

Don't Ever Lose Heart or Feel Condemned

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of not losing heart or getting discouraged in the Christian journey, focusing on the ministry of seeing the glory of Jesus in Scripture and becoming more Christlike. It highlights the dangers of discouragement and self-condemnation, urging believers to avoid these pitfalls and instead focus on continuous growth in Christlikeness through the Holy Spirit's help.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:1, 2 Corinthians 4:16, Matthew 11:28, Romans 8:28, Psalm 139:23, Mark 9:24, John 14:1, Isaiah 6:5, Romans 8:1, Philippians 3:13

Topics: "Perseverance in Faith", "Growth in Christlikeness"

Description

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Transcript

I'd like to turn to 2nd Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 1. Paul was a person who faced a lot of trials in his life. He was frequently persecuted, stoned, imprisoned, beaten, times without number, and it was very easy for such a person to get discouraged. But here he says, since we have this ministry, as we receive mercy, we don't lose heart.

We don't lose heart is what we mean by we don't get discouraged. He says it twice in this chapter, verse 16 again. We don't lose heart.

Now, there's no point mentioning that unless there's a tremendous temptation for Paul to get discouraged. And that's a temptation that comes to every believer. But we should not yield to it.

Sometimes we treat discouragement as not so serious as sexual sin, or anger, or bitterness. But discouragement can drain us of spiritual power. It's like a hole in the vessel from which all the milk or whatever is in the vessel, water leaks out.

And I know in the early part of my own Christian life, I was frequently discouraged. And I never knew how to overcome it. Nobody ever preached a message on overcoming discouragement, probably because they were discouraged themselves.

All those older people in the church, I was attending as a young person. But I'm sure that affects every one of you in some way or the other. And as we look back over the last year, it's gone by and we enter a new year.

It's possible that we are discouraged about certain things that we could not do, or certain things that did not work out as we anticipated, or discouraged that we're still defeated by some sins that we are frequently defeated by. Anger, or lust, or some things. I want to say to you, dear brothers and sisters, that we must not give up this battle.

We must ask God to fill us with the Holy Spirit, so that we overcome discouragement 100%. Don't stop before that. Because, I mean, think of certain facts like this.

Do you ever doubt that God is on the throne, running the universe? He controls everything. And think of the promise that he has made to us as children, that he will make every single thing work together for our good. Now, some things that happen to us are bad, according to our human understanding.

Maybe loss of money, or something you expected to get, you didn't get. And you say that's bad. Yeah, it is bad, in human eyes.

But God says, I will make that work for your good. So, let me turn you to that verse, which we all know. And I want to repeat it.

I'll never stop repeating it. Romans 8, 28. We know.

That's how it begins. So, it's not so certain that every believer knows this. I want to ask all of you, do you know this? All said, we know for certain.

Do you know for certain that Almighty God causes all the things that happen to you, little things, big things, to work together for your good? Because you're called according to his purpose. And that purpose is mentioned in the next verse. That you might be conformed to the image of his Son.

So, you know, when we think of good, we think of getting a better job, or a better house, or more money, or was it planning to get married? Maybe you have prettier girls, and someone else rejected them. No. The main good that a child of God longs for, if his mind is in sync with God's, is to become like Jesus Christ.

One day, when we get to heaven, we will discover there is absolutely nothing greater that God could do for us, that make us like Christ, in our character. Making us millionaires, or giving us perfect health to the age of 100, or giving us a nice house to live in, or any of these silly things. People go after a better car, or a better house.

All these things are nothing compared to becoming more Christ-like. And if you haven't understood it now, you'll understand it when you go to heaven, that'll be too late. But here it says, God's got one purpose for our life.

What was his purpose for you during 2020? It was not to increase your salary, it was not to give you a promotion, it was not to give you a better job, or a better house, it was to make you a little more Christ-like by December 31st last year, than you were on January 1st last year. That was God's purpose. Now whether that was fulfilled or not, I don't know.

You can ask yourself, whether you overcame sins like anger, bitterness, murmuring. And if you're in doubt, ask your wife, or husband, they'll tell you. Don't ask brothers in the church, because in the church, we're all well-behaved, and nice, and we all think we're wonderful in sin.

When we're at home, people see us exactly as we are. So, we don't get discouraged. Coming back to 2 Corinthians 4, verse 1, it says here, since we have this ministry, we don't get discouraged.

Now the first word in chapter 4, verse 1, is therefore. So, you know in English, whenever you find the word therefore, you always find out why it, what it is there for. Why is that word therefore there? That is connected with the previous verse.

And what is the previous verse? The previous verse doesn't look like a ministry. When it says, we have received this ministry, chapter 4, verse 1, we think of serving the Lord, or being an apostle, or preaching the gospel, or teaching, or teaching the Sunday school children, ministry, ministry, ministry. But look at what Paul calls his ministry.

We have received this ministry. Therefore, since we have received this ministry, that ministry goes back to chapter 3, verse 18. And you know what that is? Let me read it to you.

Without a veil on our face, in the old covenant, they had a veil. They couldn't understand. And it says in verse 16, when we turn to the Lord, the Holy Spirit, 16 and 17, the veil is taken away.

See, they did not have the Holy Spirit within. So, when they read God's word, they couldn't understand it. That's why they had all those scribes and Pharisees who misinterpreted God's word.

But now that veil is taken away, it says when the Holy Spirit has come, when we turn to the Lord, verse 16, the veil is taken, chapter 3, verse 16, the veil is taken away, and that Lord is the Holy Spirit. It's the only place, by the way, in the New Testament, where the word Lord refers to the Holy Spirit. Everywhere else, it refers to Christ.

Here's one place where it says the Lord is the Holy Spirit. And He wants to take away every veil that prevents us from seeing what? See here. When the veil is removed, verse 18, we see in the mirror, the mirror is God's word, the glory of the Lord.

Where do I get the word? Where do I get the fact that the mirror is God's word? It says in James chapter 1 that when we look intently at the perfect law, James 1.25, it's like a man who looks at his face in a mirror. In verse 23 and 24, the preceding verses, the way a man looks at his face in the mirror, James 1.23, is the way we look at verse 25, the word of God. So, therefore, when it says in 2 Corinthians 3.18, we see in a mirror, we're talking about reading the Bible.

Not reading the Bible like the scribes and the Pharisees read just to get academic knowledge or to get some point to preach in a sermon in the church. No, not for any of that rubbish. But we look into the God's word, the mirror, not to see our own face, but to see the glory of Jesus Christ.

I want to ask all of you a very searching question. When you read the Bible, do you try to get some clever thought from it, or some message from it, or do you seek to see the glory of Jesus in Scripture? You'll get what you look for. What you look for, you'll find.

If people are looking for a message, they'll get a message. If people are looking for some clever thought, they'll get that. But if you're looking to see the glory of Jesus in every part of Scripture, you'll see it.

We look into the mirror, the Holy Spirit's taken away the veil, and we see the glory of Jesus. Now, one mark, you know, if you're not seeing the glory of Jesus when you read Scripture, and you're only getting some bright ideas or nice thoughts, I want to say to you, ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit. To open your eyes, spiritual eyes of the heart, to the Holy Spirit.

Otherwise, it says here, you cannot see the glory of the Lord. I want to see the glory of Jesus when I read the Scriptures. I don't care if I don't get any message.

I want to see the glory of the Lord, and because when I see the glory of the Lord, like Isaiah, when he saw the glory of the Lord, he saw his own need. And then God met with him and changed him. That's what happens when I see the glory of the Lord Jesus in Scripture.

I see how unlike him I am, and I confess it, and I have a great longing to be like him. And that's exactly what the Holy Spirit wants to do. You know, Jesus said, if any man thirsts, let him come to me.

That thirst can come only if I allow the Holy Spirit to show me the glory of Jesus in Scripture and see what a wonderful life he lived, and how different I am. And the Holy Spirit says, don't get discouraged, I'll make you like that. What an encouraging word that is, that he will make me like my Savior.

That's his responsibility. But he'll do that only if I come with a great hunger to God's Word to see the glory of Jesus and see my own need and cry out for it. So that's the purpose why God has given us the Scriptures.

And it says, once the Holy Spirit shows us the glory of Jesus, 2 Corinthians 3, 18, the next thing he does is he changes us into that likeness. That's also his job. The twofold ministry of the Holy Spirit, when we read the Scriptures, is to show me in the Scriptures the glory of Jesus Christ, and then to change me into that likeness where I see my need and say, Lord, I'm not like that.

I want to be like that. I want to encourage you to read the Scriptures from now on always like that. See, let me show you this verse in Luke chapter 24.

This is what encourages me. Luke 24, we read of the long walk that the disciples had from Jerusalem to Emmaus. See, I have the habit of, when I read about some places' names, particularly in the Gospels, I go to the map at the back of my Bible and I see where is Jerusalem and where is Emmaus.

Or when I read that Joseph and Mary traveled from Nazareth to Jerusalem, I look at the map and say, well, how long did that take? I find it took them three days to travel. Or when Jesus came from Galilee to Nazareth, I look at the map and I found that every time it says Jesus went to Jerusalem, it took him three days to go there and three days to walk back. He was walking.

So there are many interesting things when you look at a map and when you read that in John chapter 4, the Jews did not go through Samaria. The straight route from Jerusalem to Galilee was through Samaria. But the Jews did not go through Samaria because the Samaritans were not real Jews.

They were the people who were conquered by the Assyrians and it was a mixture. They were a low-cost people. And the Pharisees, the Jews, because they were high-cost, looked down on the Samaritans,

low-cost, so they wouldn't even go through their town.

And they would rather take the long route bypassing Samaria, even though it took much longer, because they didn't want to go through that low-cost city. Then you see the interesting thing in John chapter 4 that Jesus says he had to go through Samaria. You see some very interesting things there.

So anyway, in Luke 24, verse 13, it says they walked from Jerusalem, these two disciples were walking to Emmaus, which is about 7 miles. Now remember, 2,000 years ago, they did not have any accurate way of measuring distance. So when I look at the map today, I discovered Jerusalem to Emmaus is actually 10 miles, not 7. Just an interesting little fact.

So when I say these two people were walking for 10 miles, and it must have taken at least about 4 hours of a leisurely walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus, and then it says Jesus joined them. You know that story. And it says while he was with them, he, this is the verse I wanted to show you, verse 27, Luke 24, 27.

He explained to them from Moses to all the prophets. Moses means Genesis. First five books of Moses.

All the prophets means all the way to Malachi. So verse 27 is really saying, beginning at Genesis and going all the way to Malachi, Jesus explained to them all the things in all these 39 books concerning himself. He showed them the glory of Christ in 39 books of the Old Testament.

I remember when I read that long ago, I said, Lord, you are the same. Take away the veil from my eyes and show me the glory of Jesus in those 39 books of the Old Testament too. And in the 27 books of the New Testament.

I want to see the glory of Jesus in every page because that is God's will for me. And, you know, it says there that when they went to their house, they said, verse 32, wasn't our hearts burning within us when he spoke to us explaining the scriptures? This is what happens to us when the Holy Spirit shows us the glory of Jesus in the scriptures. Our hearts burn.

And the advantage of our heart burning when we see the glory of Jesus in scripture is that we can share that with other people and you will have a ministry where you make other people's hearts burn because your hearts burn yourself first through seeing the glory of Jesus. This has always been my longing. I remember when I read this, I said, Lord, what a fantastic Bible study that was.

Four hours. Ten miles. Four hours Bible study and they didn't get bored.

All the four hours their hearts were burning, burning, burning. I remember praying to God when I saw that. I said, Lord, can you give me a ministry like that where when I speak God's word, people's hearts will burn through the fire of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the same. The Holy Spirit worked in Jesus. Why can't he work in me? It's all according to your faith.

When we don't have faith, we say, oh, he did it for Jesus. He won't do it for me. He's singing that song.

What he did for Jesus he will do for you. You must have faith that what the Holy Spirit did through Jesus he can do through every one of us. He may not call you to be a Bible teacher like me.

He may not call you to be an evangelist but we can all be witnesses. He didn't say that we should all be Bible teachers. He didn't say we should all be evangelists or healers or any such thing.

But he said when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you shall all be my witnesses. Acts 1.8 So that can happen only if we allow the Holy Spirit first to show us the glory of Jesus in the Scriptures and challenge us to be like him and acknowledge our own failure and limitation where we are not like him. I'll give you one or two examples that I've often quoted.

Those of you who have heard me before remember I have mentioned these examples before but I repeat them for the benefit of those who have already heard and perhaps those who have not heard. First of all an example from Matthew 12. I'm trying to show you the glory of Jesus.

When you read a Scripture I'll give you two examples of how you can see the glory of Jesus in the Gospels beyond what you read there. Matthew 12.22 They brought a demon possessed person to Jesus. He was this unusual demon possessed person.

He was blind and deaf and dumb. It's a rare case. Blind, deaf and dumb.

And Jesus cast out the demon and he could speak he could see and he could hear. And the crowds were absolutely amazed. They said this must be the son of David.

And those Pharisees were so jealous when they found the attention of the crowds being taken away from them to this person Jesus and they got so upset they said no no no no this is not he's doing this by the power of Satan. He's the prince of demons and that's why he has delivered this person. What a crazy idea they had.

As if the devil is going around healing those who are sick. He makes people sick. They didn't know that.

Anyway, when they they were actually calling Jesus the devil. Now contrast this with what we read in Luke 24 that every chapter, every book of the Old Testament portrayed Jesus. That's what Jesus explained to those people going to Emmaus.

The Pharisees studied the same 39 books and when Jesus came into their midst, they didn't see him as the fulfillment of what they read. They said no this is the devil see how they can be complete opposite of the truth. They said this can't be the Messiah.

They were so blind to those 39 books of the Old Testament. But what I wanted to point out to you was it's a very serious sin to call a servant of God a servant of the devil or the devil himself. Imagine calling Jesus the devil.

What sort of sin is that? We read in the Old Testament when Miriam Moses' sister just corrected questioned Moses about one little thing why did you marry a non-Jewish woman? He married a non-Jewish woman Jethro some guy's daughter when he was in the wilderness and just for that one question questioning a servant of God you know what she got? Leprosy. So what should these people have got who did something worse saying that Jesus was the prince of devils? You know what they got? Forgiveness. That's the difference between Old Covenant and New Covenant.

In the Old Covenant when people insult you, you get leprosy if you insult Elijah for having a bald head, bears come and eat you up you read that in 2 Kings chapter 2 but in the New Covenant when you call

even the son of God the devil no bears eat you up and you don't get leprosy you get forgiveness there I see the glory of Jesus and as I look into that glory that's how I want to be when people call me all types of names, what should I give them? I don't want to pray they'll get leprosy no, I want to offer them forgiveness see that's what happens to you when you see the glory of Jesus in scripture and you face a similar situation the Holy Spirit comes to help you to do the same as Jesus did in that situation that's the blessedness of seeing the glory of Jesus in every part of scripture let me give you another example which also I've quoted many times bless me in John chapter 7 we read of Jesus travelling all the way from Nazareth, no sorry from Capernaum, he was living in Capernaum after the age of 30 all the way to Jerusalem three days journey and it was not his hometown he came there, he went to the temple and he preached that powerful sermon where he spoke about the gift of the Holy Spirit in John 7 verse 37-39 if you thirst come to me the Holy Spirit can flow out from you like rivers of living water and so many wonderful things and the people who heard it were so blessed John 7 verse 40 they said this is certainly the prophet this is the Messiah they were so blessed through his ministry and at the end of that and he had finished that message in that day it says here in verse 53 everyone went to his own home don't stop there, go to the next verse but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives now why was that? I'm sure so many people there knew that this is not Jesus' hometown after being blessed so much by his ministry I'm sure somebody should have said to him hey Lord why don't you come and stay with us tonight we don't have a home here what I see there is nobody bothered to invite him to their home they were just blessed by the message yeah even today I find sometimes people can be like that they can be so blessed by some preacher's message and they don't even think of what his need may be it's never happened to me I'll tell you nobody's left me stranded in any new place I've gone they've always been very considerate wherever I've gone to preach but Jesus they left him alone after being so blessed by his ministry and so he said ok it's not raining I can go and sleep under the trees in the Mount of Olives and he went and slept there do you think he was tempted like us the Bible says he was tempted like us after you serve people and they don't care for you are you tempted to wonder why in the world are these people so ungrateful Jesus was tempted also but he didn't yield to it he would not yield to that and say these guys are so ungrateful no he wouldn't think thoughts like that the next morning listen to this John 8 verse 2 he came in the morning to the temple and he sat down and began to teach them again now if he was one of today's preachers he would have begun his sermon like this well last night when I was sleeping under the trees in the Mount of Olives I felt the Lord speak to me just to give people a hint that none of you guys invited me to your home Jesus never did anything like that that's where I see the glory of Jesus has somebody ignored me in some situation let me act as if he did not ignore me has somebody slighted me in some way let me act as though he didn't slight me but he honored me how wonderful it is to see the glory of Jesus in these little things never to draw attention to yourself in some way somebody ignored you or despised you or neglected you say no I don't want to draw attention to myself just continue with God's word well I had a wonderful time under the trees wonderful time of fellowship with God what have I got to complain about thank God nobody invited me to their house I could spend some time with my father so these are little examples if you want to see the glory of Jesus if you are passionate to see the glory of Jesus in every page of scripture the Holy Spirit will show it to you and he will change you into that likeness so this is called a ministry ministry is not just preaching now turn back to where we started 2 Corinthians 3 18 we saw 2 Corinthians 4 1 since we have this ministry we don't get discouraged and that ministry is chapter 3 verse 18 to see the glory of Jesus and to become like him and I want to say to every one of you my dear brothers and sisters you can all have this ministry you may not be able to have my ministry of Bible teaching God gives you that gift you do it, if God didn't give me the gift I couldn't do it either God gives each of us different gifts but this ministry of looking into the scriptures and seeing the glory of Jesus and being transformed into that likeness is for

every one of us and this is where I told you about discouragement we can easily get discouraged when we have this longing to become like Christ and we slip up somewhere oh again I slipped up I lost my temper a little bit there or I was a bit unkind in the way I acted or a bit selfish or something like that when we have a heart set on becoming like Christ which is what we teach in all our CFC churches it's very easy to get discouraged we must not get discouraged that's what I'm driving at now if you have no interest in becoming like Christ like many other Christians I'm on my way to heaven I accepted the Lord 25 years ago and I've got a passport to heaven now it doesn't matter how I live such people never get discouraged I wonder whether they'll ever reach heaven at all I wonder whether such people are even converted but you're not like that you come to a church where you're constantly challenged to become more Christlike and therefore you are more in danger if you take it seriously of getting discouraged than that other guy who has no interest in being Christlike it doesn't matter to him whether he's just as defeated at the end of 2020 as he was at the beginning of 2020 but a person who's following the Lord he examines his life at the end of a year and says, Lord, I'm still defeated by the way I think I was defeated by at the beginning of the year I'm discouraged it's like a child who's failed in some examination and has got to sit in the same class for next year same grade I wonder if we have such a desire to progress I believe we should have to become more Christlike but we must not get discouraged we do not lose heart we have this ministry of looking into the scriptures seeing the glory of Jesus and becoming like Him but sometimes we slip up we're not going to get discouraged we're going to press on that's what I want to say Paul had such a passion that what happened was he gradually found himself becoming more Christlike not for a period of a year but in much shorter periods that's what challenged me here he says for example in verse 16 we don't get discouraged twice in the same chapter he says we don't lose heart we don't get discouraged the temptation to get discouraged came to Paul and he would not yield to it it's ok I slipped up but I'm not going to give up towards the end of his life Paul lost his temper once he shouted at the high priest in the court and called him a whitewashed wall but as soon as he realized it he apologized immediately that was one thing about him he was quick to keep his conscience clear when he slipped up he didn't brood over oh I failed, I failed, I failed he'd get discouraged we don't lose heart he says in verse 16 because even though our outer man, as his body was decaying his inner man was being renewed day by day that's quite a standard to come to when I read that, I said boy I'm thinking of making progress in a year and Paul was thinking of making progress into Christlikeness every day and we say well if I made a little progress in 2020 and become more Christlike at the end of the year than I was at the beginning we congratulate ourselves but Paul said I'm not happy with that we are the inner man is renewed means made more Christlike every single day believe that's possible not overnight I'm sure Paul didn't begin his Christian life like that but Paul was so passionate in pursuing that one thing he said I do, forgetting the things that are behind and pressed to the things that are ahead that his life became something that was becoming more Christlike every day that's a tremendous challenge I know when I read it I said Lord I'm not going to get there overnight but I know that is my goal my goal is that I shall be a little more Christlike today than I was yesterday and a little more Christlike tomorrow than I am today and how does that come I'll tell you if there is one thing we can do every day and that is judge ourselves there is an inner tendency in the race of Adam in every child of Adam to find fault with others to find some fault, to judge others it's something we have to crucify, it's part of the flesh and I must say Lord I want to turn that around and use that wonderful facility I have to judge myself not look inside ourselves no, but as we look at the glory of the Lord, you remember that wonderful passage in Isaiah 6, when Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord he was immediately convicted do you notice that turn with me to Isaiah chapter 6 this is what happens when we see the glory of the Lord and you see why he didn't get discouraged in Isaiah chapter 6 we read in the year that king Isaiah died I saw the Lord and I saw the angels proclaiming verse 3 Isaiah 6 verse 3, holy, holy, holy and

immediately when he saw the tremendous holiness of God he said woe is me what a sinner I am verse 6 verse 5 he judged himself put that into what we just read we see the glory of the Lord Jesus as the Holy Spirit shows us in the scriptures something similar will happen to you as it happened to Isaiah you'll see yourself, oh woe is me, for I've got lips that are not clean a language that is not clean maybe there's anger, maybe there's murmuring maybe there's grumbling, maybe there's some untruthfulness in the way I speak or a harshness in the tone of my voice my lips are unclean now the interesting thing is Isaiah was a prophet and he was always saying woe unto this group and that group and the other group we see that in the previous chapter very interesting to see see chapter 5 verse 8 Isaiah the prophet says woe to those people who are keeping on buying property so that they have a lot of real estate woe to those verse 11 Isaiah 5 11 who get up in the early morning to get drunk and woe unto those in verse 18 who drag iniquity by telling lies and verse 20 chapter 5 20 woe to those who call evil good and good evil and substitute darkness for light verse 22 woe to those who are heroes in drinking wine and so on woe to this group this group this group and everything he said was right but when he saw the glory of the Lord that woe which he proclaimed on others he says woe is me very interesting contrast between chapter 5 and chapter 6 as soon as he saw the glory of the Lord he stopped focusing on all his weaknesses and others which were there every woe that he pronounced on those other people was absolutely correct but now the focus was on himself that's one of the results of seeing the glory of the Lord we don't concentrate so much on the weaknesses of others then we say woe is me I see things in my own life Lord what am I trying to find fault with that guy over here and that guy over there I see so much un-Christ like in my life I want to judge myself and see the wonderful thing that happened when he did that when he judged himself and just because Isaiah 6-5 I saw the glory of the Lord immediately his sin was cleansed because an angel brought a flaming coal from the altar and touched Isaiah's lips and said your lips are cleansed that particular sin which he confessed the way I speak Lord is sinful cleansed immediately for him it was that way for us it was through the blood of Jesus but more than that the fire from heaven touched his lips it's a picture of the anointing of the Holy Spirit the fire of God touching my tongue and then the Lord says now Isaiah I want you to go and tell other people verse 9 go and tell others I've got a message for you so this is how ministry comes it begins by seeing the glory of the Lord and we judge ourselves like Isaiah woe me and I'm cleansed by the blood of Christ for the sin I confess the fire of God touches me I'm baptized in the Holy Spirit on fire and the Lord says I'm going to make you my witness now you may never become a preacher we are not all called to be preachers but we are all called to be witnesses and it would be amazing to see how God opens doors for you to witness almost without your effort somebody in your office maybe some relative of yours somebody who comes and meets you in your house and you have a word of encouragement for him it's amazing how God will open doors for us to witness we have judged ourselves the Lord sees we are cleansed He touches the fire of God upon our lips and He makes us His witnesses that's why we do not get discouraged I want to say to every single one of you God's will is that every one of you to be a witness for Christ you don't have to go outside your house from your house you can be a witness for Christ in these days you pick up a phone, you send an email one sentence can encourage somebody that's being a witness for Christ and if you are in touch with the Lord the Lord will give you that one sentence which somebody needs who has called you up on the phone or whom you are talking to have you ever thought of prophesying on the phone of prophesying in an email you need only one sentence some little word to encourage that person I'll never forget when I was a young about 50 years ago and I was struggling to see what God wanted me to do a much older man a very much older man put his hand on my shoulder and said you know God's got a plan for your life and encouraged me how is it I haven't forgotten that after 50 years I've forgotten so many wonderful messages people have preached but I never forgot that one prophetic word of encouragement it was only a few words it was a

prophecy it encouraged me so tremendously I don't know God may have seen I was getting discouraged and he used that brother to just put a word into my heart that stirred me up God's got a plan for my life wonderful so you don't need big sermons to encourage people I'll tell you that a lot of people bore others with long sermons but you can encourage a person with one sentence it's true if you see the glory of the Lord and you confess your sin and stop pronouncing judgment on everybody around you and say Lord let me judge myself the fire of God the fire of God will touch your lips and give you maybe one sentence to speak to somebody who calls you up on the phone or somebody you're writing an email to and the Lord will prompt you add this sentence at the end of that mail go ahead and add it you'll never know what it'll do to that other person see it says in 1 Peter chapter 4 1 Peter chapter 4 it says the time has come verse 17 it's a very important verse the time has come for judgment to begin not that we judge other people, no in the household of God the family of God look at these lovely words with us first I read that I think of how it is in the world everybody puts themselves first in everything except judgment in judgment they put others first everything else they are first we were also like that we put ourselves first in every single thing except judgment where we judge others first but now the Lord has turned us around where we put others first in everything except judgment when it comes to judgment we put ourselves first because we belong to another kingdom the opposite of this kingdom we don't judge others we judge ourselves first so it says here judgment begins with us first I've never forgotten when God spoke that to me years ago judgment must begin with you first, I do that Lord that is the mark verse 17 of those who belong to the household of God how do I know that I belong to the household of God I judge myself first I hope you belong to the household of God too that's what it says here the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God it begins with us first if you don't judge yourself first well, I don't know I hope you belong to the household of God perhaps not but this is the mark of those who belong to the household of God they judge themselves first because they see the glory of the Lord and they never get discouraged because they know the Holy Spirit okay, I slipped up there and I ask the Lord to forgive me He cleanses me immediately there's no delay in the blood of Jesus cleansing me now, as soon as I confess He forgives me and says don't remember it anymore Hebrews 8.12, I will not remember your sin anymore did you slip up this morning don't sit the whole day gloomy over that confess it, it's gone you don't have to think about it anymore it's blotted out we press on forgetting the things that are behind pressing forward to the things that are ahead we press toward the mark of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus that's what Paul says in Philippians 3 do you know what that upward call is? to become like Christ so I must forget my past failures and let me tell you what is more difficult we must also forget our past successes our past victories we must forget how much we have already become like Christ forget it and press forward to see how much you haven't become like Christ you know the Bible says the Christian life is like a race and nobody ever won a race who keeps looking back to see how much he's already run he's bound to come last think of a man a man who is running 100 meters race he's looking in front, the finishing line is there or running a marathon the finishing line is there he's not always looking back to see how much ground he has covered so Paul says the same thing in Philippians 3 I forget what's behind I don't look back on my past failures because they are cleansed in the blood of Jesus I don't look back on my past successes or how much I've become like Christ because that will be a drag on me I keep looking to see how much more I have to become like Christ so when we see the glory of the Lord we don't get discouraged even though our outer man is decaying he says the inner man is being renewed as I said as we judge ourselves the Lord renews our inner man day by day there's one more thing that I find happens to Christians who are pursuing this way not just discouragement the other is condemnation I found that in my younger days as a new believer I'd condemn myself oh that was so bad I shouldn't have done it like that I sometimes sit with days condemning myself with one slip up or a person who is not bothered about sin will never condemn himself

a person who is sensitive about sin who condemns himself I want you to see what our attitude to condemnation should be turn with me to Romans 8 verse 1 Romans 8 verse 1 says there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus you're not supposed to condemn yourself a single day of your life do you believe that? no discouragement no self condemnation that's God's will for us and listen to this you know again we find this word therefore whenever you find therefore see what it is therefore go back to the previous verses it's unfortunate that some of these chapter divisions have broken up some wonderful truths we saw that in 2 Corinthians 3.18 and 4.1 they should be joined together here's another thing that is therefore there is no condemnation what does that mean? see let's read the previous verses he says I want to become like Christ chapter 7 verse 22 I agree with the law of God in the inner man I agree with God's plan for my life that he wants to make me like Christ but even though I agree with it Romans 7.23 I find another law working in my members called the law of sin verse 23 which is making me as prisoner my passion is to become like Christ don't you find this? in my flesh there is a law of sin that is seeking to make me sin again and again and again Paul is being honest he says oh wretched man that I am fed up with my failures who will set me free from this body of spiritual death and he says thanks be to God Jesus Christ is going to set me free so hallelujah no this is a verse which many people have not understood they don't sometimes dig into it and say what does it mean after saying thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord verse 25 it looks as if he is going backwards an anti-climax so with my mind I serve the law of God but with my flesh I keep on serving the law of sin hey Paul you just now said that Jesus is going to set you free what is this? well you need to understand this if you are a whole hearted Christian till the end of your life your mind will be wanting to serve the law of God to become like Christ but you must not forget that in your flesh no matter how holy you are that flesh is serving the law of sin it's like a law of gravity wherever you go the law of gravity will pull you down the law of gravity is always there to pull you down no matter how much you jump up it will pull you down the flesh is like that and that's for example we go along wonderfully without any conscious sin for a few days and then one day we slip up have you had that experience? and then you can it's so condemn yourself and immediately he says no there is no condemnation next verse my flesh is serving the law of sin I know that till the day Jesus comes my flesh will serve the law of sin but if ever I slip up and yield to it I will immediately confess it to the Lord and the Lord will cleanse me in his blood finished no condemnation I move on no discouragement no condemnation the blood of Jesus cleanses me because in my heart I want to live by the Holy Spirit like it says in verse 4 the last part we don't walk according to the flesh even though we have a flesh which is serving the law of sin we don't walk according to it we don't obey it sometimes we do slip up and confess it we must believe that the cleansing of the Lord is immediate very often it's one of the problems I had in my younger days that I thought if I sinned I should sort of be discouraged the whole day or condemn myself the whole day then the Lord will be happy with me absolute nonsense I'm dishonoring the blood of Christ if when I slip up supposing you slipped up maybe you haven't lost your temper for a whole week and you're determined to be an overcomer and then one day you just blow it and you get upset and then you think that you're going to cleanse yourself by spending a whole day discouraging and condemning yourself no you confess it ask the Lord Jesus to cleanse you in his blood and move right on you slipped and fell on the pavement on the sidewalk don't lie down there just get up and move on that's what he says my flesh will always know the law of sin if I slip up I confess it and move on but I'm not going to sit there feeling gloomy and sad that I slipped up there is no condemnation so as we look back over the last year you may find that you could have progressed a little more if you had eliminated discouragement and condemnation from your life completely make sure you get rid of it this year as soon as you sin confess it to the Lord it's gone repent say Lord I don't want to do it again but the more you condemn yourself the more you get discouraged the more you fall into sin determine one thing this year there will be no more discouragement

in my life by the grace of God there will be no more condemnation I want to show you a little board do you know the no entry sign do you know what a no entry sign looks like in a road now look at this this is the type of no entry sign that you need to have in front of you for the whole of this year there are two roads that you must never never enter discouragement and self-condemnation and as you are very strict to obey the no entry road signs as you drive the car next time you see a no entry sign somewhere remember this there is a no entry sign for you that should be in your life toward these two roads never never enter don't violate the laws of the Holy Spirit because I believe this is what has hindered many Christians from making spiritual progress how do I know? it hindered me for many years I never had a spiritual father when I was a young Christian to guide me to struggle and learn everything on my own and I thank God that he taught me it took me much longer but it doesn't ever take you young people so long you can come into this life quickly because you have been tremendously privileged to be part of a church that teaches you truths that many others don't hear in their churches be thankful for the church be thankful for RLCF don't take it for granted be thankful for these zoom meetings that you have with RLCF at a time when even though your lockdown is a pandemic it doesn't hinder your spiritual growth it doesn't hinder even your fellowship thank God for that so let us also say like the Apostle Paul we are not going to lose heart this year there will be no condemnation my flesh will serve the law of sin in other words because I have not yet become like Christ I am ready to acknowledge it right now that till Christ comes I will not be like him but I will be a little more like him as time goes on I will peel off one layer of this onion of my self-life every time I discover it and keep on peeling it off becoming more and more Christ-like that is God's will for you and I want to say to you the Holy Spirit is committed to help you to go that way what more do you need so dear brothers and sisters please be encouraged it is not always easy to express the burden of my heart in words words are so limited but I pray that the Holy Spirit will interpret to you what I could not explain clearly enough may God bless you thank you Amen

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