

Through the Bible - 2 Corinthians - Part 1

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the leader's condition in the church and the secret of Paul's ministry, which is going through trials and afflictions to receive God's strength.

Duration: 54:43

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:17

Topics: "Through The Bible"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of serving the Lord with integrity and sincerity, rather than using the preaching of God's word as a means to make money. He encourages those in ministry to not be discouraged, but to keep their focus on Jesus and the tremendous ministry God has given them. The speaker also highlights the need for transparency and confession of any hidden sins or shame in one's life in order to effectively serve the Lord. He uses the analogy of a vessel, emphasizing that it is not the outward appearance or impressive gifts that matter, but rather the life and substance inside that is communicated to others.

Transcript

Okay, let's turn again to God's word to 2nd Corinthians and chapter 1. The ministry in the church depends to a great extent on the work that God can do in His servant who leads the church. 2nd Corinthians, Revelation chapter 2 and chapter 3 reveals that when the leader backslid, the church backslid. When the leader was faithful, the church was faithful.

And in many years of traveling in many parts of the world, I have learned one thing about Christianity that 300 people in a church, their condition depends on the condition of the one man who leads that church. Very very true. And if that man or men, if there are two people and they are compromisers, the church is a compromising church.

And if the leader is a godly man, the church will be godly because the ungodly people will get offended and leave. He'll be left with a godly remnant. If you have a compromising leader, everybody sits there and the whole church is compromising.

So 1 Corinthians deals with the local church in a city or a town or village. And 2nd Corinthians deals with the leader who plants that church. The quality of life, the inner life of the man of God who leads the church.

1 Corinthians speaks about gifts, how to conduct meetings, breaking of bread, sisters covering their heads, discipline in the church, so many things like that. 2nd Corinthians speaks about the man who leads that church. And Paul reveals his inner life more to us in 2nd Corinthians than in any other letter.

You can read in Acts about how he was treated on the outside, but in 2nd Corinthians you see what he went through, a lot about his inner life. And anyone who wants to be a true servant of God should read and meditate on 2nd Corinthians to see how did Paul become the man he became, the man of God that he became. Not his ministry, but his life.

His ministry was a gift God gave him, but that ministry had value because of the life. See for example, you can have an earthen vessel, not a very impressive vessel, and here is a golden cup, very impressive. But this earthen vessel may contain water, and this golden vessel may be empty, and thirsty people would rather have this earthen vessel than this golden cup.

These are two types of gifts, some spectacular gifts like the golden cup, some very ordinary gifts like an earthen vessel. But the important thing is what is inside the vessel. This golden cup a man pours out for people to drink, there is nothing inside.

People come to the meeting, they go away hungry and thirsty. This man's gift is not so spectacular, but when he pours out there is water for everybody to drink. So, it is not enough to have a gift, a gift is necessary, you need some type of vessel to communicate that water to other people.

But the life inside is what we communicate through the gift. So the life inside is important, not just the gift. So if there is an emphasis on gifts in 1 Corinthians, in 2 Corinthians it is the life.

And that is what we see particularly in the first 8 or 9 verses of 2 Corinthians. You see an emphasis there on how Paul got his ministry, not just because God anointed him with the Holy Spirit. Now I think a lot of people today who have been anointed with the Holy Spirit still don't have a ministry where rivers of living water are flowing through them, because they have not understood 2 Corinthians.

They have only understood the baptism in the Holy Spirit and thought that is the answer for everything. Multitudes of people are baptized in the Holy Spirit, but rivers of living water are not flowing from them. Why? Because they have not allowed God to work in their life to do a work of breaking.

It's when the rock was broken, hit, that the waters flowed. So remember that. So here Paul says the secret of his ministry is described in verse 3 and 4, right at the beginning.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 Corinthians 1.3. Father of mercy is God of all comfort. I think of that word comfort as meaning more than just patting a person on the back and saying don't worry, it's okay, we'll get over this. That's the type of comfort we understand.

But here it's speaking about strengthening. You see, part of that word comfort in English is F-O-R-T. The last part of comfort is F-O-R-T, fort.

And a fort speaks of something that's very strong, that can resist the enemy, a fortress. And God, when he comforts people, he gives them a fort, a fortress. It's not just patting on the back, saying don't worry, we'll get over this.

It's not more than that. It's strengthening. So I believe the comfort spoken of here is a strengthening.

So I like to read it like that. The God who strengthens me. And verse 4, the one who strengthens us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to strengthen those who are in affliction themselves with the same strength with which we got when God strengthened us.

You understood that? That means I sit, I stand there in the midst of so many people who are needy, who are going through all types of trials and difficulties and they want to be overcomers. So how does God give me a ministry to them? He takes me through many, many trials and testings and afflictions, many afflictions. And in those afflictions in my hidden life, which all the people sitting there don't know about, God gives me strength and encouragement and victory and faith.

And that which I've received, now I can give to people. It's not just sitting in a room and studying the Bible and listening to a lot of tapes and reading a lot of books and having a huge library of books and studying all that. It's not just that.

One has to go through afflictions. Ministry in the new covenant comes through affliction and trial. Jesus was tempted in all points as we are, so he can be a forerunner for all of us.

He has gone through it all and said, I've gone through it all, come and follow me. We have to be mini forerunners for other people. We have to say to others, follow me as I follow Christ.

That's what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11.1. Be imitators of me as I follow Christ. And as Jesus was the great forerunner, Paul became a mini forerunner and in order to lead other people, not just by preaching to them, but by sharing with them the strength he got in trial. So if Paul had never gone through any trials and difficulties and problems in his life, he would have had no ministry, no matter how much he was anointed with the Holy Spirit, no matter how many gifts of the Spirit he had.

See, a lot of people think today that, okay, study is not enough. We need study plus anointing of the Holy Spirit. I say even that is not enough.

You need to study God's word, you need to be anointed with the Holy Spirit, and then you need to go through hundreds of trials in your life. And in those trials, you experience God's strength, thus you get a ministry. Do you want a ministry? That's the way.

You need to spend hours and hours and hours studying God's word to understand God's mind. You need to seek God in prayer and fasting, that God sees your earnestness and fills you with the Holy Spirit. And then God has to take you through an education of trial.

Many many things. And if you got all this, God will be able to give you a ministry to other people. That's basically what he's saying, because when, verse 5, the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, then the strength we have, our comfort or strength, is also abundant in Christ.

So he's telling us, this is how I became strong. That's why I'm not a weak believer today, because I went through such a lot of fellowship with the sufferings of Christ. Jesus is the one who suffered first, going through many many trials.

I've gone through it too. Have you gone through trials? Have you gone through rejection from your parents, relatives, being despised by others, maybe trials of financial difficulty, physical sickness? Don't think that people who have a lot of health are necessarily the most effective servants. Paul had a thorn in the flesh, as he says in 2 Corinthians.

Timothy had stomach infirmities all his life, and these were among the two of the most effective servants of God in the New Testament, who had physical ailments. And don't think that those who have a lot of money only can serve God. Paul was a man who had very little, sometimes he didn't have enough money to buy food.

He says that in 2 Corinthians 11. He didn't have enough money to buy warm clothes in winter. This is God's mightiest servant.

Why does God treat His mightiest servants without giving them food, without giving them warm clothing in winter? Multinational companies will treat their best servants with so many perquisites and luxuries and give them everything, but God, God is, because God had to teach Paul how other people feel in the world who don't have a warm sweater and who don't have food, who don't have money. How will you know that unless you go through it yourself? I remember when I was working in the military, I had a very high salary, and then the Lord called me out and I came down to zero, because I had given away almost all my money for God's work. No savings, and I came down to zero, and then I got married, and we had a child.

And for three years, we really struggled financially, and I tell you, those were the best years of my life. I really learned to live simply, not to borrow, not to get into debt, learned we got closer to each other, husband and wife, we got closer to God. And the lessons we learned in simple living in those days are with us even today, thirty-two years later, now we have more than enough of financial, our needs are more than met.

But I'm thankful for those years. I feel sorry for people who have never gone through financial difficulties. So some of you, if you're going through financial difficulties, remember that's an education.

You're going through physical trials, that's your education. From these different trials like this, you'll get a ministry. Are you facing rejection, misunderstanding, criticism, false accusations from other believers? That's your trial.

God will strengthen you in it. You can never have a ministry unless you face these things. So don't envy that other person who's got a big job and a lot of comfort and all that.

That fellow won't have a ministry. You'll have a ministry because you go through these things. So this is what Paul is saying.

For example, he says in verse eight, we don't want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia. We were burdened excessively beyond our strength so that we despaired even of life. There's nothing wrong in Paul sharing a little bit with us about what he went through.

He didn't give all the details, but he shared a little bit with us so that we realize his ministry did not come through just study and anointing, but through a lot of suffering. And there's nothing wrong in your sharing with other people a little bit of what God has taken you through, but not everything. It's not good to talk about everything.

Paul did not, and we should not either. But so that people don't think that you never had any problems in your life. We shouldn't think that Paul never had any problems in his life.

He had so many trials, so many difficulties, and he gives us a little glimpse of it here and in chapter 11 of the same book where he tells us what all he went through. That's how he got a ministry. So that we don't

think that study and anointing will give us a ministry.

It won't. And he says, we went through so much affliction. We were burdened beyond our strength.

It was so much. He says, we almost thought we would die. You know, this is how people serve the Lord in those days.

And we had the sentence of death in ourselves so that we should learn not to trust in ourselves, but in God. Now we go to chapter 2 and we see here, he says about restoring the offended brother. You know, Paul had written at least three letters to Corinth before 1 Corinthians.

We read in 1 Corinthians 5 verse 9 that he had written a letter before that, which God has not preserved. It's not in scripture. So what we have in 1 Corinthians is actually the second letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthians.

And in that letter, we know that he told them to put this man out of the church. Now here he writes another letter to them and says, I think you should now take him back. Because verse 6, chapter 2, verse 6, it's enough.

The amount of punishment you have afflicted on him. You all listen to me. You put him out of the church and the fellow is there now discouraged, depressed, and he realizes what a terrible thing it is to be away from the church.

He's repented. He has set those matters right. He's given up that sinful way of his.

And now he's so discouraged, sitting all there alone. Now don't punish him forever like this. Restore him.

See, the purpose of all discipline is to bring the person back into fellowship. Why does a father discipline his child? Is it to drive him out of the house? No, it's to make him a much better son. So if a child is rebellious, the father may even say, well, if you're rebellious, you can't stay in my house anymore.

And he may have to put his son outside the house. He's a grown up son. And then like the prodigal son, the father said, OK, go.

He learned his lesson and came back. The father welcomed him. That's what Paul is saying here.

Now this child has learned his lesson. Welcome him back. Otherwise, if you don't forgive him, verse 10, if you forgive anything, I also forgive.

If you don't forgive, here's a word for all of us. We should not, in order, verse 11, that no advantage be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes. Paul says, do you know how dangerous it is not to forgive somebody? Even if the man has committed the terrible mistake of sleeping with his stepmother for months on end, and wouldn't listen to anybody, stubborn, hard, OK, put him out.

But don't let him get discouraged. Now forgive him. If you don't forgive him, Satan will take advantage of you.

And that applies to us as a church and as individuals. Supposing somebody has done harm to you, and you don't forgive him, you know what will happen? Satan will destroy your life. That fellow who harmed you may afterwards repent and get into God's kingdom.

But you, who never did anything wrong, can go to hell, because you don't forgive him. You see, it looks so unrighteous, no, that fellow who did the wrong goes to heaven, and you who suffered the wrong goes to hell. But that can happen, if you don't forgive someone.

Because the Bible says, Jesus said, if you don't forgive others, My Heavenly Father will not forgive you. And if My Heavenly Father does not forgive you, how can you go to heaven? Is there anybody in heaven whose sins are not forgiven? If you die without forgiving somebody, I don't care how long you've been a believer, I believe you go to hell. Because I believe the word of Jesus.

If you do not forgive, Matthew 6.15, if you do not forgive others, neither will My Heavenly Father forgive you. And if you die like that, there is no hope for you. So, learn to forgive other people immediately, no matter what harm they have done.

Otherwise it says, Satan will get an advantage over you, and Paul says, we are not ignorant of his schemes. That's a wonderful verse. We should not be ignorant of Satan's schemes.

Satan is always trying to trip us up. Why does Satan always remind you of the evil things that other people have done to you? Tell me. You think because he's such a great sympathizer of you, you think that's the reason? That he reminds you, see what that fellow did, and see what he's still doing against you, and all types of things he keeps on telling you.

Not because he sympathizes with you, he's already got that fellow in his hands, he wants to get you also in his hands. Don't be a fool. Don't be ignorant of Satan's schemes.

Forgive him. I remember once a brother came to me and said, brother, this person did this to me, and this to me, and this to me, and this to me, and this to me. I said, has he crucified you yet? No, he said, he hasn't crucified me yet.

I said, well, then you got a long way to go, I said, because Jesus, even after being, when he was crucified, he said, father, forgive them. You haven't got that far even, and you can't forgive this man. How can you say you follow Jesus? Jesus was being crucified, he said, father, forgive them, they don't know what they are doing.

You haven't got that far. Say it. Father, forgive him.

He doesn't know what he's doing. You know, the thing that has helped me, when a lot of people have tried to do evil to me, as I said, because of Romans 8, 28 filter, it never harms me, but still the fact remains they do evil, and God will judge them for it. But the thing that's helped me not to look in anger at such people is this.

I've seen that when a person is evil, it's like a sickness. Sin is like a sickness. If somebody is jealous of me, hates me without any reason, and wants to harm me or my ministry, he's sick.

And I must look at him like I look at a patient in a hospital who's got both cancer and leprosy. Supposing you go to a hospital and you see a person who's got cancer and leprosy, are you angry with him? Or you feel sorry for him? You don't get angry. You feel sorry, poor man.

And once God opened my eyes to see that that fellow has got cancer and leprosy, he delivered me from all anger. It made me feel sorry for that poor chap, just like it made me feel sorry, I'd feel sorry for a person

with cancer and leprosy. Look at the people who harm you and hurt you like that.

They are sick. Try and heal them if possible. A gentle answer can turn away wrath.

That's the way of Christ. So, he says, forgive him. And then he goes on to say, verse 14, Thanks be to God, who always leads us in his triumph in Christ.

It's a wonderful verse. To me, many, many years ago, it came as a great challenge, particularly the word, always. Is it possible? Paul experienced it and he gave glory to God.

He didn't say he was walking in triumph, no. He said, God leads me in triumph, always. That means he was an overcomer 24 hours a day.

He wasn't perfect. There were many things he went, towards the end of his life, we read in Acts 23, he shouted at the high priest, saying, God will smite you, you whitewashed wall. But as soon as he was aware of it, he humbled himself and asked forgiveness.

So, it's not that he was perfect or that he never made a mistake, but he was a perpetual overcomer. If he sinned and he realized it, without any delay, he would immediately confess it. And he lived an overcoming life.

I want to tell you, my brothers and sisters, if you want to build a church that pleases God, you must be the type of man or woman who pleases God. God wants to lead you in triumph in your daily life, in your personal life. Not once in a while, always.

Not by your strength, verse 14, God leads you, always in triumph in Christ. This is the verse for the servant of God, thanks be to God who always leads me in triumph in Christ, in every place, in every single place, he says, and through me manifests, Paul says, the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Christ. In other words, Paul says, it's not people are thinking that Paul is a great man, but that something of Christ comes through Paul wherever he went.

The fragrance of Christ. He says, for some people, it's a fragrance of death, for some people, verse 16, it's a fragrance of life, which means not everybody appreciates this. One would think that everybody would be delighted with such a message of victory.

But no, a lot of people don't like this message because it shows up their sin. Jesus came manifesting the knowledge of God and a lot of people put him to death. They didn't want it.

It's the same today. One would think that this wonderful gospel that we preach, this wonderful life of victory, everybody should come running towards it, but it's not true. A lot of Christian leaders, their sin gets exposed through this ministry and message that they hate you and they will hate you because you preach victory.

You preach freedom from the love of money and that exposes the evil. You're shining the torch on people who are living in sin. And imagine if somebody is committing a sin there, like a robbery or something, and you go and shine a bright torch on him, you think he's going to love you? He's going to hate you.

Somebody else is committing some other sin there and you go and shine a torch, he's not going to like that. That's how it is. A true servant of God is like that.

He goes around shining torches in the dark corners and those who love to sin hate him. And they'll say he's a false teacher and it's false doctrine to get rid of him. Actually they are disturbed because their sin is being exposed.

But other people who are groping in the darkness for the way, it's all dark, they're trying to find the way, somebody shines a torch, he says, oh thank you brother for that light. We're so thankful now I can find the way. So you see there are two types of reactions to the light.

Some people hate it and some people are so thankful. That's what Paul says. Jesus fills us with the Holy Spirit, manifests his power and his triumph everywhere and some people are just so thankful for us and some people hate the sight of us.

But thereby each person is revealed as to what his true condition is. Okay, there's one more thing I want to say here, very important for those who serve the Lord, verse 17. He says we're not like many people who just peddle the word of God.

You know what peddling the word of God is? It's selling it for money. You know that means like a huckster who's selling vegetables or something, making money out of it. He says we're not like that.

We're not people just trying to make money out of preaching God's word. What an example. It's a good verse for all those who serve the Lord to be able to say at the end of their life, I did not spend my life preaching God's word in order to make money.

I was not like a man in a shop selling things or a man going around the street selling vegetables or fruit in order to make money. I'm not peddling the word of God. I give it freely.

There's a dignity about a man who is a servant of God. There must be a sincerity because he speaks in Christ, verse 17, in the sight of God. Now in chapter 3, he's speaking about the new covenant servant.

See in the new covenant, there's a difference between a new covenant servant and an old covenant servant. Big difference. And this is what we are seeing.

In the old covenant, there were a few people like Hosea who had to go through trials in order to be able to give their ministry, even Isaiah and Ezekiel. But generally speaking, the Old Testament priests, for example, they did not have to go through a lot of trials in order to fulfill their ministry as priests. They had to understand the laws, explain the laws, they had to study and preach.

Now anybody who studies and preaches is an old covenant servant. If you only study the Bible and you preach, you are an old covenant servant. A new covenant servant is different.

He has to experience and speak out of his experience. He has to say, not come in here, but come and see. And so he says further, he says about, not that we are adequate, verse 5, he says, we are not sufficient for this ministry as if we can produce all that's required for this ministry.

But our sufficiency, verse 5, comes from God. A new covenant servant does not depend on anything in his ability within himself to serve God. It's all from God.

God, you give it to me, I'll give it out. You know, I've often thought of it like the, like I said the other day about the servants who distributed the wine. They took the wine to Jesus, Jesus turned it, took the water to Jesus, Jesus turned it to wine and they distributed it.

The disciples, they took five loaves to Jesus, Jesus multiplied it, they distributed it. In the same way, we take our limited resources to God and God anoints it, blesses it, multiplies it, and that's how we are to serve. So many people in God's work, after some years of serving God, they get discouraged.

They are gloomy, they are depressed, they are exhausted because they are trying to serve out of their own sufficiency. I believe that even physical health, we need God to give us to serve Him. You know, you may go out to serve God in some difficult area and you need physical health to do it.

And think of that promise, those who wait upon the Lord shall exchange their strength. Even young men will faint, but we shall mount up with wings as eagles. Our sufficiency is from God.

When you are in financial difficulty, think of that verse, our sufficiency is from God. Whatever your need may be in the new covenant, our sufficiency is from God, who has made us servants of a new covenant. Now in the new covenant, we are not servants of the letter, but of the Spirit.

I want to turn you now to verse 9. There are two ministries mentioned here, a ministry of condemnation and a ministry of righteousness. What is a ministry of condemnation? A ministry of condemnation is where you preach to people, they feel condemned and they go away. And you may think, that is a wonderful ministry, you got everybody convicted.

That's Old Testament, that's the law. The law condemns people, you are not good enough, you are never good enough. There is a lot of preaching today in Christian circles, which is so-called revival preaching, which is just telling people, you are not good enough, you will never make it, and you are like this, and you are like this, and you are like this, and they all sit there, feel condemned and go away.

That's not Christian preaching. Christian preaching is something that leads people to righteousness and glory. They may feel convicted, but they feel lifted and healed and delivered by the end of the meeting and they go with hope.

So there is a lot of legalistic preaching today, which brings people into bondage. And if your preaching ever brings people into bondage, you can be sure that you are not a new covenant servant. If as a result of your preaching, people feel condemned rather than lifted, that's old covenant preaching.

If you push people down instead of lift them up, that's old covenant preaching. New covenant preaching lifts them up and gives them hope. Okay, now let's move on to verse 13 to 18.

Here he is comparing this new covenant with the old covenant in terms of Moses and Christ. Now this is so important because I believe that a lot of preaching today is old covenant preaching. And it says here, Moses, he used to put a veil over his face, you know, because when he got into God's presence, the glory shone on his face and he would come down from the mountain and, you know, it says he put a veil over his face.

And in the Old Testament, it says he put the veil so that people would not be scared to look at him. But here it gives us another reason. And the reason is, you know what was happening to that glory in Moses' face? Underneath that veil? What is happening? As time went on, it was becoming less and less and less.

So he says here, he put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel don't look at that which is becoming less, verse 13, and less and less. The glory was becoming less and less and less and less and less. And Moses didn't want people to see that.

And a lot of preachers today, they've got a hidden life where the glory is less and less and less and less and less. When they were twenty years old, some of today's sixty-year-old preachers, when they were twenty years old, they were on fire for God, there was a tremendous glory. But now, they have to cover it up because their attitude to money, their attitude to sin, so many things have become less and less and less and less and less and less.

This is a mark of old covenant ministry. In new covenant ministry, he says it's exactly the opposite. We don't have to put a veil over our face.

We don't have to hide anything in our hidden life like Moses. Jesus never came with a veil over his face because in the new covenant, this veil is taken away. Verse 16, when you turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

And now, when we look at the glory of the Lord's face in God's word, the Holy Spirit, verse 18, changes us from one degree of glory to another so that the glory increases day by day. That's the contrast here. In the old covenant, the glory decreased and decreased and decreased and Moses had to cover it up.

In the new covenant, verse 18, it gets brighter and brighter and brighter and brighter. In other words, the anointing upon your life is more today than it was ten years ago and much more than it was thirty years ago. And the freshness of the Spirit in your ministry is more today than it was five years ago, ten years ago.

Now, for those of you who are young, you may say, well, it's okay, but if you're not steadfast in this way as you grow older, you'll find there's a tendency for the glory to decrease in your life. I've seen, for example, very zealous young people and then they get married and then they backslide. Why is that? I mean, if you're married in the will of God, your zeal and glory and everything should be far more than it was when you were single.

It should be like that. But something has happened. I've seen that in so many cases.

Because either the wife becomes more important or the home becomes more important, the Lord is not so important and they don't behold the glory of the Lord day by day like they did in their single days and they begin to backslide. Or some people, when they were unknown, you know, they were unknown, just ordinary unknown servants of God just preaching and there was a tremendous glory in their life and then after some time, because of their ministry, they became more and more well-known, more famous and then the anointing is gone. Because now they are more concerned about what people think about them.

So it's very easy for so many things like that to take away the glory. Or maybe when you started your ministry, you had so little money and you were very careful and you were very faithful with money and then you mingled with a lot of other Christian workers who are very careless with money and you also became like them and the glory begins to fade away. Do you know the number of preachers, most of them whom I have met in my life, is like Moses.

The glory fades away and they have to cover it up. So don't think this applies only to 4,000 years ago, it's happening even now. But that is not God's will and you must make sure it doesn't happen like that in your life.

In your life it must be the opposite, that as you steadfastly look at God's word, verse 18, and see the glory of Jesus. That is the answer. I have found 2 Corinthians 3, verse 18 to be the one verse that describes the

entire ministry of the Holy Spirit most fully in the whole New Testament.

If you were to ask me, show me one verse which describes the entire ministry of the Holy Spirit, I'd say 2 Corinthians 3, verses 17 and 18. The Holy Spirit, when He becomes Lord in my life, verse 17, He brings liberty. He makes me free, that's the first thing.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. Liberty from what? Freedom from sin, freedom from the wretched traditions of grandfathers and great grandfathers and elders and all that. Freedom from the opinions of people, what they think, whether they praise or whether they criticize.

It's a tremendous liberty. Freedom to serve God and no longer serve men. Freedom from the love of money.

This is what the Holy Spirit brings. And then, verse 18, the Holy Spirit shows me the glory of Jesus in the Bible. The mirror, spoken in verse 18, is the Bible.

In the mirror I see the glory of Jesus. And the Holy Spirit shows me not just doctrines and teachings and sermons. Some people read the Bible to get doctrines and sermons.

The Holy Spirit shows us the glory of Jesus in the Bible. Everything in the New Testament is to show me the glory of Jesus Christ. And as I see that glory, the Holy Spirit does another work in my heart of changing me into that likeness.

This is what the Holy Spirit does. Then people say, what about ministry? Well, I see how Jesus ministered and I begin to minister like that. I see how Jesus sacrificed and went here and there preaching.

And I also sacrifice and go here and there preaching. That's what will happen to you. Don't think your ministry will become less.

When you look at how Jesus ministered, you will minister more and more sacrificially. Your life and your ministry will change when you allow the Holy Spirit to do the work mentioned in verse 17 and 18. That's how you'll become a new covenant servant.

And you don't have to be a full-time worker to do that. Any brother or sister in the church must be a new covenant servant. Chapter 4, Paul continues to describe his ministry.

And he says here, verse 2, we have renounced, first of all, verse 1, because we have received this ministry, we receive mercy, we don't lose heart. I just want to say one thing in passing here, even lose heart means get discouraged. Even the Apostle Paul was tempted to be discouraged.

So if you are tempted to be discouraged, that's not strange. In the ministry, we will be tempted. I've been tempted many, many times to get discouraged.

But Paul says we don't get discouraged. We refuse to get discouraged because we keep our eyes on Jesus and we think of the tremendous ministry God has given us and we don't get discouraged. And chapter 4, verse 2, he says we have renounced all the things hidden because of shame.

Not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God. There are a number of things here that you need to think of seriously. That if you want to serve the Lord, there must be nothing in your life that you have to hide because of shame.

If there is something, confess it, set it right before God and cleanse it. But make sure there is absolutely nothing you have to hide, that your life can be transparent. That's one of the most important requirements to be the type of man.

Paul is telling you about his own life in this letter, remember. Nothing hidden and not walking in craftiness. What is craftiness? When you write a prayer letter and your real aim is to get money from people and not prayer, that's craftiness.

It's really a letter to get people to give money, but you give it a holy title, prayer letter. That's craftiness. Be honest.

Write on top, letter asking for money. Speak the truth and write it. This is all craftiness.

There is such a lot of dishonesty in Christian work. Be straightforward. If you feel you should ask for money, go ahead and ask for it.

But don't put a holy title saying prayer letter, because it isn't. This is just one example. Crafty ways in which people try to give hints of their needs.

Crafty ways in which they give their testimony to give people a certain impression. Paul says, we have renounced it. We don't want any of that in our life.

We judge ourselves and cleanse it out of our life. And we commend ourselves to every man. Okay? Then he speaks about this gospel.

This gospel, many, many people cannot understand it. Because God, the God of this world, has blinded their eyes. That they cannot see it.

And he talks here about this treasure of the glory of God in verse 6. Just like God commanded the light way back in Genesis 1 to shine, in the same way He has shone into our hearts. This is a wonderful passage in verse 7. This light is in an earthen vessel. You know that till the end of your life, you will be an earthen vessel.

Nothing very attractive about this vessel, except that there is a glory inside. So, here is another aspect of new covenant service. In the Old Testament, David and Abraham were rich.

There was a glory about them externally. But the New Testament apostle is not very impressive. Tradition tells us that the apostle Paul was only 4 feet 11 inches tall.

About this much. You have to put a stool for him to stand here, if he was going to speak. And he was bald.

He had a hooked nose. And he had a sickness, which he had with him till the end of his life. I don't know what it was.

Not a very impressive person, when standing in a pulpit. When you look at such a man, sick, bald, with a hooked nose, so short. That's the man whom God used to turn the world upside down.

Because he was anointed. See, it was an earthen vessel. Very weak on the outside.

But inside it was a glory. Remember this. It's what's inside you, that's more important.

I mention this, because so many young people today are looking at all these great, so-called, so-called great servants of God, standing on platforms. More like film stars, standing up there and living like film stars. That's not the image you get of a true servant of God in the apostle Paul.

An earthen vessel, not a golden vessel. So, don't get discouraged, if there are so many human limitations and weaknesses in you. Make sure there's a tremendous glory inside, because that's the only thing that matters.

That you walk with a clear conscience before God. You live under the anointing of the Holy Spirit all the time. And this earthen vessel has to be broken.

Can you think of some Old Testament example? He speaks about a light in verse 5, verse 6, and an earthen vessel in verse 7. Do you remember we studied an Old Testament example of a light in an earthen vessel? That was in the time of Gideon. Gideon's 300 soldiers had an earthen vessel each, and a light inside. There, Gideon is a picture of Christ, and the 300, who were selected from 32,000, are a picture of wholehearted disciples of Christ.

And when they go to battle against Satan or live for God in this world, they had a sword, which is the word of God, but they also had this earthen vessel with a light inside, and that's what Paul is speaking about here. And what did Gideon tell them to do? They had to break that earthen vessel, then only the light would shine out. Otherwise, you put a candle inside a pot, how much light comes out? It's there, if you look inside, it's there, but you carry the pot like that, there's very little light.

When the pot is broken, the light shines, and that's what Gideon's soldiers did. They broke the pot, and the light shone. And now, in the next verses, the apostle says how he was broken.

How this earthen vessel was broken. And if God is to make the light of God shine from you, outside, He's got to do this in your life also. We are afflicted in every way, perplexed, persecuted, struck down.

This is the breaking of the earthen vessel. Many people don't understand this, and they don't seem to be too interested in this, but this is the way of life. You know, it's like the grain of wheat.

When you put a grain of wheat into the ground and sow it, you know what happens? That hard outer shell cracks. Then only the life from within comes out. In all of us, there is a hard outer shell of our personality, our life, our Adamic life, which has to be broken.

Then only that light will shine forth. It's a principle that comes right through scripture. When the shell is broken, the life will come forth.

I believe there's a life in all of us, but it's not coming forth. You remember that lady who brought the alabaster vial of ointment to Jesus? What a tremendous perfume there was inside that vial. But nobody in the house could get a smell of it until that vessel was broken.

I believe there's a tremendous glory in your life, but God has to take you through circumstances where your outer life is broken, where you're no longer attractive to people. We want to be attractive to people, and God says, no, I have to break that. You want to come across as a very smart person.

God says, no, let people think you're dumb. Let people think you're stupid. Let me break this outer soul life of yours.

We have a soul life. Man is body, soul, and spirit. And in the spirit, there's a tremendous glory.

But the soul life is hindering that light from shining. It's hindering us from going up and being what God wants us to be. And that is the breaking which God allows in your life through various circumstances.

And now I want to show you this passage in verse 10 and 11, which many people don't understand. You see, there are many people who are very eager to hear about a gospel which answers prayer and does so many miracles. But if you're really serious about the life of Jesus being manifested in you, the secret is here.

Verse 10 and 11. In our body, we have to carry the dying of Jesus. What is this dying of Jesus that we must carry in our body? Because he says, if you do that, the life of Jesus will be manifested in your mortal flesh.

This dying of Jesus is the taking up of the cross. That means reacting to life's situations the way Jesus reacted when he was on earth. How did he react when people called him the devil? How did he react when Judas Iscariot stole his money? How did he react when people spat on him? How did he react when people called him an illegitimate son, son of Mary? How did he react when people insulted him, people robbed him, people abused him, and people told him to stop preaching and threw him out of the synagogue? How did he react? There was something he died to.

He died to all human honor. He died to all human prestige and reputation and everything. And his own will.

For example, in Gethsemane. He said he died to his own will. That's called the dying of Jesus.

See, the dying of Jesus on Calvary, you and I have no part in. We cannot die for the sins of the world. But there was a dying that went all through his earthly life.

We have to share in that dying. Why is it called the dying of Jesus? You know, there are certain diseases which are called by the name of the man who discovered the disease. Another name for leprosy is Hansen's disease.

Because Hansen was the man who first discovered it. The dying of Jesus means he was the first person who walked this way. That's why it's called the dying of Jesus.

He went this way. Nobody walked this way before. It was a way of death to self.

Death to everything that's of this world. Everything that's human. He died.

And in that death, he manifested the glory of the Father. And you and I are called to do exactly the same thing. I believe that many of us were not able to manifest the glory of the Father.

Because we are not willing to die like that in daily situations. Well, let me conclude with verse 17 and 18 in chapter 4. It says, all this affliction that we go through is very light. Because the glory that's going to come into us through it is so great.

How does this glory come into us? Because in this affliction, verse 18, we do not look at the things which are seen. That means we don't look at it from a human standpoint. But we look at the things which are unseen.

There's a glory that's being worked in my life through these trials, through everything. I'm getting into a fellowship with Jesus' heart through these trials. And therefore, I'm encouraged.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is the way we get a ministry. We don't get ministry by just studying. Paul labors so much to explain to us the way to a spiritual ministry in the new covenant.

Let's listen to him. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the way of the cross.

There is a glory in the way of the cross that's hidden from so many people in the world. Help us to see it clearly that we may not waste our earthly days but follow in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus who walked this way of death that through us also the glory of God can shine forth. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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