Many people who will hear this tape will say, well, yeah, I agree with them.

That's the sad thing, is how many Christians have imported an idea of accountability that is institutionalized into the Christian life, which is contrary to scripture. As I recall, Paul said, the head of every man is Christ. And Paul didn't need letters of commendation from men, say he's accountable to the church in Antioch.

Well, he was in one sense accountable to the church in Antioch, because they sent him out. And whenever he returned that way, he reported back and told what he'd been doing for the past three years since they last saw him. Is that accountability? See these people once every three years and you're on the other side of the world the rest of the time? Could be, as long as you're a member of the church.

Accountability then is based on organization, institution, symbolism, name on a list, has nothing to do with actual physical contact or conversations or frequency of fellowship with people. If I'm a member of a church in this town, but I'm out of town every Sunday for six months teaching somewhere else, I'm still adequately accountable because I at least have a church. My name is on the rolls.

But if I go to church every Sunday and I'm personally acquainted with the pastor, but I've never joined the church, then I'm not adequately accountable. And this is so bizarre. Paul had none of that ridiculousness in his life.

He says, listen, what I do, I don't bring letters of commendation. I don't appeal to the church of Antioch as my covering. I don't have a covering like that.

I don't need a covering like that, since the Bible doesn't talk about coverings. Churches talk about coverings, but the Bible doesn't talk about coverings. Paul says, what I do is I just lay it out who I am.

I present, I live a transparent life. Anyone can look at me. If there's something about me you don't like, that's okay.

Something about what I say you don't like, that's okay. I just present the truth and I

commend myself to every man's conscience and the sight of God. What is a conscience? We usually think of our conscience as something that bothers us if we do wrong, and that is true.

But actually, the conscience, by definition, is your capacity to discern between good and evil, or right and wrong, or that kind of thing. The conscience is simply, there isn't a thing inside of you called a conscience. It's not located below your left kidney or something like that.

The conscience is not a thing. A conscience is just a word that has been coined to speak of a human's ability to tell between right and wrong. We call that my conscience.

If something inside tells me something is wrong, that's my conscience operating. On the other hand, if something tells me something is right and good, I say amen, that's also my conscience bearing witness to it. Paul uses the word that way, and that's the right way to use it.

If you turn for a moment over to Romans chapter 2, you'll see that Paul uses the word conscience that way. In Romans 2, verses 14 and 15, Paul says, For when Gentiles who do not have the law by nature do the things contained in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves. You can't be a law to yourself, but these people are good.

They're doing the things that's contained in the law. Paul's not saying these are bad people, these are good people. They're a law unto themselves.

Good heavens. Don't they have somebody telling them what they have to do every day? Yes, they do. It's in their heart.

They have the law written in their heart. It says in verse 15, They show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them. That is, when your conscience bears witness, it either accuses you or excuses you.

It either says you're doing right or wrong. That is what the conscience is. It's the capacity to be self-accused or to be self-excused.

Neither of which is bad. If you do wrong, you want to be self-accused. And if you do right, you want to be excused.

It is not really anything other than your capacity to know what's right and what's wrong. It's your conscience. And there are people who have the law written in their hearts, so they don't need a law imposed from outside.

They're a law unto themselves. Now when we talk about people being a law unto

themselves, that phrase has come to usually mean a loose cannon, a rebel, someone who's going to cause a lot of trouble, probably an outlaw. And that is true if they don't have the law written in their hearts.

If somebody doesn't have God's law written in their hearts, if they're not really regenerated and submitted to Jesus Christ, then for them to be a law unto themselves is the same as what was in the book of Numbers. There was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in his own eyes. The trouble is no one was regenerated.

And what was right in their eyes was bad. And they misbehaved badly. They got into idolatry and all kinds of stuff.

But when people have the law written in their heart, Paul says they can be a law unto themselves and their conscience tells them what's right and wrong. They don't need to have an imposed religious law upon them or institutionalized authority implied to them. The head of every man is Christ in the church.

Christ is the authority. The Holy Spirit leads. We don't need an institution to replace Christ or the Holy Spirit, because they don't feel more comfortable doing so.

Because they can't see Jesus, but they can see the pastor. They can see the church. They can see the congregation.

They can feel a part of something visible, tangible. And this is, to my mind, a carnal need. I'm not saying it's wrong to go to church.

Not at all. I'm just saying that if that is where a person finds his security, if a person is secure because he's got a pastor, if a person stays on the straight and narrow because he's in a church, an organization called a church, that person is really not better than anyone else in any other religion that keeps them in line. The Christian has God to keep him in line, and therefore comes to church not as a babysitter to keep him in line, but goes to church as a minister to minister in whatever gifting God has given.

It's true we receive mutual benefit. But the point is, if you are dependent on your church or your pastor to make sure that you don't sin or don't fall away, you're in trouble because there are people who were in your church who did fall away. I don't care what church you go to.

It's true of every church. There are people who did have the pastor and did have the church and fell away anyway, or fell into sin. And one of the churches in town here that used to accuse me, my face until they stopped communicating with me, of being not adequately accountable to elders, they had an elder who was accusing me who happened to be secretly living in adultery with two married women in the church.

He did it for eight years before he was exposed. And it was during that time while he was

still unexposed, and in this adultery relationship, he was telling me that I was not adequately accountable. He was, yes, because he was in eldership.

He was submitted to the elders. He was in the institution. I wasn't in the institution, but I wasn't committing adultery.

What's the difference here? People who say that you need accountability from man are people who have very little confidence in the Holy Spirit. Ironically, a lot of the churches that speak most boldly about this are the ones that claim to be spirit-filled churches. The charismatic churches are the ones that talk more than anyone else about the need to be accountable to people and to the institution.

They don't believe the Holy Spirit's adequate. I mean, the Holy Spirit might be adequate to make you fall down and laugh and bark and stuff like that, but he's not adequate to make you live a holy life, apparently. You need, for that, people.

For that, you need the world, the Christian world. I mean, you need physical structures. And, frankly, I don't think Paul agreed with that.

I don't think Jesus did either. But a large number of people do in our society. Now, I hope that you will not take these attitudes of mine and use them as some excuse to avoid fellowship.

If you do, you probably are exposing yourself as not being as spiritual as you think you are because spiritual people love fellowship. Spiritual people love accountability. I love to be accountable.

Not to an institution, though. I have many, many people to whom I'm accountable, but most of all, like Paul, I believe it's right to just be accountable to everybody. But ultimately, I'm only accountable to one person, and that's God.

Paul said in Romans chapter 14, Every one of us must give account of himself to God. Nowhere says I have to give account of myself to any man, anywhere in the Bible. But I have to give account of myself to God.

You see, if a man is accountable in his conscience toward God, he will live uprightly whether or not he is accountable to people additionally. But if a man is accountable to people but not accountable in his heart to God, he will not live uprightly, even though he is accountable to people. The elder that was living in adultery with two women for eight years is a good example of that.

He had a structure of accountability. He had institutional accountability. He was as close to the eldership as anyone could be because he was on the eldership.

And he met regularly with the elders in the past of the church, and was known by them



fairly intimately, but they didn't know what was really going on. You know why? He was not accountable in his heart to God. The fear of God was not there.

The fear of man was, and therefore he didn't let on that he was sinning to those people who would have disapproved. But the fear of God was absent. Now Paul says, my accountability is to all people in the sight of God.

I do what's right in the sight of God and let everybody see what I'm doing and let their own conscience decide what to make of it. Their own capacity to tell what's right and wrong. Now Paul didn't indicate that everybody's conscience would tell them the same thing.

There would be people who would reject him. There would be people who would see him and hear his message and say, sorry, I'm not interested in that, and go away. Their conscience is poorly informed.

Because a conscience is not infallible. When I say the conscience refers to the ability to know right and wrong, it doesn't mean a God-like infallible ability to know what's right and wrong. The conscience can be corrupted.

The conscience can be seared. The conscience can be miseducated, misinformed. And therefore the conscience could believe that it's wrong for a woman to wear pants.

There's a lot of Christians who believe it's wrong for a woman to wear pants. So their conscience would bother them if they wore pants, if they're a woman. And when they see women wearing pants, their conscience tells them that's wrong.

But I personally don't agree with that judgment of their conscience. I might prefer women in dresses myself, but there's nothing in the Bible that says that a woman can't wear pants. And for that reason, a person's conscience can be mistaken.

But whether mistaken or not, Paul says you always have to go by your conscience. He says that in his discussion about meat sacrificed to idols. If your conscience won't let you eat meat sacrificed to idols, even if your conscience is misinformed about that, obey it.

Because if you go against it, you're sinning against your conscience. You remember Paul's discussions about that. He talks that way in Romans 14 and 15.

And he also talks that way in 1 Corinthians chapters 8 through 10. That some things that your conscience might even be misinformed about, it still cannot be ignored. You have to follow it.

Because if your conscience tells you something is wrong and you do it anyway, even if it isn't really wrong, the fact is you think it's wrong and you do it. It means that your heart has decided to do what you believe is wrong, and that's where the sin is. Someone else

doesn't think it's wrong and it isn't, and does it, they're not sinning.

But if you do what you believe to be wrong, you're sinning. Now, Paul is not saying that since he commends himself in his message to every man's conscience, everyone will infallibly recognize that it's right and embrace it. Paul knew better than that.

There are many people who heard Paul who rejected him and didn't accept it. But that didn't matter. He just left it to the conscience of every man, knowing that this is where ultimate responsibility lies with every man for the salvation.

Every man's conscience has got to decide for himself what he will believe. If he makes the wrong choice, too bad for him. But Paul is not going to force someone to believe, or uphold rank by citing authorities that stand behind him or something like that.

He just gives them what God gave him to give, and leaves it to every man's conscience to decide whether they're going to accept that as right, or reject it as wrong. And that's his method. Very unstressful.

No fear of man in there. He lived and preached in the sight of God. That was his accountability structure.

God. And when a man is accountable to God, he has no objection to making himself fully transparent to all people. And that's what Paul says he did.

You see, a man who's not accountable to God, but is accountable to a church or a structure, that person will not be totally transparent sometimes, because he may have hidden sin in his life. But Paul makes it clear, I don't have any of that. I've renounced the hidden things.

I don't have some secret sins going on. Therefore, I don't need to appeal to this church or that church sent me out. This church or that church approves of me.

This church or that church will vouch for me, and I'm accountable to them. He didn't need any of that. He was accountable to God.

He had no secret sin in his life, and he presented himself and his gospel for exactly what it was, without any masks, without any dissimulation, and he left it to every man's conscience to make their judgment of him and his ministry, and he would live with that. If that didn't make him popular, because most people didn't like what they saw and heard from him, that's not his problem. That's God's problem.

And theirs, but not his. His obligation is to be honest, do what's right, instead of God, and to leave it to people to decide what to do with him. The idea of covering, as churches use that term these days, I always wondered that too, because I used to be in a church in Santa Cruz, California, briefly, that got into this shepherding thing, where the word

covering originally began to really be used a lot.

And I always looked in the scripture to find the basis for it, and there simply isn't any biblical basis. I mean, you get out your concordance and look at the word cover or covering, and you'll find those words there, but they're not used in any way to speak of what they're talking about. The concept of being covered as under a protective spiritual umbrella by being submitted to some leadership arose, as far as I know, in the shepherding movement.

At least I never heard of it before then. It might have been around before then. But it seems to me the only place that any scripture has ever appealed to is 1 Corinthians chapter 11, about a woman covering her head as a symbol of her submission to her husband.

And I think it was extrapolated from there, without any real biblical basis, but for the sake of making the point that they wanted to make, that a woman's covering on her head representative of her submission to proper authority also is symbolic of the fact that she's covered or umbrella-ed or protected from some things. And even when it says a woman ought to have authority on her head because of the angels, it suggests maybe that could mean the fallen angels, demons, and that if a woman is not covered, in Paul's case physically covered, but symbolic of being covered in the sense of submitting to her husband, then she's a target and vulnerable to demonic attack. There's all kinds of fear tactics used in this.

It's very manipulative. But actually, one can read very carefully 1 Corinthians 11 about a woman wearing a head covering, and you'll not find one indicator there that a head covering is symbolic of some kind of a spiritual covering. I mean, it is no doubt a picture of submission, but to add to it that it's a picture of some kind of protection that comes through submission is to add to what's there.

I personally think there is protection of the weak in their submission to proper authority. The sheep need the shepherd. If a person is a sheep, they need a shepherd.

Fortunately, God has given us a shepherd. His name is Jesus. He called himself the Good Shepherd.

His sheep know his voice, and they follow him. There are weak sheep who sometimes tend to stray, and God does appoint for such sheep under shepherds, pastors and so forth, to go after them and to bring them back for him and to be his agents, though it should not be thought that every sheep is a wandering sheep. Jesus gave the example of a shepherd who had 199 of them who weren't wanderers.

One was. And the shepherd goes after the one that's wandering. He doesn't micromanage the 99 that are doing okay.

But the one that's getting in trouble, that's the one the shepherd spends his time on. There are some pastors who don't seem to understand that. They think they need to micromanage the life of every person in the church, even if they're doing fine without it.

And it's, frankly, a big power trip for some people. Maybe not for all. Some who do it might do it because they think, and they've been falsely taught that the Bible teaches such a thing, that that kind of oversight is not in Scripture.

Actually, Paul himself makes that clear in 2 Corinthians 1.24, for he, an apostle, actually says, not that we have dominion over your faith, but we're fellow workers for your joy. By faith you stand. Paul's very emphatic that everyone stands before God by himself in one sense, and with others in another.

That is, when it comes to fulfilling the purposes of God in the earth, we need the whole body of Christ. No member can say to the other, I have no need of you. We all need each other.

And if one member is missing, then something that should get done won't get done properly. And in that sense, we're all mutually dependent upon each other. But in another sense, we cannot be, in the final analysis, dependent on each other, because the day could come where we're isolated against our will.

And we have to be as strong in the Lord when we don't have each other to help us as we would be if we were in the middle of the congregation. Now, Paul kind of makes that distinction, I think, in Galatians 6. I'm going to get me off on a tangent here, but I guess I've already got myself off on it. In Galatians 6, Paul says in verse 2, Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Then he says, For if anyone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself, but let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone and not in another, for each one shall bear his own load. That's an interesting contrast. Bear one another's burdens, but everyone's going to bear his own load.

That sounds like a contradiction. But it isn't. In one sense, he's saying, When a brother is in need, and has a heavy burden to bear, for you to get there and get your shoulder under it with him, and help him through it, and help him get to where he's got to go, and be a partner with him in the task that has to be done, that's being loving.

That is fellowship. That is fulfilling the law of Christ. That's what Christians need to do.

But in terms of accountability before God, let each one examine his own work, verse 4 says. Then he can have rejoicing in what has been accomplished in himself alone, and not in another. That is to say, on the day of judgment, or simply in terms of your standing before God at any given moment, it's based on your own work.

It's not what someone else, your pastor or someone else is doing for you. You have to bear the load yourself of your own personal responsibility before God. Not every load he puts on you to bear, you have to bear alone, but your responsibility for your life is certainly your own responsibility.

But it is possible for us, although I recognize that each of you, ultimately, is responsible for his own life before God, and her own life before God. Yet, there are many things, struggles, that we go through where we do very well to have assistance. Whether it's comfort or counsel or encouragement or finance or practical assistance or whatever.

There's all kinds of ways in which we bear each other's burdens. There's all kinds of ways where the body of Christ helps other members of the body of Christ. One of those ways is those who have the gift of leadership.

Christ gives leaders to the body of Christ. There are those who have the gift of administration, the gift of ruling. There are elders, in other words, deacons.

And there were apostles. Now, why are these people there? They're there to be leaders. Not dictators.

Leaders. A leader is one who serves. A leader is one who sets an example in the body of Christ.

A leader is one who provides leadership for those who need it. It is not to be thought that everyone equally needs leadership. In fact, that's clearly not the case, because then what would the leader do? Where does the leader go? Who's his leader? Well, some people would have a whole chain of command going up to the Pope himself.

So, that's not in Christ. In Christ, the head of every man is Christ. He is the leader of us all.

There are some, however, who are weaker, deafer, more in bondage, more ingrained in sin, having more troubles than others, more blind, and who desperately need some teaching, some leadership, some counsel. And that's what leaders are there for, to provide that service. But you don't impose your service and tell everyone they have to come under it.

If I said, OK, I'm here to wash the windows, and you said, well, my windows are already clean, thank you, but I'm here to wash the windows. That's my ministry. I'm going to wash your windows.

No, I don't need my windows washed. Actually, I washed my windows myself just recently, and they're very clean. You don't understand.

I am ordained to be the window washer here, and I'm going to wash your windows. Well,

that would be ridiculous. Why waste my effort if you've already got your windows clean? If I have a ministry of window washing, I should look for the people who don't have clean windows and wash their windows.

And if I had a ministry of leadership, or pastor, or whoever, I should look for sheep that are wandering and who need a pastor. Sheep who don't hear his voice very well. I've got limited energy.

Why should I waste my energy on people who don't need me? Why would a pastor want everyone to be dependent on him to tell him what to do? Well, there's many people in the church, hopefully, unless he's disabled them by his very style of leadership. There should be many people in the church who know how to follow Jesus by themselves without intrusion. The leaders are there for the weak, and everyone is weak sometimes.

Even the leaders. When I say the leaders are there for the weak, you might think that I'm somehow arrogantly saying I'm not one of the weak, so I don't need any leaders. That's not true at all.

I receive teaching all the time, and benefit from it. I receive counsel all the time and benefit from it. I'm not always strong, but when I am strong, I don't need someone to treat me like I'm weak.

I mean, there are times when everyone needs the help of those who are struggling. In fact, that's exactly what Paul told the leaders to do. If you look over at 1 Thessalonians 5, we've gotten off on a tangent quite far from the flow of thought in 2 Corinthians.

We're going to need to get back there real quick. In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul addresses two groups of brethren, those who are under authority and those who are in authority. That is, those who are the leaders and those who are under the leaders.

He first speaks to those who are under the leaders. Now we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord. Notice those who are over you are the ones who are laboring, they're servants, and who admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake and be at peace among yourselves.

Then he says, Now we exhort you, brethren, and I believe from the content and now he turns, I believe, to the leaders. He says in verse 14, Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the faint-hearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. This is the pastor's task.

Who is he ministering to primarily? The unruly, the faint-hearted, the weak, the ones who test your patience. Therefore the leaders are told concentrate their energies on those people who are in need of leadership. Is everyone in the church in need of that kind of leadership? Hopefully not or else it's a terrible church.

Most Christians, mature Christians, don't need micromanagement from a human leader. We do need micromanagement from the Holy Spirit, but we have that. And when you find church leaders who insist that everyone in the church must always be under their scrutiny, must always be submitted to the Holy Spirit, you're finding a pastor who's saying I want everyone in this church to remain babes and I want to remain in my job as a babysitter.

It's my job security, you know, as a pastor, to have the church continually babies. What if they grew up and didn't need me? Not good for my job security. I don't mean to be cynical, but I cannot imagine any other motivation than ego or job security to remain babies depending on Him.

Jesus didn't want that even though we are dependent on Him in a sense. He launched them. He left them with His Spirit and said, you know, I can only tell you so much.

The rest you're going to have to get from the Holy Spirit. Paul didn't want to keep people dependent on Him for every little thing. He's not dominating them.

So the spirit that exists is simply the same as the rulers of the Gentiles who exercise authority over them of whom Jesus said, it shall not be so among you. Paul didn't have so many leadership like that over him. And some might say, well, that's because he was an apostle.

Apostles are at the top of the ladder. Well, I think every person is at the top of the ladder in the sense of direct access to God and accountability to God. That's what Paul said.

He didn't have a structure of accountability that could keep him honest. He needed God to do that because there was no church that watched over him closely or that required him to answer back to them on a regular basis. He had to be a real Christian.

And if he wasn't, you know what he would have become? A real heretic because there was no one there to stop him from being. Only God. But you know what? I think it's almost in some ways that a heretic is exposed because the church is not there to make him keep looking like an orthodox person.

Physical structures of accountability keep people outwardly honest. But sometimes those people never are inwardly honest as the case of the elder in adultery I mentioned earlier is a good example. Outwardly he was exemplary.

Everyone thought he was the greatest, most spiritual man in the church. I did, believe it or not. I was taken in by it.

For years, unrepentant. I mean, it's one thing to fall and to repent. It's another thing to do it for years and years and years and keep it covered up.

There's no honesty in that. Anyway, we get good glimpses in this very personal letter from Paul of his basic attitude toward ministry. I mean, he talks a lot about ministry and his attitude toward ministry in this epistle.

Now he says in verse 3, even though our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. You can see he's continuing along the same imagery as the previous chapter. The Jews, when they read the law of Moses, there's a veil over their minds.

It doesn't go away until they turn to the Lord. Paul indicates not only the law of Moses is veiled to them, there are some people who find even Paul's message veiled. It's not our fault.

We're speaking boldly and plainly. We're hiding nothing. If someone is not getting it, if it's not penetrating, it's not our fault.

He said in the previous chapter, chapter 3 and verse 13, actually verse 12 and 13, he says, therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech unlike Moses who put a veil over his face. In other words, we don't put a veil over our face. We speak boldly and plainly.

In chapter 1, verses 13 and 14, he said the same thing about his writings. He says, we are not writing any other things to you than what you read and understand. In other words, it's all on the surface.

There's not some deeper hidden meanings to my writings here. Some people are always looking for hidden meanings and mystical meanings in what Paul wrote or what the Bible says. There are some of those in the Old Testament and Jesus opened the understanding of the disciples so they could understand those things.

But the New Testament writers are different. They're not like Moses who veiled it. They speak boldly, plainly.

They didn't write anything other than what you write and understand. It's right there on the surface, easily accessible, right where the goats can get it. Now I trust you will understand even to the end, he says.

Now, what Paul is saying is there's, even though we use plain speech and speak it boldly and we're honest and transparent, there are still some people who are veiled to Jews who haven't turned to Christ, but our message is veiled to some people. They may or may not be Jewish people. They might be Gentiles, but they're not getting it.

And he says, if it is so that our gospel is veiled to some, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the God of this age has blinded. Paul hasn't blinded them and God hasn't blinded them. The God of this age has blinded them.



Now, Satan is called the God of this age. Now, when you talk about Jesus being God and you use proof texts that talk about, you know, that Jesus is called God, those who don't think Jesus is God, like say the Joneses, they'll say, well, yeah, Jesus is called God, but that doesn't mean he's Jehovah God. Lots of things are called God.

Even the devil is called the God of this age, they observe. And Paul said in 1 Corinthians 8, there are gods many and lords many. There are many that are called gods and many that are called lords, and therefore that Jesus is called God but of course they're missing the point.

There's only one true God. There's a whole lot of false gods. Yes, there are many things called God and called Lord, but they're all false except for one.

There's only one God and one Lord that's real. The others are false. They are called gods for no other reason than that they are objects of worship.

The word God can be used either way and frequently is in scripture or in ordinary language. God can mean a being who is inherently divine and deity and that is of course the way it's used of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit and of the Father of Jehovah. But the word God is equally frequently used of anything that receives worship.

And we use it that way, I mean even non-Christians use that. Somebody sees himself as a god or a person, their car is their god or their job or their wife or their children or their money is their god. In the Bible they're called gods.

They're the gods of the heathen. They're not innately god. They're not divine.

They are called God because the term God can simply refer to something that is the object of veneration or worship. Satan in that sense is a god because there are those who worship and venerate and follow him. In fact, he is the god of this age.

This age is of course dominated by its infatuation with the things of Satan. Satan is the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience, said Paul in Ephesians 2. And so he refers to Satan as the god of this age. Now, anyone who has Satan for a god is going to have their eyes blinded from the gospel.

You cannot acknowledge the gospel and still be venerating the enemy of the gospel. And it is one of Satan's activities that he tries to obscure the message, to blind it. This he may do by simply trying to prevent the message from being preached at all.

So that he tries to prevent missionaries from going out, either by discouraging them from going or by putting up roadblocks to them going. He does not want the gospel to be heard. The minds of those who have not heard the gospel are already blinded and he just has to keep it that way.

And also among those who have heard, he tries to blind their minds to its truth by either trying to make them doubtful of the truth of it or corrupt it so they misunderstand it into some heresy or something. The devil is always trying to do one thing and that is keep the truth away from people. Because Jesus said the truth will make you free.

And if you are free, you are free from Satan's sin. And free indeed. There is nothing the devil hates more than truth.

And there is nothing the church should seek more than truth. And the more the better. Because the more one has truth, the more they are set free.

Now Satan does not want people free because he is the jail keeper. And so he will blind people to the truth as much as he can. Either keep them from hearing the gospel in the first place or cause them to doubt it when they hear it or to corrupt it and misunderstand it or whatever he can just so the truth never penetrates.

Because once the truth penetrates, he loses a victim. And so he is blinding and veiling and corrupting and whispering and perverting and obstructing the work of the apostles and their message as much as he can. Paul is perhaps implying that those in Corinth who are coming against him and his message, their agents of Satan are at least blinded by Satan.

And he says the reason Satan does it, their minds, it says in verse 4, the God of this age is blinded who do not believe lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God should shine on them. Now notice the use of the word glory here. The gospel of the glory of Christ.

Okay. The image of God, the linking of the word glory and image is common in scripture. It says in 1 Corinthians 11 that woman is made in the image and glory of man.

Jesus was said in Hebrews 1.3 to be the brightness of God's glory and the express image of his person. Glory and image mixed closely together. I don't know if these terms are interchangeable or simply extremely closely related.

We see Paul assuming that same image in verse 18 of chapter 3 where he says as we're beholding the glory of the Lord, we're changing that same image from glory to glory. Remember I said that the glory of God and the glory of Christ in Christ in the scripture has an additional meaning to that which the word glory might mean in some other instances. It additionally means the essential innate excellency and character of God and when it says we are being changed into his glory, it means we're being changed into his image.

So Paul links glory and image continually together, not continually but frequently together. He says lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God, Christ's glory is the image of God, should shine on them. There you have the

radiance kind of aspect of glory in there, the imagery of glory being in the scripture and there's no attempt made to separate them.

It's as if they all kind of work together in the same word. Devil doesn't want that light of the glory of God to come to him so he blinds them and veils it. For we do not preach ourselves, Paul said.

We don't talk around, if someone says well who authorized you and what makes you so special blah blah blah, he says well I'm not here to preach, we don't preach ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. So if you inquire about who I am, I'll tell you who I am. Well first of all, more importantly who Jesus is.

Jesus is the Lord. I'm one of his slaves. That's all you need to know about me.

I'm just his slave for your sake or for Jesus' sake. Your servant for Jesus' sake. That's the opposite of the way that the wrong kind of spiritual leaders think.

They think that Jesus is there to serve their agenda and everyone is supposed to serve them. They are the rulers. And this is the normal way that Gentiles think.

It's a shame that so many have been in the church notwithstanding Jesus' warning not to have taken on this spirit. In verse 6 it says for it is God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness who is shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Now here again we have the glory of God.

We've got the light imagery. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God. It's been made known to us in the face of Jesus Christ.

Of course we haven't really literally seen his face. He's speaking figuratively. It's in being exposed to Christ.

Exposure to Jesus. Knowing who he is. Perceiving him.

Having him presented to us and our looking on him without wincing and without turning away and without trying to corrupt what we see. But just looking on to who Jesus is. Acknowledging him.

Embracing him for who he is. That has given us the knowledge of the glory of God. We have come to know the glorious being that God is by having embraced Jesus as presented to us.

And therefore in the face of Jesus Christ God has shone in our hearts to give this knowledge. Now Paul compares this in verse 6 with God calling the light to shine out of darkness. And there there's no doubt he's referring to Genesis 1. For all was dark and God said let there be light.

And there was light. And Paul's simply saying it's sort of like that in our hearts. Just like in Genesis 1 it was dark and God called the light to shine out of darkness.

So has he done an analogous thing in our hearts. He's given the light. We were in the dark.

Our hearts were darkness. We were darkness. Now are we light in the Lord he says in Ephesians.

And God has given the light of the knowledge of the glory of himself in the face of Jesus Christ to us. Now many years ago this was the verse that kind of tipped me off to something that I've come to see much more clearly and have many Bible verses that I now consider to be relevant to. And that is that the story in Genesis 1 of the creation has a dual function.

On one hand it tells us how the creation took place. However it doesn't tell us why the creation took place in that way as opposed to some other way. God for example did not require six days to create the world.

He used six days but he could have done it in two or three or one or in a moment. Could he not? Does anyone doubt that God has the power to do that if he just said okay let there be everything. And there was everything.

He could have done it that way. But instead he said let there be life. And he waited the first evening and morning and the second day he says okay now let the firmament be between the waters above and below.

And that happens. Waited another day. Third day.

Well let the waters divide and the dry land appear and let there be vegetation. And that happened. Then he waits another day.

Then he creates the sun, moon and stars. Then he waits another day and creates sea creatures and arboreal creatures. And then he or actually flying creatures.

And then finally he creates land animals on the sixth day. Why did he do that all at once? Why did he do it that way? And why in that order? Why did he make plants before he made sunlight? I mean why, why, why? You know I mean Genesis tells us what God did. It does not give us a clue why he did it in that precise way as opposed to some other any other way that he might have done so.

Now God is not obligated to tell us why and I'm not sure that our curiosity would be legitimate to say that if we wanted to pester him about it. You know God tell me why he did that. That's his business not ours.

But there is a reason. And I didn't understand that there was a reason nor did I even

puzzle over it really until once I was reading this particular verse. And it came to light as it were.

He said God in the King James Version that I was reading at the time it says God who called the light to shine out of darkness has shined in our hearts to give the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. To give the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Now God shined in our hearts just as he shined in the darkness as he called the light to shine in the darkness.

And I thought hey Paul is making some kind of a connection here. Paul is saying that what happened in our conversion when God revealed to us Christ for the first time and enlightened us from our darkened minds before that that is like what happened in Genesis in Genesis 1-2 or 1-3 where God said let there be light and there was light. And I thought I wonder if that's the only parallel.

I wonder if Paul is just kind of taking something out of left field and saying well you know it's a little bit like what happened back there what happened to us. Or if he is drawing that from a larger scenario that he embraced without explaining it. Namely what happened as possible that Paul saw the entire creative action in Genesis chapter 1 all of it as having parallels in our lives and he only appeals to the part that he wants to appeal to here.

The fact that well in the beginning when God said let there be light it's like when we got converted. Yes. Yes.

Is there more? Are there more parallels to that? I wondered and I began to study the scriptures and I began to find out there were many parallels. In fact many of them appear to be deliberate in scripture and even alluded to in scripture elsewhere. I don't have time to get into it now.

It may not interest you anyway enough and we don't have time. If you are interested I have a tape in our tape I recall the spiritual implications of Genesis 1 where I go through and I show with each day of creation the things that parallel things in the development of the Christian life. The most important or the largest message of it all is that God began in Genesis 1 once he created the heavens and the earth it was all formless and void and in darkness but at the end of that creative activity he had a man and a woman in his own image and that is parallel to his work in the human being.

He finds somebody who is in darkness formless and void spiritually and by the time he is finished he has a man or a woman in his own image and the days of creation in between represent various works that God does in the life between the first and the last state of that person. He begins with us lost and he ends up with us as replicas of Christ. We are not there yet we are somewhere in the days in between but there are parallels and I believe the scriptures actually make reference to those parallels in some cases.

Anyway, I will just say that much and go on. What Paul is doing of course is in the previous chapter and up to this point in chapter 4 is doing a lot of word plays on some of the images from the Old Testament about the veils and Moses' face and the glory and the light and stuff like that but he is bringing out spiritual lessons especially about the New Covenant in contrast to the Old Covenant from this and also the fact that he has walked in the light he has presented the glorious gospel but it has not shined to everyone who has heard him. The devil has blocked and obstructed their view of it as if they were veiled or blinded them because he doesn't want the light to shine to them. If the devil could have done that in Genesis 1 and just wouldn't allow the light to shine to the earth then there would never have been anything else that God came up with including man and woman in his own image.

The devil doesn't want the spiritual fulfillment of that type in the Old Testament to ever come to manifestation so he opposes it with all he has. But we have verse 7 this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. Now this is one of the most succinct and excellent statements in the scriptures to help us through the maze of verbal confusion on all the talk that goes on about self-image and self-esteem and so forth.

Are we to have a high or low self-esteem? Well, it depends. It just depends on what you mean. I mean obviously self-esteem is not a term that's found in the Bible so we can't find a definitive verse that says here is the Christian view of self-esteem.

Unfortunately, even outside the Bible it doesn't have a real clear definition because the self is sort of a vague term. Does it mean to who I am essentially or who I am actually? Does it mean my better self or my corrupt self? I mean what are we talking about here? Well no one has ever really fully defined it I guess or if they have I haven't got wind of it. So everyone kind of defines it for themselves in discussion therefore everyone has a different opinion about whether you should have high or low self-esteem.

To me this is a very good verse to just put it all in perspective. We have a treasure. That's worth something.

That's valuable. But we have it in an earthen vessel. The earthen vessel is not particularly valuable.

Not particularly admirable. Not particularly worthy of any attention or of any esteem. The treasure, well the treasure has always got value, that's why they're treasures.

Earthen vessels got no value. But you put a treasure into an earthen vessel and that earthen vessel will be a thing very much desired. I saw a movie once years ago about someone who smuggled a lot of expensive drugs in the country in the body of a teddy bear.

And the teddy bear got misplaced early in the movie into the wrong hands and the person who had it didn't know there was cocaine or whatever was in it and there was this attempt to retrieve it on the part of those who knew the cocaine was in it. And of course there were the criminals who were trying to smuggle it in. But you know it was not clear to some participants why anyone would value this teddy bear so much.

And on the other hand it was worth a great deal to those who knew what was in it. Now the teddy bear itself was just an ordinary teddy bear and didn't have anything particularly valuable about it that any human being especially an adult would care anything about. But there were all these adults trying very hard to steal it and to get it and to apprehend it and to search for it.

They're risking their lives to get it in some cases. And risking arrest. One has to wonder why did they value this teddy bear so much? Well it's not that they valued teddy bears.

It's that they valued something that had monetary value in it for which they were very greedy and wanted to have it. Now was that teddy bear valuable? Yes and no. I mean as a teddy bear it was not particularly valuable.

As a container for something that had monetary value it was greatly desired and valued and sought after. Now you as a Christian your body is made of earth. Made of the dust of the earth.

You're an earthen vessel, an earthen container. Is that worth much? Not really. Actually they say that if all the chemicals in your body were simply extracted the value would be, what is it, about 97 cents in chemicals? Something close to that.

Your physical body isn't worth all that much. It's mostly water anyway. The price has gone up.

With inflation maybe it's worth about \$1.50 now. of course when people think about their self worth they're not thinking about their literal physical body they're thinking about their mind and their personality and their talents and things like that. What contribution they're capable of making to society or to whatever.

How they measure up in comparison with other people. Those are the kinds of things that people are thinking about when they think about self worth. But really the self is a fallen sinful thing.

I mean the flesh is. Let's use that word. A more biblical word.

And it's not worth an awful lot. But God is worth a great deal. The Holy Spirit is of surpassing value.

And he dwells inside of us. We are a container. We are a vessel.

A vessel of earth. Not very valuable in ourselves. But full of God.

Full of God's Holy Spirit. And because of the Holy Spirit being us there's all kinds of potential in us. There are many wonderful things that can be done through us.

The world can be changed for better by a mere human being who has God in him. But it's not the human being. It's God.

And that's why Paul earlier said it's not that we have sufficiency of ourselves. Our sufficiency is of God. Now sure we're in the picture.

We're the containers. But anything good that happens didn't happen because of the container. Any value in our lives is not because of the container.

It is because of the contained treasure. So on one hand of course you value a jar if you have a jar full of gold coins worth you know tens of thousands of dollars the jar might be an ordinary mayonnaise jar. But if you lost it you'd think you'd lost something of great value.

And when you found that jar again you'd be very happy you did. And you know but it's not the jar is transparent. It's what's inside there that you're looking at.

And that's what's valuable. And so but I mean frankly I think self esteem is simply wrong headed. I think that to be worried about how much I'm worth or thinking about how much I'm worth is just thinking about the wrong subject.

I'm not supposed to be thinking so much about me anyway. There's many other things to be thinking about first. And once I've thought about all of them I don't have much time left to think about me.

But if someone says you know do you have low or high self esteem I'm not sure how to answer. I believe there's a treasure there. That's worth something.

I do believe that and I believe every one of you should be able to say the same thing that if God is in there then there's good things. Potential. Tremendous things that God can do through me.

I'm of great value. But expendable. That treasure could fit in another earthen jar just as well.

And it'd be just as much a treasure. And the earthen jar is very expendable. And therefore if what I bring into the transaction is the earthen jar and God brings the treasure then I don't have very much opinion of myself and my contribution.

And that is a hard balance for people to keep because so many times when God works through you or if God has gifted you or done something for you that makes you valued



by men you need to remember it's not as if we are sufficient of ourselves it's our sufficiency is of God. We have this treasure in earthen vessels. Now one of the prevailing and repeated themes in 2 Corinthians is going to be that which is found right here in verse 7 of chapter 4. We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.

Paul states this a little differently in his first letter to the same church. 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and 1 Corinthians chapter 1 in verse 26 and following. Paul said for you see your calling brethren that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.

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 shame the things that are mighty and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen and the things which are not that means that don't even exist to bring to nothing the things that are. Paul is using a little bit of hyperbole here but the point is God chooses the lowest, weakest most contemptible things. Why does he do that? It says in verse 29 so that no flesh should glory in his presence but of him you are in Christ Jesus who became for us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

Now am I wise? Am I righteous? If I am I might be proud of myself but I have no reason to be. If there is wisdom, if there is righteousness if there is sanctification there this is all of him. Of him you are in Christ.

Christ is those things. If wisdom or righteousness is manifest it's just that the vessel is not concealing adequately the treasure inside but it's not that the vessel is anything. God chooses weak and ugly vessels.

Weak and valueless vessels. Foolish vessels. Why? Because he doesn't want them to detract from the treasure.

God wants to deliver the treasure and he wants people to appreciate the treasure. But he doesn't want the vessel to be so ornate and so valuable and so precious in itself that the treasure is eclipsed by the vessel. And so God chooses as vessels those who have notable flaws or at least those who are not in themselves impressive in the flesh so that no flesh or glory in his sight but the glory would go to him.

Same thing. Same motivation mentioned here in 2 Corinthians 4.7 God chooses to put the treasure in urban vessels so that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. Now if you are strong and wise you can do a lot on your own without God.

At least it may seem as if you can and you may think that you do. And the world may think that you do. But if you know that you are weak if you know that you are foolish and then something wise and strong happens through you you know it's God.

And that's good. That's encouraging. A person who knows himself well enough knows that if left to himself he couldn't do anything right anyway.

Jesus said without me you can do nothing. But it's encouraging to see God work through you in ways that just ignores your deficiencies and God's power seen in it. Now one of the things that Paul is going to say repeatedly in this chapter and in this book is that in order to keep God's power on display God keeps beating up the vessels.

He keeps cracking the pots. He keeps weakening the Christian so that his strength will be made perfect in them. That's that whole discussion about the thorn in the flesh in 2 Corinthians 12.

He says that he's been given a thorn in the flesh so that he might not be exalted by measure. And he's prayed three times to God to take away but God says no. My grace is sufficient for you.

My strength is made perfect in your weakness. And Paul says oh okay then I'll rejoice in my impoverishment because when I'm weak then I'm strong. It all sounds like a bunch of double talk but actually what he's saying is if I'm strong God's strength is not visible.

It might not even be active. My very strength may interfere with God's strength. I've mentioned these things before many times.

Corrie Ten Boom's illustration of the glove. She holds a glove up and says can this glove pick up this Bible here and she kind of shows that it can't because it's not on her hand. But she puts it on her hand and she says now can this glove pick up the Bible? Of course it can because not because of the glove but because now it's the hand picking up the Bible.

It happens to be clothed in the glove but the glove had no power in itself. And the strength of the glove is in its own weakness because if the glove is stiff and has a lot of strength of its own then the hand is limited in what it can do. The gloved hand must be unimpaired by any strength in the glove itself in order to function properly.

I have some gloves they're old ski gloves of an older sort. Two layers of leather with this thick padding in between and they keep your hand really warm but they don't you can't turn a doorknob with them. You can't turn the key in your car you can't even get your hand up to where the key goes.

Your hand's so big when you wear this thing. But good strong gloves too strong to be of use they interfere with the strength of the hand and the function of the hand. The weaker the vessel the greater the strength of the one working through it.

Now that is what Paul says. It's a mysterious concept but Paul repeats it again and again. He'll do so again as we get closer to the end of this chapter.

Speaking of his own case, how God keeps him from being exalted. How God keeps him successful but never in any way that he could take credit for it. He says we are hard pressed on every side but not crushed.

We are perplexed but not in despair. We are persecuted but not forsaken. Struck down but not destroyed.

Always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us but life in you.

But since we have the same spirit of faith according to what is written, I believed and therefore I spoke. Quotation from the Psalms. We also believe and therefore speak knowing that he who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus and will present us with you.

For all things are for your sakes that grace having spread through the many may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart even though our outward man is perishing. Yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.

For our light affliction which is but for a moment is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory while we do not look at the things which are seen but of the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary but the things which are not seen are eternal. Now this is all an expansion on his statement in verse 7. The vessel must remain weak, unattractive, and unimpressive because God wants the treasure in it to get all the credit.

God wants all the treasure in it to get all the glory. God wants the excellency of the power to be of God and not of the vessel, not of man. And therefore God keeps Paul who would be ordinarily capable of boasting a great deal because he had more than ordinary anointing and success and impressiveness in his ministry to avoid his ever being given credit.

I mean people say, well Paul is so effective because he was a well trained rabbi, smart guy. Paul, I mean if I had that much brains I could probably accomplish as much too. Or he's a great speaker.

If I was that eloquent, if I was that dramatic I could sway the crowds too. Well actually Paul may not have been a really great speaker. He was intelligent but he was kept contemptible in the sight of men by God's dealings.

He was continually hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down. These are the things that God subjected him to so that he might not ever rise too high in his own estimation of himself or another's estimation of him. But all the while that he's hard

pressed he's not crushed entirely.

Though he's perplexed he's not ever brought to the point of total despair, abandoned by God. Though he's persecuted he's not forsaken by God. And though God knocks him down he's never fully destroyed.

He gets back up again. God gives him the ability to keep going. Though he knocks him down repeatedly.

Now Paul is using figurative language in some measure. But what he's saying is that the hard knocks he experiences in his ministry are there to keep accentuating his own weakness. His own vulnerability.

His own inability to even survive much less to accomplish anything without the aid of God. It was earlier in chapter 1 he said that we have the sentence of death in ourselves. Meaning that we're facing death on a regular basis so that we might not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead.

So also here. God keeps us beat up. He lets us get ground down but not totally to oblivion.

You know we keep going. He sustains us but not without pain. Not without humiliation.

Because it's necessary to keep us from being exalted so that the glory of the treasure might never be obscured by any imagined glory of the vessels. Now he says in verse 10 we're always caring about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. Now, caring about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus it's hard to know exactly of course his meaning of that.

It certainly has something to do with his actual circumstances. Probably meaning that I'm always you know kind of very near death. In fact I'm at that point in my life where every day brings me closer to death.

Not just chronologically but in my physical condition. My health, my safety is imperiled all the time. For the Lord.

I mean I could live a more comfortable life if I gave up this apostolic ministry but I'm in peril of life all the time for Jesus sake and as such I'm suffering for Christ. And as such he is suffering in me. And because of that my suffering is the suffering of Christ.

My dying is the dying of the Lord. What's going on in my body is caring about the dying of the Lord. Jesus in me and I together we're dying all the time.

Facing death. Suffering. But the reason that this is happening is so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

Remember Jesus died but he rose again. And when he rose again it was with a new kind of life. A resurrection life.

An eternal kind of life. And this supernatural kind of life, this resurrection life cannot be had without a dying. Jesus didn't have it without dying.

And neither do we. We have to die to ourselves. We have to be brought to the end of ourselves.

We have to come to the point where we're not thinking about ourselves. We're not looking out for ourselves. We're not concerned about ourselves.

That ourselves are becoming more and more out of the range of even our vision. Because we're focused on something else. And the more we are vulnerable, the more we are afflicted, the more we are focused on our need for God.

And the less we have any grounds or temptation for confidence in ourselves. And this dying condition, this suffering condition keeps Paul continually dead to himself. Forgetful of his own self.

No self-confidence at all. Why? So that this resurrection of life can be manifested in his body. Now, there is a supernatural element of life that he's talking about here that is manifested in the life of the Christian, or at least potentially so.

Not every Christian is it very visible in. I dare say, if you knew Paul, it would be visible in him. I think that if you met Paul, or someone like him, you would see in his character, the character of Jesus, you'd feel almost that you were looking at Jesus.

His reactions, his words, his expressions, everything. The life of Jesus, I think, was manifest in his mortal body. Now, that's a very nice ideal.

But it might sound very, you know, idealistic to speak that way. It's not idealistic. It's realistic.

Although it is not realistic in terms of the experience of many people that we know, because there's still a great deal of self-life in most of us. And one of the reasons is we haven't been beat up much. The self has not been killed.

We do not bear about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus on any kind of regular basis. And because of that, the life of Jesus is probably not manifest in most of us in the same degree. Now, being beat up can take all kinds of forms.

You can beat yourself up in the proper sense of that word. You can deny yourself. You can take up a cross.

You can... If suffering is not inflicted from you outwardly, it is possible to bring severe

discipline on yourself. I'm not talking about monasticism and asceticism and self-flagellation. I'm just saying that you can... you can order your life in such a way as it does not hamper yourself.

And in many respects, does not provide a lot of security for yourself. There are ways to live your life in such a way that you remain more dependent on God than you might otherwise be if you lived another way. But a lot of people don't have to do that to themselves.

And most people in the world aren't like us. We have to discipline ourselves. Most people are disciplined by their very chastening conditions of life.

In the world, there's a great deal of sorrow and death and poverty and sickness and all kinds of things that are simply the circumstance people are in. Paul had a lot of those because of his chosen course. And as such, it gave opportunity for the life of Christ to be worked in him.

And he's going to make it clear exactly how that works before the end of the chapter, which we've already read the verses I'm referring to. But he says, he repeats himself. He repeats what he said in verse 10 again in verse 11.

For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. Essentially the same thing he said in verse 10. In verse 10, it's caring about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus.

In verse 11, it's being always delivered to death for Jesus' sake. In verse 10, it's that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. In verse 11, it's that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Same thing. So it's just a repetition of the same thing in slightly different words. In verse 12, so then death is working in us, but life in you.

Apparently what he means is that as we die to ourselves, there is the life of Jesus operating through us, ministering life to you. But since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, I believed and therefore I spoke. We also believe and therefore speak.

Now I'm not sure exactly why he quotes this particular line from Psalm 116 verse 10, we believe and therefore we spoke. Perhaps what he's saying is don't fault me for speaking. Even the scriptures say we speak according to our beliefs.

If you believe something, you're going to say it. Your mouth, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. And therefore we speak because we do believe it.

We're not speaking because we're trying to manipulate and make money off the

ministry. We speak that because it's what we believe to be true. Just in the same spirit of faith that the psalmist spoke of.

I believed it. I said it because I believed it. That's why we say what we say.

And apparently, you know, Paul was accused of saying what he did for ulterior motives. He says, no, there's no other motive. I say it because I believe it.

Same spirit of faith that the psalmist referred to. We believe, therefore we speak. And he said, knowing, verse 14, that he who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus.

As he said earlier in chapter one, we trust in the Lord who raises the dead because we might die. We're always subject to death. But we have the life of Jesus in us and we'll even have it more so if we die because he'll raise us from the dead and we'll be just like him.

For all things are for your sakes that grace having spread through the many may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. So Paul's saying this is not all just some kind of selfish thing. I have to be sanctified and glorified myself.

That's happening, but actually God is doing all this in me for the sake of people like you who benefit from my ministry. Verse 16, therefore we do not lose heart even though our outward man is perishing. He is dying.

He's getting older. He actually didn't die for a long time after this, but he was near death all the time. And probably his health was deteriorating for a very long time.

Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. So it doesn't matter if you're sick. It doesn't matter if you're poor.

It doesn't matter if you're grieved. It doesn't matter if your outward circumstances are even mortally threatening or simply just downright uncomfortable. The inward man can be renewed and it can be renewed as a result of this suffering, not just in spite of it.

It's not that, oh well, I'm suffering, but at least something else is going on. God's doing something nice for me too. And that kind of outweighs it.

It's rather, as we shall see, the suffering is causing the benefit inwardly. It's not just, well, the outward man is perishing, but at least the inward man is getting better. It's rather the outward man is perishing and thus the inward man becomes better.

And he makes that clear in verse 17, for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us. The affliction itself is working for us. A far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

I understand glory here to be a reference to the character and excellence and likeness of Christ. And we're becoming more Christ-like. And this is being worked in us through the affliction.

Notice the contrast in Paul's mind. Our light affliction is compared to a weight of glory. The affliction is but for a moment.

The glory is eternal. You've got a light affliction that's but for a moment, and you've got an eternal weight of glory. But he says this is only going on.

This transformation, this transfer of energy from the physical to the inner man, this benefit inwardly from suffering outwardly, that takes place only conditionally. It doesn't happen automatically. It happens, he says in verse 18, while we do not look at the things that are seen, but the things that are not seen.

For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. This benefit accrues only while our sight is set on the proper place. A person who suffers may not always benefit from it.

They may not become more glorious. They may not become more Christ-like. Many people have suffered without any such benefit.

Why? Because they looked at the things that were seen. They looked at their circumstances. They looked at the people that looked like they were causing their circumstances and they did not see anything behind that.

They did not see the unseen. But as we look at what is unseen, God, Himself, God's sovereignty in the situation, God's purpose in the situation, God's mercy in the situation, what God is seeking to accomplish in the situation, that's the unseen part of every trial. But as we look at that, we benefit.

If we don't look at that, we don't. So the benefits of suffering are not automatic. They come as we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen.

As we set our sights on the spiritual, on the eternal, on the eternal rewards, on the eternal goodwill of God toward us, even in our sufferings. And the fact that we know His faithfulness and that He would not let us be suffering unless there was some benefit that He hoped for us to gain from it. We keep our sights set on those things and as we do, this affliction works for us.

The eternal weight of glory, which makes us more like Jesus. We'll stop there. We're out of time for one thing, and we've also run out of verses in this chapter, so we'll stop there and continue next time in chapter 5, possibly 6 as well.

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