



**COURAGE**

**FOR THE CONFLICT**

Warren W. Wiersbe, [The Bible Exposition Commentary](#), vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 641–643.

The key theme of this section is repeated in 2 Corinthians 4:1 and 16: "We faint not!" Literally, Paul said, "We do not lose heart!"

There were plenty of reasons for discouragement in Paul's situation, yet the great apostle did not quit.

What was it that kept him from fainting in the conflicts of life? He knew what he possessed in Jesus Christ!

Instead of complaining about what he did not have, Paul rejoiced in what he did have; and you and I can do the same thing



# We Have a Glorious Ministry

2 Corinthians 4:1–6 (NKJV)

1 Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart.

2 But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

3 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,



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

5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake.

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



"Therefore, seeing we have this kind of ministry" is the literal translation of what Paul wrote. What kind of ministry?

The kind described in the previous chapter is a glorious ministry that brings men life, salvation, and righteousness, a ministry that can transform men's lives.

This ministry is a gift—we receive it from God. It is given to us because of God's mercy, not because of anything we are or we have done.



1 Timothy 1:12–17 (NKJV)

12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry,

13 although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.

14 And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.



15 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

16 However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.

17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

The way you look at your ministry helps to determine how you will fulfill it.



If you look on serving Christ as a burden instead of a privilege, you will be a drudge and do only what is required.

Some people even look at service as a punishment from God. When Paul considered the fact that he was a minister of Jesus Christ, he was overwhelmed by the grace and mercy of God.

His positive attitude toward the ministry had some practical consequences in his life.





# It Kept Him From Being A Quitter (v. 1)

He confessed to the Corinthians that his trials in Asia had almost brought him to despair.

2 Corinthians 1:8 (NKJV) For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.



Despite his remarkable gifts and vast experience, Paul was human and subject to human frailties. But how could he lose heart when he was involved in such a wonderful ministry? Would God have entrusted this ministry to him so that he might fail? Of course not! With the divine calling came the divine enabling; he knew that God would see him through.



A discouraged Methodist preacher wrote to the great Scottish preacher, Alexander Whyte, to ask his counsel. Should he leave the ministry? "Never think of giving up preaching!" Whyte wrote to him. "The angels around the throne envy you for your great work!"

That was the kind of reply Paul would have written, the kind of reply all of us need to ponder whenever we feel our work is in vain.



# It Kept Him From Being A Deceiver (vv. 2–4)

Paul was undoubtedly alluding to the Judaizers when he wrote these words. Many false teachers today claim to base their doctrine on the Word of God, but false teachers handle God's Word in deceptive ways. You can prove anything by the Bible, provided you twist the Scriptures out of context and reject the witness of your conscience.

The Bible is a book of literature, and it must be interpreted according to the fundamental rules of interpretation. If people treated other books the way they treat the Bible, they would never learn anything.



Paul had nothing to hide, either in his personal life or in preaching the Word. Everything was open and honest; there was no deception or distortion of the Word.

The Judaizers were guilty of twisting the Scriptures to fit their preconceived interpretations, and ignorant people were willing to follow them.

If Paul was such a faithful teacher of the Word, why did more people not believe his message? Why were the false teachers so successful in winning converts? Because Satan blinds the mind of the lost sinner, and fallen man finds it easier to believe lies than to believe the truth.



# The Gospel "Is Hidden To Them That Are Lost:

In whom the god of this world hath 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" (2 Cor. 4:3–4).

Paul had already explained that the minds of the Jews were "veiled" because of the blindness of their hearts.

Romans 11:25 (NKJV) For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.



## 2 Corinthians 3:14–16 (NKJV)

14 But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ.

15 But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart.

16 Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

The minds of the Gentiles are also blinded! Those who are lost ("perishing") cannot understand the message of the Gospel.



Satan does not want the glorious light of salvation to shine into their hearts. As the God of this age and the prince of this world (John 12:31), Satan keeps lost sinners in the dark.

The sad thing is that Satan uses religious teachers (like the Judaizers) to deceive people. Many of the people who today belong to cults were initially members of Christian churches.





# It Kept Him From Being A Self-promoter (vv. 5-6)

- The awesome fact that Paul had received this ministry from Christ kept him from being a quitter and a deceiver, but it also kept him from being a self-promoter (2 Cor. 4:5–6). "We preach not ourselves!"
- The Judaizers enjoyed preaching about themselves and glorying in their achievements.



## 2 Corinthians 10:12–18 (NKJV)

12 For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

13 We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you.

14 For we are not overextending ourselves (as though our authority did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ;



15 not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labors, but having hope, that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere,

16 to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment.

17 But "he who glories, let him glory in the Lord."

18 For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.



They were not servants who tried to help people; they were dictators who exploited people.

Paul was undoubtedly a man who practiced genuine humility.

- He did not trust in himself (2 Cor. 1:9)
- or commend himself (2 Cor. 3:1–5)
- or preach himself (2 Cor. 4:5).

He sought only to lead people to Jesus Christ and build them up in the faith. Paul would have been easy to build a "fan club" for himself and take advantage of weak people who thrive on associating with great men. The Judaizers operated that way, but Paul rejected that kind of ministry.



What happens when you share Jesus Christ with lost sinners?  
The light begins to shine!

- Paul compared conversion to Creation as described in Genesis 1:3.
- Like the earth of Genesis 1:2, the lost sinner is formless and empty; but when he trusts Christ, he becomes a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).
- God then begins to form and fill the person's life who trusts Christ, and he begins to be fruitful for the Lord. God's "Let there be light!" makes everything new.



# We Have a Valuable Treasure (2 Cor. 4:7–12)

From the glory of the new creation, Paul moved to the humility of the clay vessel. The believer is simply a "jar of clay"; the treasure within the vessel gives the vessel its value. The image of the vessel is a recurring one in Scripture, and from it, we can learn many lessons.

To begin with, God has made us the way we are so that we can do the work He wants us to do. God said of Paul, "He is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles" (Acts 9:15).

No Christian should ever complain to God because of his lack of gifts, abilities, limitations, or handicaps



## Psalm 139:13–16 (NKJV)

13 For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb.

14 I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well.

15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.

16 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them.



Psalm 139:13-16 indicates that our very genetic structure is in the hands of God. Each of us must accept himself and be himself.

The important thing about a vessel is that it is clean, empty, and available for service. Each of us must seek to become "a vessel unto honor, sanctified [set apart], and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (2 Tim. 2:21).

We are vessels so that God might use us. We are earthen vessels so that we might depend on God's power and not our own.

We must focus on the treasure and not on the vessel.





Paul was not afraid of suffering or trial because he knew that God would guard the vessel so long as Paul was guarding the treasure.

1 Timothy 1:11 (NKJV) according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.

1 Timothy 6:20 (NKJV) O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—

God permits trials, controls trials, and uses trials for His glory.  
God is glorified through weak vessels.



The missionary who opened inland China to the Gospel, J. Hudson Taylor, used to say, "All God's giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on Him being with them."

Sometimes God permits our vessels to be shaken so that some of the treasure will spill out and enrich others. Suffering reveals the weakness of man and the glory of God.



Paul presented a series of paradoxes in this paragraph: earthen vessels—the power of God; the dying of Jesus—the life of Jesus; death working—life working. The natural mind cannot understand this spiritual truth and therefore cannot understand why Christians triumph over suffering.



We must focus on the treasure and not on the vessel, but we must also focus on the Master and not on the servant. If we suffer, it is for Jesus' sake. If we die to self, it is so that the life of Christ might be revealed in us. If we go through trials, it is so that Christ might be glorified. And all of this is for the sake of others. As we serve Christ, death works in us—but life works in those we minister.

- Dr. John Henry Jowett said, "Ministry that costs nothing accomplishes nothing." He was right. A story is told of a young man who preached an eloquent sermon, but it lacked something. "Something was missing," Waren Wiersbe said to his friend, and he replied, "Yes, and it won't be there until his heart is broken. After he has suffered awhile, he will have a message worth listening to."



The Judaizers did not suffer. Instead of winning lost souls, they stole converts from the churches.

Instead of sacrificing for the people, they made the people sacrifice for them.

2 Corinthians 11:20 (NKJV) For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face.

The false teachers did not have a treasure to share. All they had were some museum pieces from the Old Covenant, faded antiques that could never enrich a person's life.



Warren Wiersbe states, "it has been my experience that many churches are ignorant of the price a pastor pays to be faithful to the Lord in serving His people."

This section is one of three sections in 2 Corinthians devoted to listing Paul's sufferings. The other two are 6:1–10 and 11:16–12:10.



The test of a true ministry is not stars but scars.

Galatians 6:17 (NKJV) From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

How can we keep from giving up? By remembering that we are privileged to have the treasure of the Gospel in our vessels of clay!

