

# (Through the Bible) 2 Corinthians 3-4

by Chuck Smith

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*The new covenant excels in glory because it is based on God's faithfulness, not man's, and we become conformed into the image of Jesus Christ by yielding ourselves to the work of God's spirit within us.*

**Duration:** 1:22:58

**Topics:** "Spiritual Transformation", "Evangelism"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes that the highest capacity of man is not just to contain God, but to be a channel through which God's love can flow to the world. The speaker highlights the importance of sharing the glorious treasure of God's work within us with others. They caution against seeking personal glory or using crafty tactics in preaching the word of God. Instead, the focus should be on pointing people to Jesus Christ and allowing God's Spirit to work in our lives for the transformation of ourselves and others.

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## Transcript

So we turn tonight to the third chapter of 2nd Corinthians. Paul the Apostle, it seemed, had the detractors to his ministry, men that followed him around seeking to discredit him. There are always those, it seems, who are ready to come in upon another man's work and to reap the benefits of another man's labor, but aren't really willing to go out and to break fresh ground themselves.

Those that endeavor to live off the body of Christ rather than really developing the body of Christ. The body of Christ is not expanded by transferring people from one fellowship to another. The body of Christ is expanded when we become a witness to the world and we bring others to Jesus Christ who do not know him.

There were those who were willing to go around and follow Paul, to come into the areas that Paul had plowed, where Paul had planted, and seek to uproot Paul's ministry, drawing people to themselves, seeking to discredit Paul in the eyes of the people. Such was the case in Corinth. Those who followed Paul, putting down Paul and his message of the gospel of grace, seeking to bring the people under the law, challenging Paul's authority as an apostle, lifting up themselves as the authorities and the authorized ones.

And so it seems rather tragic that old blessed brother Paul was always, it seems, defending himself against those detractors as though he needed to. And so in chapter three we find this again the case. Do

we begin again to commend ourselves or need we as some others letters of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? These people coming in and presenting their letters of authority which were many times falsified, spurious.

Paul said, look, do I need to have letters of commendation when I come to you or do I need to seek letters of commendation from you when I go elsewhere? You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men. Your faith in Jesus Christ, your existence as a church is all of the recommendation that I need. You are proof of my apostleship.

You are proof of the validity of my ministry. The very fact of your existence is all that is necessary to prove the authenticity of my calling. Now the person who doesn't have that kind of proof needs all kinds of phoned up documents to tell how great they are.

I get a kick out of some of the letters that I receive enclosed with them, all of these letters of commendation. Your ministry itself bears witness to your calling. And so Paul said, you are my letters of commendation.

The fact that you exist, that's all that's necessary. That's all the proof I need of my calling of God. For as much as you are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God, not in the tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart.

And such trust we have through Christ to Godward. So Paul just sort of lets it rest there. Not that we think that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God.

Now, Paul, in the last of the last chapter, you remember, cried out and who is sufficient for these things. There have been so many times when I have faced the issues of the ministry. And I said, Oh Lord, who is sufficient for these things? Who's able to do this? And Paul asked the question and who is sufficient for these things? And now he answers his own question.

Not that we think that we have any sufficiency within ourselves or not that we are sufficient within ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God. I believe that God deliberately allows us to come to the end of our own capacities and abilities in order that we might learn to trust in him in order that we might draw from that all sufficiency see from him. God revealed himself to Abraham as El Shaddai, which means the all sufficient one.

And it's always good to know the all sufficient one and to be able to rely upon the all sufficient one to fill up that which I am lacking when I come to the end of my own resources. And how many times we are driven to draw from that sufficiency that God has provided for us through Jesus Christ. And Paul said, he is the one who has made us the able ministers of this new covenant or new Testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

Now, this is one passage of scripture that unfortunately is often quoted out of context, especially by those who are looking for a more experiential relationship with God, who are looking for more exciting experiences in the things of God. So often you'll hear them say, oh, but the scripture says the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life as though the word of God or the teaching of the word of God will kill you. But the spirit and the moving of the spirit and the experiences of the spirit bring life.

That is a gross misquotation because it is taking this scripture totally out of its context. The Bible tells us concerning the word of God that it is alive and powerful and it is sharper than a two-edged sword and it's

able to divide between the soul and the spirit, the bone and the marrow. The word of God, the letter does not kill, it's alive, it's powerful and it brings life.

The letter that kills is the letter of the law. And Paul here declares, I am the able minister of the New Testament, the new covenant, the old covenant was by the law. And the old covenant in the letter of the law does condemn us to death.

If you want to be righteous before God by the keeping of the law, then it's too late. It's already condemned you to death. You've been destroyed.

The letter of the law kills. For the law said, he that does these things shall live by them. But also it says, if you keep the whole law and yet you violate him one point, you're guilty of all.

And thus the law condemns every one of us to death. And it is the letter of the old covenant of the law that condemns us to death. But it is the spirit in the new covenant that brings us life, spiritual life.

And now he goes on to talk about this ministration of death under the law, which was written and engraven in stones. It was glorious so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away. Now there is a misunderstanding many times as the purpose of the veil.

When Moses came down with the tables of stone, having met with God there on the Mount, having been privileged to see the afterglow of God. God said to Moses, what do you desire? And he said, Lord, show me thyself. And God said, you can't look at me and live, but you stay there in the rock.

I'll pass by and then you can see the afterglow. And it was so glorious that Moses face shown for days after he came down from the Mount with the tables of law for the people. But he put a veil over his face, not because they couldn't look at the glory on the face, but because the glow was beginning to fade and they didn't want them to see the fading glow.

But that was only a witness of the law that had been given, that it was going to be phased out, that God might establish the new covenant through Jesus Christ. And so the purpose of the veil was that they would not see the receding glory that was upon his face. We'll get that when we get a few verses down.

But this ministration of the law was glorious so that they could not steadfastly look at the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance, which was fading away. How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious or even more glorious if the old covenant, which condemned men to death was so glorious and given in such a glorious way, how much more this new covenant of life through Jesus Christ is glorious to those who have received it. For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect by reason of the glory that excel it. In other words, there is really no way to compare the glory of the old covenant with the exceeding glory of the new covenant. That new relationship that we have to God through Jesus Christ excels in glory, brings us into such glory.

You see, the old covenant was predicated upon man's faithfulness and man's obedience. The purpose of the covenant is always to bring men into a relationship with God. That's the primary purpose.

The old covenant failed not because it wasn't good, but because man was weak and man failed. It was predicated upon man's obedience, man's faithfulness. Now this new covenant cannot fail because it's predicated upon God's faithfulness to his word.

A covenant predicated upon my faithfulness to the word of God failed. I couldn't be faithful, but we know that God is faithful to his word and thus this new covenant whereby we stand tonight is certain, is sure. That's why we can say with assurance, I know in whom I have believed and I'm persuaded that he is able to keep that which I've committed and I've committed my life and my future to him and I'm confident that he shall bring me into the fullness of his glory because he is faithful to his word.

His word cannot fail. He will not fail. So the new covenant excels in glory because it's based upon God and his faithfulness.

Now if that which was done away, that is the old covenant under the law, was glorious, was made glorious, for even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect by reason of the glory that excels. Nothing to compare with. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remains is more glorious.

Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great boldness or plainness of speech. Not as Moses which put the veil over his face that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end or to the phasing out or the fading of that which is abolished. You see here it declares that it was because it beginning to fade away and they didn't want them to see this thing fading out.

But their minds were blinded for until this day there remains the same veil untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament which veil is done away in Christ. So blindness has happened to Israel in part until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. Even when they read the law there is a veil over their faces that they don't really understand the law.

A very sad thing has taken place among the Jewish people for though they still verbally hold to the law, they do not practice or follow the law in establishing a righteous standing before God. Under the law, under the Old Covenant, it was necessary that there be a death of a substitutionary animal to atone for their sins. You would bring the animal to the priest, you would lay your hands upon its head, you would confess your sins over the animal, and then the priest would slay the animal and offer it as a sacrifice, a sin offering for you.

And thus your sins would be covered and you would then be able to approach the Holy God. Now today, the veil is over their faces for they are endeavoring to approach God through their own good works, ignoring the fact that God required the sacrifice of an animal for the wages of sin is death. And without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.

They have substituted now the sacrifice of the animal and are trying to instead place their good efforts and their good works as the basis for their coming to God and their righteous standing before God. Nowhere in the law are substitutes ever suggested for the sacrifices. And thus, a veil is over their face even when they read the law today, as they think that by their good efforts and good works they can atone for their sin.

But their minds were blinded, for until this day there remains the same veil that's not taken away. Their minds blinded to the truth. Israel is blind in part.

Now this veil is really done away in Christ. When you see Jesus Christ as our perfect substitute for our sins, our sacrifice, we come to an understanding of the righteousness of God being satisfied through the death of Jesus Christ. But even unto this day when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart.

They are just blinded to the truth. Now the Lord is that spirit. And where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

So there are a couple of passages here that the Pentecostal people really grab on to. This is the second one. The first one is the letter killeth, the spirit gives life.

This is another one that they latch on to, where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. And they interpret that in a very broad way. There is liberty to do all kinds of things.

Liberty to scream out and to shout out and to run up and down the aisles and whatever happens to suit their fancies. Again it is taking it out of context. Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty from the law and from the bondage of the law.

Free from the law there is no condemnation for Jesus provides a perfect salvation. And so this is freedom from the requirements of the law. Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

But we all with open face beholding as in a glass or as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the spirit of the Lord. The work of God's spirit within our hearts is to conform us into the image of Jesus Christ. When God first made man, he made man in his image.

God said let us make man after our image and after our likeness. And so was man created in the image of God. But through sin man fell and no longer was in the image of God.

The image of God being a spiritual image. God is a spirit. Man was created a spirit being.

Dwelling in the body, possessing a consciousness. But God said in the day that you eat you will surely die. When man sinned his spirit died.

And so Paul writing to the Ephesians said and you has he made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins. God's chief emotional attribute is love. God made man with the capacity to love.

A need for love. God is a God is light. And so God created man with the light and mind and a consciousness of God.

But through sin man came into darkness. His foolish heart was darkened. And so man made in the image of God.

Fallen from that image. But now the purpose of God is to restore man into his image again. That man might receive a restoration of that which God intended him to be before he fell.

And that is what the spirit is doing in our lives tonight. As we yield ourselves to the work of God's spirit within us. He is conforming us into the image of Christ.

Now we all with open face or unveiled faces. The children of Israel have avail every time they read Moses avail is over their heart and their eyes are blinded. But we with open face as we behold as in a mirror the

glory of the Lord.

As I'm looking in the mirror seeing my reflection. I can see the work of God that is taking place in my life. As the spirit of God is changing me and bringing me into the image of Jesus Christ.

How beautiful it is to look at God's work in our own life. And just to marvel at what God has done. There have been areas in my life.

The old nature. That were extremely ugly. I used to have an ugly temper.

Easily ignited at the slightest provocation. And it was ugly. And I didn't like what I saw in me.

I hated that nasty demonstration of that temper. And I tried to control it. But I just couldn't.

Things would happen and before I knew it. Poof it was gone and I blown up. And here I was ashamed embarrassed at the things I did.

And the things I said. Guilty defeated. And with all of my efforts I could not control it.

And one day I said God I'm sorry I just can't do it. I've tried Lord I just can't do it. And I gave up in despair.

Ever hoping to have control over that temper. And then the spirit took over. And he did for me what I couldn't do for myself.

And he took away the inward boiling. The inward steam. It wasn't a thing of my keeping the cap on the pressure.

Seething inside ready to just explode. But just holding tight and keeping the lid on you know. And somehow the spirit from within took away the pressure the steam.

And I could look at a situation. Or I could experience a situation where at one time I would have exploded violently into that ugliness. And there were no more explosions.

And as I looked in the mirror I saw the spirits work in my life. Changing me. Into the image of Jesus.

How glorious it is when God works in us by his spirit. Bringing to pass those changes. Removing the ugliness of the self life and of the old life.

And conforming us more and more into the image of Jesus Christ. And as David and I shall be satisfied when I awake in his likeness. Someday when I look in the mirror and I see the Lord.

I'll be in glory at that point. But what a day that's going to be. When the spirit's job is finished in my life.

And I am completely conformed into the image of Jesus Christ. Beloved now are we the sons of God. It does not yet appear what we're going to be.

But we know that when he shall appear we will be like him. For we shall see him as he is. But thank God each day there are changes that are taking place.

As the spirit of God continues his work in my life. Conforming me into the image of God's dear son. How does it happen? By just continuing to look to Jesus.

When I look to myself I can't do it. When I look to others to aid me they can't do it. The only place that I can find really effective help.

Is by looking to Jesus Christ. It seems that we want to look to man so quickly. Oh let's run down and counsel with a pastor on this you know.

Let's see if he has some magic words that will change us. We're always getting calls. The story goes basically like this.

I've talked to seven other pastors and they haven't been able to help me. Now I want to talk to Chuck. Hey I'm sorry friend but I don't have any help either.

I don't have any magic formulas. I don't have any magic words. Your changes that are so necessary are not going to come to pass through counseling sessions.

Looking to man. But those changes that are necessary can only come to pass when you look to Jesus Christ. I don't know where the church ever got messed up in these counseling programs.

Getting people to depend upon the counselor to solve their problems. There is a interesting study that has just been released by I think it's the cells ice neck report. Oh it's really stirring things up something fierce.

For they have made a pretty comprehensive study of people with mental problems who have turned to psychoanalysts to solve their problems. And they have found that when a person turns to a psychoanalyst to help them with their problem in 45 percent of the cases by the end of a year's therapy with a psychoanalysis only 43 percent could quit counseling were helped enough that they needed no more counsel. Only 43 percent.

Those who went to psychotherapist it was a little better. 52 percent did not have to continue after a year. Those who could afford a psychiatrist came off a little better for 61 percent who went to psychiatrist did not have to continue counseling after the year.

However those who didn't go to anybody 73 percent didn't need any counseling at the end of the year. As I said this study is turning the whole field of psychology on its ear right now. It's really the big buzz through all the universities that the release of this report.

But it's just pointing up what I'm telling you. Your help is going to come from the Lord. It's looking under Jesus that you're going to find your answer.

And as long as you're looking and demand and trying to make a crutch out of some counselor you're not going to make it. You've got to turn to Jesus and find the help that he offers. So we with open face beholding the glory of the Lord are then changed from glory to glory into the same image as his spirit is working within our hearts.

The best thing any counselor can do is make you dependent upon Jesus Christ. The greatest service any counselor can do for you is to bring you to Jesus Christ and to a dependency on him because he's the only one that's going to bring you any help. Several years ago when I was counseling a psychiatrist he made me a very lucrative offer to go into business with him.

He wanted me to begin counseling in his offices. He had a clinic and he said I can give you the technical problem with that person. I can tell you what's gone wrong.

But he said having done that I can't do much more. He said you have the answers. I want you to go to work for me.

But the answer is just pointing people to Jesus Christ. Get people to trust in him. Get people to look to him.

We with unveiled faces beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being changed from glory to glory. The changes do take place as God's spirit works in my life. Therefore seeing we have this ministry, what ministry? Pointing people to Jesus Christ.

We have received mercy. We faint not. But we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty.

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 said look I am not seeking to be crafty.

I'm not seeking to give some kind of a hype. Get people all hyped up emotionally and all. Handling the word of God in a crafty manner or deceitfully.

But by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. I had lunch today with some people from Israel. And the man sitting next to me at lunch said you know I first became acquainted with you when you were on television on channel 13.

He said one morning as I tuned in I saw you standing there. I saw the menorah behind you and he said you were teaching from the old testament. And he said I called my wife and said look here's a rabbi that doesn't wear his yarmulke.

He must be a reformed rabbi. And he said I started listening to your program every Sunday. Started watching.

And he said you were so unlike so many of the other ministers that are on TV. He said so many of these Christian TV programs insult my intelligence. All of the hype and all of the emotionalism.

He said it insults my intelligence. But he said you gave me something to think about and you started me thinking in many areas. This is what Paul's saying of his own ministry.

I was straightforward with you. I didn't try and give some hype. I didn't try and use the word of God deceitfully.

I renounced those hidden things of dishonesty. I didn't walk in craftiness. And believe me there's a lot of crafty fellows out there.

They've existed from the time of the beginning of the church. And unfortunately they still exist today. I do receive some of the most craftily written computerized letters you ever saw in your life.

Every kind of gimmick you could ever think of. If I'll just send in five dollars or ten dollars or fifteen dollars or go to the bank and borrow fifty dollars to get them out of the jam that they're in right now. Then I'll get a little square inch of the prayer rug where they kneel to pray for me.

Paul said we've renounced these hidden things of dishonesty. Not walking in craftiness or handling the word of God deceitfully. But by the demonstrating of the truth.

Commending ourselves in every man's conscience. In the sight of God. Now there were those who were saying that Paul was preaching mysteries that you could not understand.

The gospel that Paul preaches is hid. And so Paul answers them in a very clever way. He said if our gospel is hid, it is hid to those that are lost.

They're the ones that can't see it. In whom the God of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not. Lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ who is the image of God should shine unto them.

A very interesting passage of scripture and one that we'd like to spend just a little time with you tonight because I think it's a key that's going to help. In your praying for your loved ones who are not saved. As we mentioned earlier we have been created in the image of God and one of God's characteristics is that he is self-determinant.

That is he has a will and the capacity to exercise his will. The power of choice. And God created you in his image and gave to you the power of self-determination so that you can determine your own destiny.

And you do determine your own destiny. Having given us the power of choice it was necessary that God then respect the choices that we make. The moment God would no longer respect my choice but force me to do something against my will.

Then I am not really a self-determinant creature. So for this self-determination to be valid. It was necessary that God respect the choices that I make and that there be an opportunity to make a choice.

So God gave the opportunity for Adam to make a choice and then God did respect the choice that he made. So with you. You can choose to love God or you can choose not to love God.

You have that choice. You make the choice and God must respect that choice. Or else it is a fallacy that God has given you choice.

Therefore if God respects the choices that a man makes. I really cannot pray oh God please save John. Unless John himself asked the Lord for salvation.

He can't be saved. And for God to save John against his choice would be violating his choice. Which again destroys the whole purpose in giving us choice.

That sort of creates a dilemma in praying for the lost. Except this verse gives us the answer. Those who are lost who believe not.

We are told here that the God of this world being Satan. Has blinded their eyes or the minds of them which believe not. Lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ who is in the image of God should shine on them.

Now why is it that John doesn't believe in Jesus Christ? Because his mind has been blinded by Satan to the truth. He doesn't really see the truth of this glorious salvation that God is offering. Satan has prejudiced and poisoned his mind against God.

Satan is holding him in a spell. Now though God respects our choices Satan doesn't. He could care less that you have the power of choice.

If he has the opportunity he's going to hold you. And he will blind your mind to the truth. And he will fill your mind with poison and prejudice against God and the things of God.

So that it is impossible for you to think rationally about your relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Have you ever noticed how some people are so gracious and genteel. And they can talk to you rationally on any subject in the world except that of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Talk to them about the Rams chances next year. Oh and they can go on for hours. Talk to them about fishing in Alaska.

Talk to them about the Hawaiian Islands. Talk to them about the space shuttle. Name your subject.

Oh they're so gracious. They'll talk so graciously to you. They can go on and on.

Bring up the subject of Jesus Christ and they become totally irrational. I don't like to talk about that subject. I don't think people ought to discuss things like that you know.

Totally irrational. Why? Because Satan has put such a hold upon their lives. Paul writing to Timothy said that we might take them from the captivity of the enemy.

Who is holding them captive against their wills. He doesn't respect choice. The God of this world has blinded their minds.

So Jesus said whatsoever things you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. And whatsoever things you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. So the way to pray for your loved ones who are not saved is to pray that God will bind that work of Satan that has blinded their minds and is holding them captive.

That God will bind Satan's work in their lives that have prejudiced and poisoned their minds against the gospel. In order that they might be able to consider the truth of God without this ungodly pressure from Satan. For any man who will rationally look at the offer that God has made in Jesus Christ is a fool if he doesn't accept it.

But the reason why they don't accept it is they can't accept it because of Satan's power that is holding them in the captivity of the enemy. And so we through prayer can set them free from Satan's power. And once set free from this blinding influence of Satan upon their minds.

I don't know of anybody who just doesn't accept this gracious offer that God has made to us through Jesus Christ. So make that the direction of your prayer. The binding of the power of Satan that has blinded their minds and that is holding them captive.

And whatsoever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven. God will bind that power of Satan. God will take away the blinders that he has put over their mind.

And they'll be able to see rationally and clearly the offer that God has made to us through Jesus Christ. And then loose that work of the Holy Spirit and the conviction of the Holy Spirit upon their hearts. And that drawing of the Holy Spirit of their hearts to Jesus Christ.

You can't just say, oh Lord save them. God will not save them against their wills. There has to come the change of will and that desire in their heart and that asking of God for salvation.

And whosoever comes unto me, Jesus said, I will in no wise cast out. So our prayers are to set them free so that they can see. Paul said, for we preach not ourselves but Jesus Christ the Lord.

And ourselves your servants for Jesus sake. I will leave the exposition of that because I could get quite involved. For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form and void. And darkness was upon the face of the deep.

And the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters. And God said, let there be light. And there was light.

By his divine fiat, God called light into existence. And God saw the light that it was good. And God divided the light.

Interesting statements if taken in a scientific context. Which we are not intending to do tonight. But God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness.

And God said, Yahiyar, wah Yahiyar. Let there be light or literally light be and light was. I like that.

And God said, light be and light was. Oh, that kind of power excites me. God commanded the light to shine out of darkness.

And now he has shined in our hearts. Which were once blinded by Satan. Hearts that were in darkness, alienated from God.

But now the God who called the light to shine out of darkness. Has shined in our hearts. To give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

We with open faces beholding the glory of the Lord. And this glory is in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure.

In earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. God has taken one of the most glorious treasures that any. Well, it is the most glorious treasure any man can possess.

The light of the knowledge and the understanding of Jesus Christ is the most glorious treasure any of you could ever have. Because that's that's eternal life. That's the treasure of eternal life.

The most valuable thing that any man can possess. That eternal life through Jesus Christ. For what will profit a man if he would gain the whole world and lose his own soul? What can a man give in exchange for a soul? You see what you possess in your knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The light and the understanding of Jesus Christ that God has brought to you is the most valuable thing you could ever have. The valuable treasure of God. What does he put it in? We have this glorious treasure in earthen vessels.

Or in clay pots. Our bodies. This old earthen vessel.

This old clay pot becomes the dwelling place of the eternal God. That Christ might dwell in your hearts. And in that day you shall know that I am in the Father and ye are in me and I am in you.

This glorious treasure. The light of the gospel dwelling in these clay pots. God takes the most valuable thing and puts it in the cheapest thing.

A clay pot. What's more common than a clay pot? In those days especially. Today we fire them up a little more and paint them a little more and they become you know sometimes treasures in our cupboards.

But in those days these just reddish clay pots all over the place. God's taken this glorious treasure and put it in this earthen vessel. Why? That the excellency of the glory may be of God and not of us.

Isn't it stupid for man to glory in himself? To glory in the clay pot rather than in the contents? Norman Grubb in his book *The Deep Things of God* makes the statement that man's highest capacity is that of being a vessel containing God. The fact that God will dwell in you. Man's highest capacity a vessel that can contain the eternal God.

I read the book. I was impressed by that statement. I thrilled at his exposition of that concept.

But then I got to thinking about it and I thought no he's wrong. That is not the highest capacity of man. There is one capacity that excels that and that is the capacity of being a channel through which God will flow to a world around you.

One thing to contain God. Glorious oh my yes. No underestimating of the glory of being able to contain God.

But oh one step further when God through me pours forth his love to the world around me. And this glorious treasure that I have is shared with others. And that work of God's spirit within my life flows out that others might benefit from that work of God in me.

When the subjective work becomes objective. When it is no longer God's work in me but now God's work through me. Then I've reached my highest capacity.

This earthen vessel. There's no value in the vessel at all. The value is in the contents being held by the vessel and as I pour forth the contents I must be careful that the contents do not taste of me.

That I don't get a lot of my personality into the teaching. Into the contents that come forth. But that I bring forth the contents in as pure a form as I possibly can.

Have you ever had a plastic vessel in your refrigerator that is sometimes maybe you put an onion in it. And now you're keeping water in it. Every time you drink water you get an onion taste.

Yuck. When I drink water I don't want to taste onions. Now onions in their place are great.

And I love them. But not in flavored drinking water. And when the vessel begins to give off a taste of itself it's time to get rid of the vessel.

God did that which was almost ludicrous. Putting the most valuable treasure in a common vessel. In order that man would not become enamored of the vessel.

But would be enamored only of the contents. Only of God and the work of God through the vessel. That the glory of the excellency might be of God and not of us.

So as Paul declared, we preach not ourselves but Christ. And that should be the theme of every minister. We preach not ourselves but Christ.

And we seek to draw men to Christ. And we seek to bring men the contents. The value and the treasure in Jesus Christ.

Rather than bringing to them the old clay pot. The moment we start trying to bring them an old clay pot you can be sure God's gonna crack it and you become a crack pot. And I've seen a few of those.

They've got one on TV now. I mean that pot's really cracked. We are troubled on every side.

Now Paul's talking about the ministry. Troubled on every side. God doesn't promise you immunity from trouble.

In fact he sort of promises you trouble. In this world you're gonna have tribulation. They that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

Promises that I hate. There are promises I love. But then there are those I don't care for.

I wish God had never promised me that. We are troubled on every side yet we're not distressed. You see as a servant of God, as a child of God, you can be facing and you will face a lot of trouble.

But you should never be distressed. We are perplexed. And a lot of times we don't know what to do.

A lot of times we're perplexed by the situations. We don't know what the solution or the answer is. But we don't despair.

And there's a big difference between being perplexed and despairing. Despairing is when you throw up your hands. Oh I think it's the end.

I don't know how we ever get out of this you know. And you just give up. Now we're perplexed.

I don't know how God's going to work this thing out. This is interesting to see what God is going to do now. Man this I don't know where God can go at this point.

I don't know what he can possibly do. But I'm sure excited. I'm just waiting to see what he's going to do.

You see I'm perplexed but I'm not in despair. I'm not wringing my hands and saying oh friends I'm sorry to tell you this but you know this is the end. We're going off the air and we're not going to be able to come back.

Unless you send in your letters this week. And you that are listening on radio that's all tongue and cheek. Jesus said the poor you have with you always will be back.

We are persecuted but we are not forsaken. The Lord stands by us in every trial. We are cast down but we're not destroyed.

So the things which we have but the things which we don't have. Trouble yes but not distress. Perplexity oh yes but not despair.

Persecution oh yes but never forsaken. Cast down yes but never destroyed. Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

Now you remember at the beginning of the letter Paul was apologizing to the Corinthians because he didn't come and he said I wasn't fickleness on my part but he hinted to some real physical problems that he had had. He had gone through some heavy persecution where he actually figured it was the end. He didn't see any way out.

He thought that this was it and he despaired of life. He figured well you know I'm never going to get out of this. And having gone through these severe persecutions it probably had a physical effect upon him and left him extremely weak.

And so he speaks about bearing about in his body the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ. That suffering that he had experienced for the cause of Christ. The persecutions.

The beatings. The stonings. Bearing in my body the dying of the Lord Jesus that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death working in us but life in you. We having the same spirit of faith according as it is written I believed and therefore have I spoken.

We also believe and therefore we speak. Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus and shall present us with you. So that same spirit that raised Christ from the dead is going to raise us up and present us to you.

For all things are for your sakes that the abundant grace through the thanksgiving of many may read down to the glory of God. So the suffering that Paul mentioned in the lesson last week. The afflictions.

The sufferings. The persecutions. As Paul said they are for your sakes.

That I might comfort you with the comfort that I receive. That I may be able to comfort you in your sufferings. In your trials.

In your testings. I experience these things for your sake. And so again my sufferings.

My weaknesses. They're for your sake. It is interesting to me that suffering brings out a depth of character that nothing else can produce within a person.

G. Campbell Morgan spoke of a young man who came and ministered at his church. A very brilliant young man. And he said he went home after service and he was remarking to his wife concerning the brilliant message that was delivered that morning by the young man.

And his wife said he'll be better after he suffers. And G. Campbell Morgan commented and this young man went through much suffering and he was better. Suffering does something in causing the roots to go deep.

It develops character. It develops strength. Like nothing else I know.

And Paul the Apostle here is speaking of how the suffering that he went through actually redounded to their glory. You have benefited. And no doubt this is true.

The depth of character that was created in Paul as the result of his suffering. The church was able to benefit from that which he developed and received in his sufferings for Jesus Christ. He was able then to minister in such a much more effective way as the result of the sufferings that he experienced.

Now we are chickens when it comes to suffering. You'll remember when Jesus began to tell his disciples how that the Son of Man must suffer at the hands of men. That Peter immediately cried out, Lord be that far from thee.

Another translation more accurate is, Lord spare yourself. Don't do it. That is the voice of the natural man that would cry, spare yourself.

In fact, Jesus recognized it as the voice of Satan. And he said, get thee behind me, Satan, for you don't understand the things that are of God. Peter tells us, much to the chagrin of some of the modern day evangelists, that if any man suffers according to the will of God, that he should just commit his soul unto him who is faithful.

Yes, you can suffer according to the will of God. And through that suffering, God can develop within you a depth of character that cannot be developed any other way. Some people from which I draw the most are those people who have had a lot of suffering in their lives.

For I find in them an interesting depth that excels anything I've ever seen. And I can receive from them and I can draw from them because of the richness that has been developed through suffering. And so Paul looks at his own suffering as for the benefit of the people.

That it was for your sake that the abundant grace through the thanksgiving might redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not. But though our outward man is perishing, the old outward man, hey, he's been through it.

Beaten, kicked, stoned, the whole bit. Our inward man is renewed day by day. We've been through an awful lot, but oh, the strength of character that it is built within.

As the inward man, the old man on the outside, hey, he's going downhill fast. But the inward man being renewed day by day with the strength of the Lord. For our light affliction, and now notice the contrast here, and they're beautiful.

Our light affliction, which is but for a moment. Now, that's not the way it appears. Whenever I am suffering, it seems like eternity.

I mean hours drag. You ever been really sick at night and you ever realized how long a night is? You know, when you're feeling well and you're tired and you go to sleep, it's amazing how short a night is. Morning already? Oh, I can't believe it, you know.

But if you're sick, night can spread on for almost eternity. You look at the clock, only 10 minutes? Since the last time I looked, I can't believe it. When's it going to be morning, you know? Suffering has a way of expanding time.

But what if I suffered for 50 years? As far as God is concerned, it's just a moment if you compare it with eternity. Our light afflictions, which are but for a moment. For you see, what is life? It is but a vapor.

It only appears a moment and then vanishes. If you suffer all your life, it is still but a moment in comparison with eternity. In fact, you can't even compare it to eternity because you have the finite and you have the infinite.

And there's no grounds for comparison of the finite to the infinite. It isn't even as a drop of water in all of the oceans of the seas because you are comparing finite with finite. There is a certain number of drops in all of the oceans and all of the seas.

But when you get to eternity, you've come to the infinite and thus you cannot draw any comparisons that can compare a finite with the infinite. So our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh an exceeding eternal weight of glory. The eternal weight of glory compared with this light affliction, which is but for a moment.

Now, what we need to do is to get our eyes upon the eternal. Our problem is that we are looking so often at the temporal. We are looking at these afflictions and we are getting so involved in the present material surroundings that I lose sight of the eternal.

The light affliction is only for a moment, but God has an eternity planned for you. An eternity of glory that is indescribable. An eternity that so far exceeds anything that we could ever think or dream.

In glory, in beauty, in wonder, in awe, in blessing, in joy, in love. God's eternal plan for you. This light affliction is just a moment.

It's going to pass. Life is going to pass so quickly. Don't live for now.

Live forever. Don't do all of your planning for just right now. Get involved in the eternal.

Paul said, while we look not at the things which are seen, this old outward man that is perishing, these light afflictions, which Paul says light afflictions, but when he lists them, hey, I feel like the author of Hebrews, hey, you haven't yet resisted under blood, uh, you know, striving for Jesus Christ. Let me see your bruises. Let me see your scars.

You know, where did they beat you? It's read what Paul endured for the gospel of Jesus Christ. And, and yet he says these light afflictions in stripes above major, that is stripes laid on my back, frequently in prison, faced death many times of the Jews. Five times I received 40 stripes, save one.

Three times I was beaten with sticks. Once I was stoned. Three times I suffered shipwreck.

I spent a night in the day floating out in the ocean. I journeyed often. I was in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, and watchings often in hunger and thirst, in fastings often in cold and nakedness beside those things that come upon me daily, the care of all of the churches, the light affliction, which is but for a moment.

But Paul's key, his secret, hey, we don't look at these things, which we can see because they're only temporal. But we look at the things which are not seen, for they are eternal. What do you have your eyes on? The temporal passing things? Where do you place your values? In the temporal passing things? God help us that we might begin to look at the eternal and place our value in the eternal things, looking unto Jesus, keeping our eyes on him, the author and the finisher of our faith, who will bring us who trust in him

into that eternal glory.

Father, we thank you for your word tonight and the guidance that we receive, the encouragement that we have, the wisdom that is there. Help us, O Lord, to get our eyes off of ourselves, off of our circumstances, off of our weaknesses, off of our failures, off of our disappointments, and help us, Lord, to get our eyes upon you. May we endure suffering as good soldiers as we look forward, Lord, to the glorious eternal weight of glory that shall be revealed in Jesus Christ.

Let thy word now be planted in our hearts, Lord. May there not be a veil over our hearts as we read, but may your spirit give light and understanding in your truth in Jesus' name we pray, amen. May the Lord be with you and bless and keep you in his love and draw you nearer unto himself as he works in your heart by his spirit.

And may this week your eyes be kept upon Jesus, that God might by his spirit bring to pass those changes in our lives whereby he will conform us into his image for his sake.

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