

# **Gospel Ministry in Earthen Vessels (2 Corinthians 4:17-5:10)**

Presented to  
Professor Stacy Watford  
Holmes Bible College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Course  
NEW 402 1 and 2 Corinthians

by Todd OBert  
11/22/2022

## **2 Corinthians 4:17-5:10**

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

The Apostle Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthian church, at least the first extant letter, he had addressed a whole host of issues that were going on in that church including division, sexual immorality, suing one another, causing others to stumble in the liberties in grace, not supporting the clergy, dishonoring communion, lacking orderly worship, and false doctrine such as not believing in the resurrection. If that weren't enough to grieve an elder or pastor such as Paul, in this second letter we have of 2 Corinthians, Paul spent a vast portion of his words in defending his ministry and his apostleship. In fact, it is in our passage of Scripture, **2 Corinthians 4:17-5:10**, that it is described as "the determination of Paul to carry out his ministry."<sup>1</sup> After Paul's customary greeting, he speaks of the troubles and sufferings that he and others had been dealing with but then sets the tone for the rest of the letter in saying that Paul and his companions had "conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you." Then Paul says that as the Corinthians should boast in Paul and others, they would be boasting in them. Ultimately what Paul is getting at and what we'll see in our passage of Scripture is in what Paul says in his first letter, "as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord."" (**1 Corinthians 1:31**) The point of that is that we were created by God for His glory and we have to trust Him in His sovereignty even when it means times of suffering. What Paul then goes on to tell us is that our focus should be on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, and to hold onto His promise of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Savior and Lord. As it is also written, "Everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him." (**Isaiah 43:7**) There is that ultimate distinction that is being made that He alone is God and that we are His creation for His glory and that He promises us to be clothed with His glory at some time past this lifetime but in the meantime, good or bad, let us glory in the Lord. In other words, to God be the glory! We are in these earthen vessels created by God for His purpose but we are also led to know and believe that this is just the beginning stages of getting us ready for abiding in God's eternal glory in Christ Jesus.

That is where we can begin to get the imagery of God being the potter and we are the clay, as God has formed us, in His image, and created us for His pleasure, purpose and glory. (**Philippians 2:13, Revelation 4:11**) Another analogy in Scripture is how we are God's tools for His workmanship. As the prophet Isaiah asks whether an axe or a saw can boast against the One who wields it, of course the answer is no, they are but a tool used by the Craftsman. (**Isaiah 29:16**) Just as Paul said in **Ephesians 2:8-10** that it is by the grace of God alone that we are saved and that we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert Gundry, Survey of the New Testament, A, pg. 426 (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 2012)

good works. We are in God's creation according to His plan. We are not to be trying to determine how God fits into our plan. One very important reason that it is imperative for the believer to understand that this is God's plan and purpose is in how Paul first addresses the sufferings that one has to endure while in our present bodies and in this world. But the starting point for any believer is in what was the starting point of Jesus' ministry as He said, "**I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.**" (**Luke 5:32**) That then means, each and every one of us as all have sinned against God and fall short of His glory (**Romans 3:23**) That call to repentance is in knowing that "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (**Romans 5:8**) God sent His Son Jesus to die for our sins, to which He was crucified on a cross, died and was buried in a tomb, and on the third day He rose from the dead and conquered death, so that we too can be alive to God in Christ, as we are then reconciled to God through Christ, forgiven of our sins, and the wrath that was due us was put on Christ, and then we too will overcome death and have eternal life in Christ Jesus. The process is that the goodness of God leads us to repentance, as we recognize the love of God in His perfect sacrifice for our sins, and then He gives us His Spirit in our hearts, as Paul said, as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come-which is eternal life in Christ Jesus. (**1 Corinthians 1:22**)

The next important element in our faith in Christ is in having the fear of the Lord. To those who have received Christ, Paul warns us to, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." (**Philippians 2:12-13**) Similarly, the writer of Hebrews talks of our ultimate destination as entering God's perfect rest to where we should, "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it." (**Hebrews 4:1**) Just prior to that passage in Hebrews, the author mentions those who do not enter God's rest are those who are disobedient and also those who don't enter because of unbelief. Two issues are at stake in that. First is that we have to honor and revere God (fear God) for who He is, that is God Almighty, creator of all things. Secondly we have to trust Him in all situations whether good or bad. I'm preaching to myself in that but we have to continue to go back to Proverbs 3:5-6 and "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

It is interesting to note that Paul referred to the present sufferings as "light afflictions" even though later in this letter he runs off a vast number of his sufferings by being whipped, beaten, stoned, and shipwrecked, all the while also suffering hunger and weariness. Also included in Paul's suffering was in what he referred to as his "thorn in the flesh" that he, several times, asked God to

remove it. Yet God's reply was this, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." (**2 Corinthians 12:9**) The preoccupation of Paul's in focusing on the glory above and the glory to come versus the temporary sufferings, "was not the result of an arbitrary choice; it was an informed decision. Paul was profoundly aware that the present age is transient, whereas the age to come is destined to last forever; his afflictions therefore were temporary but his reward eternal."<sup>2</sup> Paul says that he wants to be "further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life." That clothing that Paul is referring to, he elaborates saying, "For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven." What Paul could be somewhat referring to is in what Jesus says in **Revelation 3:5**, "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."

But really what Paul is getting at is in what he said in **Romans 13:14**, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts." Yet even when we put on the Lord Jesus, it's painful at times, it hurts, brings sorrow and tears. Yet, we are not in this alone. That is one of the primary reasons we are given the Comfortor, the parakletos. As a side note, "Comfortor" or "Consoler" corresponds to the name "Menahem" given by the Hebrews to the Messiah."<sup>3</sup> When Jesus speaks of those who overcome we can be reminded that Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." (**John 15:5**) That bearing fruit is of what the Holy Spirit is working in us and then through us. One of the fruit of the Spirit is longsuffering.

Paul made it known of his groaning with "earnest desire" for his heavenly body but Paul's vision was not on the temporary or the things of the world that are perishing but his focus was on the glory of God. Paul said he is, "beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." From His glory, to then be put on us-that we will be clothed in His glory. As God promised Paul that His grace is sufficient for Paul and that the fruit of the Spirit is then necessary but also sufficient then it would seem that what Paul is getting at is to be as fully clothed with Jesus as is possible. There is no getting around the pain and suffering of this world but in His grace He will get us through it. That doesn't mean it is pleasant. Just as with Jesus, the writer of Hebrews said, to keep "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the

---

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Barker and John Kohlenberger III, Expositor's Bible Commentary, Abridged Edition, pg. 675 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994)

<sup>3</sup> W. E. Vine, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary, pg. 111 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996)

shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (**Hebrews 12:2**) What typically happens when someone begins to go through an unpleasant experience is to gravitate toward a comfort zone which is usually then the comforts and pleasures of this world. Hey we all do it from time to time. But as Albert Barnes considers in his commentary on the temporary vs. the eternal he says, "wealth, pleasure, fame, the three idols which the people of the world adore, are all to endure for a little time. They will all soon vanish away. So it is with pain and sorrow and tears. All that we enjoy, and all that we suffer here must soon vanish and disappear."<sup>4</sup> Paul understood that the temporary is not worth focusing on nor clinging too but instead to be focused on and clinging to Jesus.

Paul makes it clear by saying that we are walking by faith and not by sight. Many, many, many times it may seem as though God has abandoned you or that God is just willing all sorts of bad things upon you. While we don't need to be reminded that we live in a fallen world, full of sin and depravity, even within the churches, Paul knew all too well how easy it is for the church to turn into a blending of spiritual emptiness, operating in the ways of the world. Yet Paul says that we are to be living a life pleasing to God. You're on the right track if you're always longing for the Lord, always wanting more of Him. After all we are to love God with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind. But we also have to learn to be content in what grace God provides us. As Paul said, "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (**Philippians 4:12-13**) Within Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians (**1:6-7**) Paul explains to them that the sufferings that we encounter are in order to console or comfort others and that can lead to or encourage someone in their faith. Sufferings are also used by God to strengthen us in our perseverance.<sup>5</sup> As Paul said in **Romans 5:3-5**, that we can "glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." We are, day by day, being made into the image of Christ, taking on the sufferings of Christ as we live in His righteousness and redemption. That longsuffering that is working in us means He is going through it with us.

As we are called into the hope that is in Christ Jesus, we are not promised that all of our troubles and struggles and pains and turmoil will fade away in this lifetime. In fact Paul is making it clear that as a child of God one is going to suffer, just as Paul said to

---

4 Albert Barnes, Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, pg. 843 (Grand Rapids: Kregal Publications, 1966)

5 Stacy Watford, 2nd Corinthians 1 & 2, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBz5i3BryTg> ((accessed Nov. 22, 2022))

Timothy, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." (**2 Timothy 3:12**) It should be mentioned here then that that persecution may be strictly coming from the spiritual realm. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." That word tribulation is from the Greek word "thlipsis" which means a pressure to which one feels as though there is no escape.<sup>6</sup> There are times then where it may seem as though we are suffocating from the evil and pressures in this world but we are told by Paul, later in 2 Corinthians to be "casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." (**2 Corinthians 10:5**) Yet once again, we are not in this fight alone, we are told to "casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." (**1 Peter 5:7**) We can also be assured of what Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." That is why we must cling to Him for He is our life! Jesus is the Way, the Truth, AND the Life!

We must never allow the enemy to take that hope from us that is in Christ Jesus. One thing the enemy cannot take from us ever is the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." We have to believe that. God is not hating you or me. If anything He is hating what He wants to remove from us but He is not hating us personally. God desires for none to perish and all to come to repentance. God is leading us in His Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption, and if anything is in the way of that, God will begin to remove it, but it is up to us to let Him. We do have a free will of sorts within the realm of God's sovereignty. It will not benefit us or God if He were to take something from us that we aren't willing to let go of. That would lead us to bitterness and rebellion. He uses His Word to lead us to an understanding that He is making us to be perfect as He is perfect, to be holy as He is holy and He then uses circumstances to teach us. That is only possible if we let Him work in us His perfection and His holiness. Yes, we are promised in God's Word, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." (**1 John 3:2**) We are called to be watchful and ready for when it is time for Jesus to take us home, living each day as if it were our last. "So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is

---

<sup>6</sup> "2347. thlipsis", Biblehub.com, <https://biblehub.com/greek/2347.htm> (accessed Nov. 22, 2022)

raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power."

For those who continue in the faith and remain obedient, we are promised to be glorified in Christ Jesus and our "mortality will be swalled up in the life that is in Christ Jesus." To sum it up, Paul gave an incomparable description of the war in our minds with the temporal against the eternal saying, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God." The word Paul is using in "consider(ing)" or translated also as "reckoning" is *logizomai* which we can see the word logic. It is a concluding, a thorough reasoning not just a presuming or sort-of-thinking-just-maybe.<sup>7</sup> So it is with us, we must conclude in our minds and hearts to accept what God apportions us, to go where He leads us, and to do what He tells us for it is a guarantee per the Word of God, that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

---

<sup>7</sup> James Strong, Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, Greek Dictionary of the New Testament, pg. 45 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, no date given)



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barker, Kenneth and Kohlenberger, John III. Expositor's Bible Commentary, Abridged Edition. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.

Barnes, Albert. Barnes' Notes on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Kregal Publications, 1966.

Biblehub.com. 2347. thlipsis. <https://biblehub.com/greek/2347.htm>

Robert Gundry. Survey of the New Testament, A. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.

Stacy Watford. 2nd Corinthians 1 & 2, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBz5i3BryTg>

Strong, James. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, Greek Dictionary of the New Testament. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, no date given

W. E. Vine, Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996