

### The Light and Life of Christ Within Us

#### 2 Corinthians 4

*2 Corinthians 4: 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, 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. 7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. 8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— 10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So then death is working in us, but life in you. 13 And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, 14 knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. 15 For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. 16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 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.*

#### Background Notes

In 2 Corinthians 3:15-16, speaking of the Jewish people, the apostle Paul said: "when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away." In 2 Corinthians 4:3, we see that a veil exists not only for unbelieving Jews, but also for **all** unbelievers. Verse 3: "But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing."

In verse 4 Satan is called the "god of this world" or the "god of this age." This is a title that God did not use in the Old Testament – it was only used after the world rejected Jesus Christ.

Satan is involved with this veil. The "god of this age" has blinded the minds of those "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." Notice that Satan is not permitted to

blind people so that they have no choice – so that they are unable to believe. No, he blinds those who **do not** believe – those who refuse to believe – those who are **committed unbelievers**.

As a result of this veil, the gospel or good news of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, is hidden from the unbeliever. That is, unbelievers are blinded to the truth that the risen Jesus Christ is now glorified in Heaven, with all power and authority given unto Him! Tell that to your average unbeliever and he/she will look at you as if you're out of your mind.

To the world, Jesus was just a good man who lived in history, who was unfortunately crucified on a Roman cross, and only His teachings survived. How blind they are! Our responsibility is to be available as the means God can use to take away this satanic veil. Then the light of the glory of Christ can be seen, and those who are perishing can have their spiritual blindness removed - so they may come *“out of darkness into God's marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9)*.

But if we're going to be involved in this important ministry of removing the veil from the hearts and minds of unbelievers, we must do it in God's way. As verse 2 says, we must renounce the “hidden things of shame.” We must not craftily serve ourselves, and our own selfish agendas. We must not handle the Word of God deceitfully, as the false teachers at Corinth were doing. We must manifest the truth - live out the truth, and tell the truth in a plain and understandable way. And we must practice what we preach! We must *“commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.”*

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The light of Christ is seen as believers live to serve.

Verses 5-7: *“For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. 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. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.”*

In verse 6 a beautiful parallel is made between Creation and Salvation: *“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.”* As the Spirit of God moved in the darkness over the face of the deep, and God said, *“Let there be light,”* so the Spirit of God has been at work to prepare hardened hearts to bring the light of Christ into our lives.

We have this treasure within us – *“the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”* As God's servants, we need to share it with others. We live to serve others for the sake of Christ: *“For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake”(v5).*

Verse 7: *“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.”* So that God’s power can be seen in our lives, God has chosen to let His servants remain as “earthen vessels” or “clay jars” for the present time (we will get our new resurrected bodies later). But right now, we are not Superman. We are just common clay jars – nothing to be proud of! We’re frail and fragile and aging. We’re subject to headaches and colds and rashes and arthritis.

**But – we have the treasure of the light of Christ within us!** The point of this whole passage is to show the great contrast between the message and the messengers. ***The valuable treasure is the message*** - not the messenger! The messengers are just ordinary clay containers – earthen vessels, clay jars.

In Bible days, clay containers were sometimes used for storing treasure, and simple clay containers were used for oil lamps. It’s as we serve others for the sake of Christ that the light of Christ is seen shining forth from our ordinary clay jars. As believers live to serve, the light of Christ is seen.

## **2. The life of Christ is seen as believers die to self.**

Verses 8-12: *“We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you.”*

In verses 8-9 the apostle Paul described the Christian as a common earthenware container - a battered earthenware container! Paul mentioned instances in his life that were impossible situations for mere men to handle. The deliverances that he experienced were clearly brought about by the power of God, and not by the genius of man.

In these two verses, four sets of words are used to describe the battering of the clay vessel on the one hand, and the miraculous deliverance by the power of God on the other hand. *Hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted* and *struck down* all refer to the battering that a Christian undergoes as a messenger of the gospel. *Not crushed, not in despair, not abandoned, and not destroyed* all refer to the deliverance that God is able to bring, even in an “impossible” situation. We can all think of times when God stepped into difficult situations and saved the day for us. God purposely permits the clay pots to be battered so He can exhibit His supernatural power in the situation.

In verses 10-11, in allowing the struggles and hassles of the battering a Christian goes through, God’s purpose is for the clay jar to be broken open so that the treasure within can be seen. Even though the anxiety of circumstances, the antagonism of persons, and the attacks of Satan himself are death blows to the human vessels of clay, the very life of Jesus is revealed through the Christian as a result. To “carry around in our body the dying of Jesus” and to be “given over

to death for Jesus' sake" is to experience in some small way, the battering our Lord went through when He walked on this earth.

The Christian who is seeking to live a godly life will in some way know what the hate of this world and the attacks of Satan are all about. See John 15:18 and 1 Peter 5:8 in this connection. As the Christian undergoes these deadly attacks, and the jar of clay is broken down, the life of Christ can be seen. Thus it can be communicated more easily to others who see this treasure.

In verse 12, Paul said that the breaking process at work in his life resulted in new life in Christ for the Corinthians. Will new life come to someone because Jesus has been seen in your life through a broken jar of clay?

As believers die to self, the life of Christ is seen.

[If you'd like to read a devotional essay on this passage, entitled "Jars of Clay," go to our website ([growingchristians.org](http://growingchristians.org)). It's listed under "Devotions for Growing Christians."]

## Practical Application

### Let's weigh our afflictions on God's scale.

In verses 13-18, the last section of the chapter, Paul looked by faith beyond this present scene to eternity. In verse 13 he quoted Psalm 116, where the psalmist looked, by faith, beyond suffering and death to God's deliverance. In the same way, we should look by faith beyond our *temporary* present afflictions to our *eternal* deliverance and glory. This will ultimately come in the future, when we are resurrected to be with the Lord (v14&18).

In the meantime, we should recognize that through our present afflictions, God spreads the good news to more people. When the light and life of Christ are seen through our broken jars of clay, God is glorified (v15). Even though *the outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day* (v16)!

In the light of all this great truth, how much do our *present afflictions* weigh, compared to our *eternal weight of glory*? Answer: practically nothing! Our temporary light affliction, "*which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*"(v17).

We may not feel that our present afflictions are light – in fact, they may be severe. This practical application is certainly not meant to minimize our present afflictions. But – when we look ahead to the future eternal glory God has prepared for us, we're able to weigh our afflictions on **God's** scale!