

2 Corinthians 4-5 – Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION - *Outline*

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II. Paul's Ministry • 1:12-7:16

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1. The triumph of the ministry • 2:14-17

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3. The basis of the ministry • 3:6-18

Paul ends ch. 3 by contrasting the Old & New Covenants.

He says the glory of the Old was temporary and meant to point to the permanent glory of the New Covenant God enacted through the mission of Messiah who came to liberate people from sin & death.

Then he says . . .

4. The theme of the ministry • 4:1-7

¹ **Therefore,**

Because the Old Covenant of Law points to & is fulfilled by the Gospel -

since we have this ministry,

of proclaiming the Gospel -

as we have received mercy,

And have been brought into the glory of the New Covenant -

we do not lose heart.

Paul uses a potent word here – “we don’t become faint-hearted cowards”, spineless wimps, simpering yellow-bellied mama’s boys.

The Gospel had turned Paul into a tiger. It’s understandable why it would.

He began as Saul, a young man whose home town was many miles north of Israel in the rough & tumble region of Tarsus.

He was so bright, his parents sent him to Jerusalem where he could sit under the feet of one of Judaism’s greatest teachers – the Rabbi Gamaliel.

There Saul was not only taught the rigors of the Pharisees, we learned from Gamaliel how to *apply* the Word of God to current events with great wisdom & skill.

Saul was something of a fanatic; his devotion to God & the Law burned hot within him.

When a dangerous sect arose he deemed a threat to pure belief in God, he attacked it, even officiating at the execution of one of its leaders.

This first taste of blood enflamed his zeal and moved him to pursue of course of harsh persecution of the sect.

Once he drove the Christians into hiding in Jerusalem, he launched a second

campaign against another center of their activity, Damascus.

But Jesus appeared to him and showed Saul that the very movement he was seeking to stamp out was in fact the answer & fulfillment to everything he had devoted his life to.

The truth was so staggering, overwhelming, massive, Paul had to spend some time alone in Arabia, rethinking everything he had learned from this new perspective.

He realized Jesus was the missing piece, the key that made it all come together.

He emerged from that time of reflection a new man – Paul the Apostle.

Now he had a mission, a purpose. He understood that the Gospel is THE Message, not a message, THE message God has for all people everywhere and that all of history centered on it.

He came to the realization that there is no greater calling & privilege than bringing the Gospel to the Lost.

And to both Live & share the Gospel was to put yourself in the very center of the Will of God.

All of this combined to produce a boldness & courage in Paul that was unstoppable, as his story makes abundantly clear.

² But 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.

Paul had been accused by some of the Corinthians of being a *charlatan*, of as he says in 2:17, peddling the Word of God – hiding behind the Gospel as a means to promote his own selfish ambitions.

Here he says his ministry had no ulterior motive.

His preaching was no mask for self-promotion.

He & the team he'd brought to Corinth to start the work there had lived their lives as an open book.

No one who could impugn his actual behavior.

There had been critics who said his motives were wicked – but Paul makes a strong point – impure motives produce evil deeds.

But Paul had lived as an open book among them; they knew his lifestyle was in 100% harmony with His message – proof he had no questionable motives.

³ But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ whose minds the god of this age has 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.

In ch. 3 Paul spoke of the unbelief of Israel that lies like a veil over their spiritual eyes, blinding them to the things of God.

He expands that blindness to *all* who reject Christ.

He attributes their spiritual blindness to satan, whom he calls “the god of this age.”

The devil is not, as some modern ideas contend, merely the personification of evil.

The Bible makes it abundantly clear that satan is a real spiritual person.

He was once the chief cherub but through pride exalted himself & sought to usurp God's throne.

Now he has made himself the inveterate opponent of God.
Because God made humans in His image so we can have an eternal love

relationship with Him, the devil does his best to hinder & destroy that. ^[1]
He tries to keep us from coming to faith in Christ.

Failing that, he tries to keep us from growing in grace, because he knows the closer we get to God, the greater the threat we present him.

Paul refers to the devil here as “the god of this age.”

He uses the word ‘god’ generically—the Greek word *theos* meant *deity* & was used for the many idols pagans worshipped.

In the Bible, Theos has to be understood in light of the context, whether it means the true Creator God, or one of the many idols people worship.

Here it’s the god of this age – the current scene & set-up.

This age began with the Fall & continues until Jesus returns to take possession of what He redeemed at the Cross.

This world is in rebellion against God; satan pulls its strings.

He’s engineered a vast system of deception utilizing religion, philosophy & sensuality to blind people to the truth of the Gospel.

But notice the *order* here – he’s been able to *keep them blinded* because they do not believe.

We can read v. 4 like this -

4 [t]hose who do not believe, the god of this age has blinded, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

They’ve given satan permission to blind them because they don’t believe – they’ve rejected Christ.

Unbelief causes spiritual blindness. That blindness then *reinforces* their unbelief.

The cure, is the same Paul mentioned as for the Jews in 3:14 – the veil is taken away in Christ.

When we *turn to the Lord* the blindness is removed.

As you pray for the lost, ask God to remove the veil & heal their spiritual blindness.

Ask God to let them *see* that Jesus IS both Savior & Lord.

5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus [as] the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants [slaves] for Jesus’ sake.

Last Sunday’s Message – The Master & His Slaves

6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Knowing Jesus is THE key, the crucial element in life.

He is the light that illumines all else. Without Him we walk in darkness.

There isn’t a *matter of* or *moment in* your life He isn’t supposed to be at the very center of.

In fact, so intimately are we to be united to Him that He’s come to dwell within us. Paul is surely referring to the transfiguration here when he speaks of the glory of

God in the face of Jesus.

The radiance of His countenance was so great the disciples couldn't hold their gaze.

That same Jesus now lives within our hearts.

7 But we have this treasure

The glory of Christ -

in earthen vessels,

Clay jars -

that the excellence of the power

The vastness & excelling nature of the might

may be of God and not of us.

Immense treasure in a humble container. It's an unexpected picture.

Remember the story of the woman who anointed Jesus feet with perfumed?

The perfume she brought was kept in an alabaster flask.

An exquisite & expensive container as befitted the contents – the essential oil of some exotic flower.

This was the way it was, premium items were kept in special containers.

You didn't keep an expensive perfume in a cheap clay jar.

Common earthen vessels were for common contents; low-grade olive oil or grain.

Even today, manufacturers market their premium products by putting them in the best packages.

But God puts the greatest & most glorious of all, His glory, where?

In us – humble, clay pots.

So when anything noteworthy, anything truly significant takes place through us, it's obvious it's not us, it's God working through us.

5. The trials of the ministry • 4:8-18

Paul had been accused by his opponents of having self-serving motives in preaching the Gospel.

He answers that charge by reminding the Corinthians what preaching the Gospel had cost him.

8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed;

Not destroyed.

As Paul travelled, seeking to expand the Kingdom of God, he got opposition from every quarter.

From the Jews who saw him as a traitor, to the Romans who resisted the emergence of new religions.

To the general hostility of unbelievers who felt threatened by the Gospel.

The only people who showed Paul support were the few believers he'd won to faith.

Sadly, as in the case of the Corinthians, some of even them turned on him!

Talk about a guy who had reason to be depressed!

But Paul didn't take Prozac or Zoloft. He drew his encouragement from the Lord.

we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken;

struck down, but not destroyed—¹⁰ always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

Paul lived in the daily, even moment by moment reality of Galatians 2:20.

Whenever he was pressed & opposed, he saw it as an opportunity to die to self.

So the charge that he did what he did for selfish reasons was absurd!!!

¹¹ 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. ¹² So then death is working in us, but life in you.

It was because Paul had died to self, & kept dying to self, that life had been brought to others.

¹³ And since we have the same spirit of faith, [as you] according to what is written,

He quotes from Psalm 116 -

***"I believed and therefore I spoke,"* we also believe and therefore speak, ¹⁴ knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.**

Because Paul *really* believed Jesus died for our sins & rose again for our justification & new life, he spoke up, declaring the Good News boldly, without regard for what it would cost him.

What Paul says here presents a challenge.

He sees a *necessary connection* between faith in Christ & sharing the Gospel.

He says, "We also believe and *therefore* speak."

If we've been saved, if we really believe that the Gospel is THE Good News all people need to hear, don't we HAVE to share it?

We talk a lot about the importance of *not just saying* we believe but making sure we live it.

While that's true, we can subtly convey the idea that as long as we're living it we don't *need* to say it.

After all, as the old adage goes → actions speak louder than words.

You'll often hear Francis of Assisi quoted at this point; "Preach the Gospel at all times; if necessary, use words."

Okay, I get the point, but let's be honest, can you ever imagine the Apostle Paul saying that?

Actions may speak louder than some words, but the fact of the matter is, when it comes to the Gospel, without words the actions say nothing.

We must speak, because God uses the *proclamation* of the Gospel to save the lost.

1 Corinthians 1:21 • It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

¹⁵ For all things are for your sakes,

He means *all the things* he'd endured for the sake of the Gospel

that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. ¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart.

He comes back to this phrase he began with in v. 1 -

Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is

being renewed day by day.

As Paul aged, he saw how his physical body was wearing out. But the real man, the immaterial one who lived inside the physical tent was growing stronger & more vital because he was being renewed by the Spirit of God.

Then he sums up all of the hardship he'd endured so far -

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment,

A moment? As anyone who's suffered knows, the time lags & drags!

Why is it when you're having a good time, it goes by so quickly but when you're getting hammered time seems to stop?

The only way Paul could have this perspective of the brevity of suffering is if he kept his eyes firmly on eternity – on the glory & reward that awaited him.

When you're going through a hard time, don't allow the trial, the pain, the hardship to eclipse your destiny. [Thumb & sun]

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, ¹⁸ while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

Is God all powerful?

Is His love perfect?

Is He supremely wise?

Does He want the very best for you?

Does He know how to bring it to pass?

Will He?

Don't lose your grip on that!

At the Preach the Word conference 2 weeks ago, Greg Laurie shared with us in the last session how to minister to people in pain.

He lost his son Christopher this last Summer just a few weeks before the Harvest Crusade at Anaheim.

It was a terrible blow and it was obvious Greg is still hurting from the loss.

He shared something Pastor Chuck said right after it happened; "Don't trade what you know for what you don't."

That's important advice for all of us.

When tragedy strikes and we're tempted to question the goodness of God, we must not trade what we know for what we don't.

God IS good – and the fact is, what today looks like a tragedy, tomorrow we come to see was necessary, or produced something essential.

But not all tragedies will resolve themselves in this life.

With some hardships, some losses, we go to the grave never understanding what good came from them.

Our sure hope & confidence is that the answer to those hard mysteries lies on the other side of that door. Those answers are in heaven and will become the platform for some of the strongest praise to God.

6. The motivation of the ministry • 5:1-10

¹ For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we

have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

That's precisely what Jesus promised us in John 14 when He said He was going to prepare a place for us.

2 For in this we groan,

In this hope, in this expectation of future glory, at present we yearn with such intensity we ache for it.

earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven,

And everyone over the age of 45 said a hearty "Amen!"

3 if [since] indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked.

Paul gives an important insight here. In heaven, we will have real bodies.

They'll be very different from these physical bodies, but they *will be* bodies of some kind.

By 'naked' Paul means we won't be disembodied spirits floating around.

As human beings, God created us as a soul & spirit inhabiting a body.

We won't be *less human* in heaven, we'll be MORE human, meaning the body we will have there will be a superlative version of the one we possess now.

We need only look to Jesus as the prototype of our resurrection.

I rejoice in the fact that we're getting new bodies because it means the realization of even more delight & pleasure in heaven.

Having a resurrection body means the potential for more avenues of experiencing the goodness of God.

4 For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

As I age, having some physical problems; aches, pains.

As I endure them, don't want to *shed* the body, just wish it worked better.

So, try to help by exercise, diet, doctor. Hard work, it's a bother!

Long for a body that worked right. Even groan for it.

5 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

We have to remember God planned all of this!

He did not *will* for evil & sin, but He knew it would happen & permitted it as the necessary consequence to free will, to choice, which people possess as the image bearers of God.

This *isn't* the best of all possible worlds, because if there was *even just one less* evil, it *would be a better world*.

So while this isn't the best of all possible worlds, it is the **BEST WAY** to the best of all possible worlds.

We may not see, in fact we *don't* see, *how* this is the best way – but because of what we **KNOW** about God, we can live in the confidence *it IS*.

God has placed the Holy Spirit inside us as the guarantee, the *down payment* that the fullness of redemption will one day be ours.

Here's a model I made a while ago. Here's the box of one I have yet to make.

This is one my daughter & I are making.

If I just went to the store & bought a plane already built, I'd have no real work invested in it.

It would be okay to look at, but would not be the manifestation of my labor & care.

And it wouldn't in anyway know me.

This Thunderbolt knows me because I spent hours with it.

I snipped off all the little pieces of plastic, filed off the nubs, painted them, glued them, pieced them together.

I know every detail, and if this model could talk it would give eloquent testimony to how faithfully I rendered every detail out of a desire to make a thing of excellence.

This is what we will one day be. [Completed model]

This is us before we come to Christ. [Unopened Box]

But this is what we are right now. [Model in process]

God is the very best model maker.

He's filing down the nubs, painting the pieces, fitting them in place.

6 So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord.

The down payment of the Spirit is the promise of the surety of our full redemption.

We have a mortgage crisis right now in which millions of people who bought homes can't afford them and are defaulting on their loans.

God will never default on His promise to redeem us.

7 For we walk by faith, not by sight.

This connects to what he said in 4:18 – that the physical realm is temporary and passing away while the eternal realm for which we are destined, though now unseen, is eternal.

By "walk", Paul means *how* we order our lives.

We don't draw our motives or values from the physical world of what our fleshly eyes see.

We operate by the eternal principles of God.

8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

This is the universal yearning of every true child of God – to shed the limitations of this life & world and enter into the glory & bliss of heaven.

Some scoffers would call this a mindless escapism – and surely it would be if it weren't for the fact that *Heaven is real*.

Listen, Hawaii is real & it is *fantastic*! A bad day in Maui is better than a good day most anywhere else.

All things being equal, to *not want* to be in Kaanapali rather than Bakersfield is silly!

Now, you could live in Bakersfield & not believe in Hawaii.

But that wouldn't make Hawaii any less real

You could live in Bakersfield, know there's a Hawaii, but have no prospect of every going there.

If you did make reservations for a visit, as the day of your departure drew closer, so would your excitement.

Heaven is real. Our reservation's in. The trip has been paid for & the day of our departure is getting close.

9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.

Paul says, "My over-riding goal is this: To please God."

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

The word for judgment seat here is the Greek *bema*.

It was a place of judgment used in both civil matters & athletic contests.

Paul referred to the bema in 1 Cor. in its athletic connection.

Here, he means it in more of a general sense – for the judgment all will face after death.

The Lost will be judged for their sin & rejection of Christ.

The saved will only face a judgment for *rewards*, for how they have lived as the sons & daughters of God.

This potential for rewards served to motivate Paul to greater faithfulness.

He didn't want to arrive in heaven to a meager reward.

Jesus had done such marvelous things for him, he longed to do marvelous things for Jesus.

The Love of God found an echo in his life & work.

7. The message of the ministry • 5:11-21

11 Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

How are we to take Paul's mention of the terror of God as a motivation to faithfulness?

Some commentators think Paul meant knowing the anger of God at sin & the eternal torment of the lost, he was driven to warn & call them to faith in Christ.

But the context suggests Paul is still dealing with the issue of his motives.

He tells the Corinthians that *God & they* knew the reason for what he did was a *deep reverence* for the Lord – which at its core is what the word "*terror*" means.

12 For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have *an answer* for those who boast in appearance and not in heart.

The challenge to Paul's credibility & calling had been dealt with by his previous letter.

Now Paul tells them if it comes up again instead of questioning his motives, they can stand with confidence against his critics & say, "Yeah, we've already dealt with this & know Paul's a solid guy who did a good work here by the grace & Spirit of God."

13 For if we are beside ourselves, *it is* for God; or if we are of sound mind, *it is* for you.

He suggests they look at it this way –

If someone thought he was a bit extreme, just chalk it up to his intense devotion to God.

If others thought he was normal & doing the right thing, fine.

14 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; ¹⁵ and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. ¹⁶ Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him thus* no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

This will be my text for Sunday.

18 Now all things

Meaning all these things that he's just mentioned.

18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. ²⁰ Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

And that will be my text for the following Sunday. *Evangelistic message.*

[1] John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11 Ephesians 2:2