



A&P Home Church | Weekly Study 2 Corinthians 3-4

BOOK SUMMARY:

Second Corinthians returns to similar themes as those Paul mentioned in his first letter to this church. Paul is glad to hear that the church in Corinth has heeded his advice. At the same time, it is necessary for Paul to counter criticisms about his personality and legitimacy. Most of this text involves that subject. The fifth chapter, in contrast, contains comforting words which Christians have quoted often in times of hardship. Paul also details his expectations that the church in Corinth will make good on their promise to contribute to the needs of suffering believers in Jerusalem.

CHAPTER 3 SUMMARY:

Earlier chapters described the Corinthians' response to Paul's earlier instructions. Here, Paul once again defends the legitimacy of his role as an apostle of Christ. He then compares the old covenant of the law of Moses with the new covenant of faith in Christ. The old covenant revealed human sinfulness, God's condemnation, and the death required to pay for sin. The new covenant brings God's forgiveness for sin to all who trust in Christ, making it possible to look on His glory and to begin to be changed by it into the image of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. This launches Paul into a description of the value of the gospel, in contrast to the struggles of earthly life.

CHAPTER 2 SUMMARY:

Second Corinthians 4 follows Paul's teaching in the previous chapter about the transformation that happens for those who see God's glory in Christ. Some are blinded to it by sin and by the god of this world. Paul knows that he and his co-workers are fragile containers for the priceless message of God's grace through faith in Jesus. They won't quit, though, because God sustains them and will eventually resurrect them. Once in eternity, all the suffering in this life won't be worth comparing with sharing God's glory forever. Chapter 5 expands on the idea that believers in Christ look forward to something much better than this life.

Throughout the week continue to look through the scriptures, think through the questions, and apply the Word to your life. Email any questions during the week to Brandon & Travis at aphomechurch@gmail.com & ap.travisjohnson@gmail.com.

MONDAY

Eager for the Corinthians to understand that he is not promoting himself, Paul wants them to look at themselves to validate his role as an apostle of Jesus. Their own lives should serve as all the evidence they need that Paul delivered not himself but Christ to them. After all, they have become living, breathing letters of recommendation for him and his co-workers. They are letters written by Christ with the Holy Spirit instead of ink on human hearts instead of tablets (2 Corinthians 3:1-3).

Paul insists this is not because of his own strength and skill. He and his friends are not "sufficient" to carry out this work. They are not specially qualified, in and of themselves. They're not boosted by their own power. All their sufficiency comes from the power of God. He is the one who has empowered and enabled them to be ministers of the new covenant (2 Corinthians 3:4-6).

- **What is the role of the pastor/leader of the church?**
- **What are the requirements to be a pastor/leader of the church?**
- **How should your pastor be serving you and your family?**

Question: "What does the Bible say about the role of senior pastor?"

Answer: Concerning the role of the pastor, the Bible says a great deal. The primary terms that describe the role of the pastor are "elder," "bishop," and "teacher" (1 Timothy 3:1-13). "Elder," or *episkopos* (from which we get our word *episcopal*) refers to the oversight of the believers, and it involves teaching, preaching, caring, and exercising authority where needed. The elder also serves in the church as leader and teacher. In Titus 1:5-9, Paul urges Titus to "appoint elders in every city." They will teach and lead the congregation in their spiritual development. Also, in 1 Peter 5:1-4, Peter addresses his "fellow elders" and tells them to "be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but

because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve" (v. 2).

So concerning the role of senior pastor the Bible doesn't address that title specifically. It has come into existence as the church has grown and required additional staff. The title of senior pastor refers to the person who primarily leads the church, generally doing the majority of the preaching and teaching in the pulpit at the services and overseeing the administration of the church. Some larger churches may even have an executive pastor who oversees the day-to-day operation of the church, while the senior pastor then would be responsible for working with the church board, along with the preaching, teaching, and counseling ministries that go with the role of pastor.

Every church, whether large or small, needs a pastor who will shepherd, lead, feed, and guide the people to spiritual growth and service for the Lord Jesus. In larger churches, a senior pastor often

shepherds the pastoral team in addition to shepherding the congregation. As a result, a senior pastor should be held to an even higher standard of agreement to 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:6-9 than other pastoral roles.

2 Corinthians 3:5, NIV: "Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God."

2 Corinthians 3:5, ESV: "Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God,"

2 Corinthians 3:5, KJV: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;"

2 Corinthians 3:5, NASB: "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God,"

2 Corinthians 3:5, NLT: "It is not that we think we are qualified to do anything on our own. Our qualification comes from God."

2 Corinthians 3:5, CSB: "It is not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God."

In the previous verse, Paul referred to the absolute confidence he has that his ministry of representing Christ is from God. Now he makes clear that his is not a confidence built on belief in himself or his own skills, abilities, and knowledge.

At one time, Paul would likely have placed great confidence in himself based on those things. He wrote this in Philippians 3:4-6, "If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless."

But when he came to Christ, Paul lost all that earthly, religious confidence, "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ" (Philippians 3:7). Now he writes that any selfish version of self-confidence is gone. He does not believe he and his co-workers are sufficient in themselves to take any credit. They are not ultimately responsible for delivering anything of value to the Corinthians. Instead, their sufficiency comes from God. It is by God's power they deliver God's message to the people God wants to reach.

TUESDAY

Paul compares the new covenant of salvation by faith in Christ through God's grace with the old covenant between God and Israel. He describes that old covenant as a ministry of death carved in letters on stone. It came with true glory. It was God's revelation of Himself, after all, to the Israelites. The glory was so powerful that the Israelites could not even bear to look at the reflection of it on Moses' face after he spent time with God. It was a ministry of death, though, because it required the death of an animal to pay for every sin Israel committed. It revealed that sinful human beings cannot lead the righteous lives required by God to see His glory (2 Corinthians 3:7).

The glory of the new covenant of God's grace and forgiveness for sinners through faith in Christ far surpasses the glory revealed by the old covenant of the law. That old ministry of condemnation for sin was being brought to an end, while the ministry of righteousness received as a gift through Christ will go on forever. It reveals a glory that is permanent (2 Corinthians 3:8–11).

Because Paul is a minister of the new covenant, which allows those in Christ to see God's glory, Paul can be far more bold than Moses. As a minister of the old covenant, Moses had to cover his face with a veil in order to protect the sinful Israelites from seeing the glory of God. That veil is still there. It stands between those who are not in Christ and the glory of God. It can only be removed by the Holy Spirit through Christ for those who turn to Him in faith (2 Corinthians 3:12–17).

Those in Christ look at Him with unveiled faces. To see Christ in this way is to see the glory of God on earth. It begins a transformation, changing those who look on Him to becoming like Him, over time, by the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Question: "What is new covenant theology?"

Answer: New covenant theology is best described as a hermeneutical principle, or an interpretative grid through which one reads and interprets the Scriptures. As a hermeneutical principle, it stands as a bridge between dispensational theology and covenant theology. That is not to say that new covenant theology has intentionally set itself up between dispensational theology

and covenant theology, but that new covenant theology shares things in common with both dispensational and covenant theology. As such, we cannot say what new covenant theology is without reference to dispensational theology and covenant theology.

Dispensational theology essentially sees the Scriptures unfolding in a series of, usually, seven "dispensations." A dispensation can be loosely defined as the means through

which God governs His actions with man and creation. Therefore, God's governance was different with Adam than it was with Abraham, etc. Dispensational theology views the revelation as progressive, i.e., in each dispensation, God reveals more and more of His divine plan of redemption. However, while Scripture is a progressive revelation, each successive dispensation represents a new way of God dealing with His creation. In other words, according to dispensational theology, there is a strong level of discontinuity between the dispensations; once an old dispensation is over and a new one begun, the "old" way of doing things under the old dispensation is superseded by the new dispensation. And each dispensation is typically introduced with some new revelation from God.

The thing to remember with dispensational theology is that there is a sharp distinction between Israel and the Church. They are two different people with two different destinies in God's economy. The Church is seen as a "parenthesis" between God's dealings with national Israel. The restored kingdom promised to Israel will be fulfilled in the Millennium. Until then is the Church Age—the time of the Gentiles.

Covenant theology is effectively the polar opposite of dispensational theology. While both agree that Scripture is progressive, the overarching principle of covenant theology is the covenant. Covenant theology sees two theological covenants in Scripture—the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. The covenant of works was introduced in the Garden between God and man in which God promised mankind life for obedience and judgment for disobedience. The covenant of works was re-introduced at Sinai as God promised Israel long life and blessing in the land on

the condition of their obedience to the Mosaic covenant, but expulsion and judgment in the event of their disobedience. The covenant of grace was implemented after the fall and represents God's unconditional covenant with man to redeem and save the elect. All of the various biblical covenants (Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and the New) are outworkings of the covenant of grace as God works His plan of redemption in human history. So, where dispensational theology saw a discontinuity between the various dispensations (and in particular between the Old and the New Testaments), covenant theology sees a great deal of continuity.

This is especially evident in the fact that covenant theology does not see a sharp distinction between Israel and the Church. Both entities are seen as one continuous people of God with one ultimate destiny.

All of that serves as the backdrop to view new covenant theology. As mentioned previously, new covenant theology is a middle point between the two. It shares a lot in common with classic covenant theology, in particular the continuity between the Church and Israel as being one people of God. However, it also differs from covenant theology in that it does not necessarily view the Scriptures as the unfolding of redemption in a covenant of works/covenant of grace framework. Instead, it sees the Scriptures in a more promise/fulfillment paradigm.

By far the biggest difference between new covenant theology and covenant theology is how each views the Mosaic Law. Covenant theology sees the Law in three ways: civil, ceremonial and moral. The civil aspect of the Law was those laws in the covenant of

Sinai which governed the theocratic nation of Israel while they live in the Promised Land. The ceremonial aspect of the Law governed the worship of God by Israel while in the land. Finally, the moral aspect of the Law governed the behavior of God's people. It should be understood that the Law, in and of itself, is one cohesive whole and that the Jews did not delineate between civil, ceremonial and moral; these are just terms used to help identify the three areas of Israelite life that the Mosaic Law governed.

According to classic covenant theology, Jesus came to fulfill the Law (Matthew 5:17). He did so by satisfying all of the ceremonial, civil and moral aspects of the Law. Jesus Christ is the reality behind the shadows of the Old Testament sacrificial system and thereby fulfills the ceremonial aspect of the Law. Jesus Christ also bore the penalty our sins deserved and thereby fulfilled the civil aspect of the Law. Finally, Jesus Christ lived in full accordance with the moral aspect of the Law and fulfilled the righteous requirements of the Law.

Now, the moral aspect of the Law represents the essence of the covenant of works. As such, it transcends the Mosaic economy. In other words, God has always required holiness from humanity. The covenant of works was not negated due to the fall, nor was it negated even though it was fulfilled in Christ. The moral aspect of the Law still stands as the standard of morality for mankind because it is reflective of God's character, and that does not

change. Therefore, covenant theology still sees the Mosaic Law (especially the Ten Commandments) as prescriptive for the Church, even though the ceremonial and civil aspects have been rendered obsolete in Christ.

New covenant theology sees the Mosaic Law as a whole and sees it all fulfilled in Christ (so far in agreement with covenant theology). However, because new covenant theology sees the Mosaic Law as a whole, it also sees the moral aspect of the Mosaic Law as fulfilled in Christ and no longer applying to Christians. Instead of being under the moral aspect of the Mosaic Law as summarized in the Ten Commandments, we are under the law of Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21). The law of Christ would be those prescriptions that Christ specifically stated in the Gospels (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount). In other words, the entire Mosaic economy has been set aside in new covenant theology; it no longer applies in any way to Christians. So, while covenant theology sees a continuity between the Old and New Testaments in regards to God's people and the way of salvation, new covenant theology draws a rather sharp line of distinction between the Old and New Testaments when it comes to the difference between the old Mosaic covenant and the new covenant mediated by Christ. The old covenant is obsolete (including the moral aspect of the Mosaic Law) and replaced by the new covenant with the law of Christ to govern its morality.

WEDNESDAY

Against criticism and questioning, Paul continues to defend his legitimacy as an apostle of Jesus. The context here is the great suffering he and his co-workers for the gospel of Jesus have experienced. As he writes, Paul reveals his great confidence in God's ability to sustain him and his great hope in the life to come.

Paul knows that God is the one who has given him the ministry of bringing the truth about Jesus to the world. It's not a position he deserves; it is his by God's mercy. That's why he insists to the Corinthians that he has not and would not act with them in any way that is underhanded, disgraceful, or deceptive. Instead of manipulating God's Word, he and his partners state it openly and invite others to openly evaluate their lives before God to see that they are acting with integrity (2 Corinthians 4:1-2).

The fact that they tell the truth, though, does not mean that everyone will believe them. Paul acknowledges that the reality of their good news about salvation through faith in Jesus is veiled or hidden from the view of people who are on their way to eternal death and separation from God. The god of this world, Satan, blinds the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of Jesus' glory. That's the light that Paul and his co-workers carry in their hearts and deliver to those who will see it (2 Corinthians 4:3-5).

Question: "How do God's sovereignty and humanity's free will work together in salvation?"

Answer: It is impossible for us to fully understand the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's free will and responsibility. Only God truly knows how they work together in His plan of salvation. With this doctrine, probably more so than with any other, it is crucially important to admit our inability to fully grasp the nature of God and our relationship with Him. Going too far to either side results in a distorted understanding of salvation.

Scripture is clear that God determines who will be saved (Romans 8:29; 1 Peter 1:2). Ephesians 1:4 tells us that God chose

us "before the creation of the world." The Bible repeatedly describes believers as the "chosen" (Romans 8:33, 11:5; Ephesians 1:11; Colossians 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:2, 2:9) and the "elect" (Matthew 24:22, 31; Mark 13:20, 27; Romans 11:7; 1 Timothy 5:21; 2 Timothy 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:1). The fact that believers are predestined (Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:5, 11) and elected for salvation (Romans 9:11, 11:28; 2 Peter 1:10) is clear.

The Bible also says that we are responsible for receiving Christ as Savior. If we believe in Jesus Christ we will be saved (John 3:16; Romans 10:9-10). God knows who will be saved and God chooses who will be saved, and we must choose Christ in order to be saved. How these facts work together is impossible for a

finite mind to comprehend (Romans 11:33-36). Our responsibility is to take the gospel to the world (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). We should leave foreknowledge,

election, and predestination up to God and simply be obedient in sharing the gospel.

Question: "How does God's sovereignty work together with free will?"

Answer: It is impossible for us to fully understand the dynamics of a holy God molding and shaping the will of man. Scripture is clear that God knows the future (Matthew 6:8; Psalm 139:1-4) and has total sovereign control over all things (Colossians 1:16-17; Daniel 4:35). The Bible also says that we must choose God or be eternally separated from Him. We are held responsible for our actions (Romans 3:19; 6:23; 9:19-21). How these facts work together is impossible for a finite mind to comprehend (Romans 11:33-36).

People can take one of two extremes in regard to this question. Some emphasize the sovereignty of God to the point that human beings are little more than robots simply doing what they have been sovereignly programmed to do. Others emphasize free will to the point of God not having complete control and/or knowledge of all things. Neither of these positions is biblical. The truth is that God does not violate our wills by choosing us and redeeming us. Rather, He changes our hearts so that our wills choose Him. "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19), and "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16).

What are we to do then? First, we are to trust in the Lord, knowing that He is in control (Proverbs 3:5-6). God's sovereignty is supposed to be a comfort to us, not an issue to be concerned about or debate over. Second, we are to live our lives making wise decisions in accordance with God's Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17; James 1:5). There will be no excuses before God for why we chose to disobey Him. We will have no one to blame but ourselves for our sin. Last but not least, we are to worship the Lord, praising Him that He is so wonderful, infinite, powerful, full of grace and mercy—and sovereign.

THURSDAY

To summarize this mission, Paul incorporates all of his era's main cultural ideals into a single statement. Then, he connects that idea to the relationship God intends us to seek in the person of Christ. No matter what a person thinks they desire—Hebrew "light" and truth, Greek "knowledge" and wisdom, or Roman "glory" and accomplishment—all of it is ultimately found only in the person—in the face—of the One and only Savior (2 Corinthians 4:6).

The knowledge of Christ's glory as the image of God is a powerful treasure. It is worth more than all other knowledge in the universe. Paul writes that God has stored this priceless treasure in fragile, vulnerable clay jars, meaning himself and his friends. It's only by God's power in them that they have not already been shattered by their suffering. Paul writes that they have been afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down—but they have not been crushed, driven to despair, abandoned, or destroyed. They carry in themselves Christ's death in the sense that they suffer as He did and for His sake, but they also carry Christ's life as evidence that His power is at work in them (2 Corinthians 4:7–12).

Paul understands that the path he is on will eventually lead to his physical death. He won't stop, though, won't lose heart, because he also knows that the one who raised Christ from the dead will raise him up, as well. In the end, he will find himself with Christ sharing God's glory forever. For now, he will continue to contribute to expanding God's glory by leading all those who receive God's grace through faith in Jesus to give God more and more thanks (2 Corinthians 4:13–15).

Question: "What does the Bible say about suffering?"

Answer: Of all the challenges thrown at Christianity in modern times, perhaps the most difficult is explaining the problem of suffering. How can a loving God allow suffering to continue in the world which He created? For those who have endured massive suffering themselves, this is much more than a philosophical issue, but a deep-seated personal and emotional one. How does the Bible address this issue? Does the Bible give us any

examples of suffering and some indicators on how to deal with it?

The Bible is startlingly realistic when it comes to the problem of endured suffering. For one thing, the Bible devotes an entire book to dealing with the problem. This book concerns a man named Job. It begins with a scene in heaven which provides the reader with the background of Job's suffering. Job suffers because God contested with Satan. As far as we know, this was never known by Job or any of his friends. It is therefore not surprising that they all struggle to explain Job's suffering from

the perspective of their ignorance, until Job finally rests in nothing but the faithfulness of God and the hope of His redemption. Neither Job nor his friends understood at the time the reasons for his suffering. In fact, when Job is finally confronted by the Lord, Job is silent. Job's silent response does not in any way trivialize the intense pain and loss he had so patiently endured. Rather, it underscores the importance of trusting God's purposes in the midst of suffering, even when we don't know what those purposes are. Suffering, like all other human experiences, is directed by the sovereign wisdom of God. In the end, we learn that we may never know the specific reason for our suffering, but we must trust in our sovereign God. That is the real answer to suffering.

Another example of suffering in the Bible is Joseph's story in the book of Genesis. Joseph was sold into slavery by his own brothers. In Egypt, he was indicted on false charges and thrown into prison. As a result of Joseph's suffering and endurance, by God's grace and power, Joseph is later promoted to governor of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh himself. He finds himself in a position to make provision for the nations of the world during a time of famine, including his own family and the brothers who sold him into slavery! The message of this story is summarized in Joseph's address to his brothers in Genesis 50:19-21: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children."

Romans 8:28 contains some comforting words for those enduring hardship and suffering: "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." In His providence, God orchestrates every event in our lives—even suffering, temptation and sin—to accomplish both our temporal and eternal benefit.

The psalmist David endured much suffering in his time, and this is reflected in many of his poems collected in the book of Psalms. In Psalm 22, we hear David's anguish: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? Oh my God, I cry out by day but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel. In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed. But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: 'He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.'"

It remains a mystery to David why God does not intervene and end his suffering and pain. He sees God as enthroned as the Holy One, the praise of Israel. God lives in heaven where all is good, where there is no weeping or fear, no hunger or hatred. What does God know of all that humans endure? David goes on to complain that "dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they

have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.”

Did God ever answer David? Yes, many centuries later, David received his answer. Roughly one millennium later, a descendant of David named Jesus was killed on a hill called Calvary. On the cross, Jesus endured the suffering and shame of his forefather. Christ’s hands and feet were pierced. Christ’s garments were divided among his enemies. Christ was stared at and derided. In fact, Christ uttered the words with which David opens this psalm: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” thus identifying Himself with the suffering of David.

Christ, the eternal Son of God in whom the fullness of God dwells, has lived on earth as a human being and has endured hunger, thirst, temptation, shame, persecution, nakedness, bereavement, betrayal, mockery, injustice and death. Therefore, He is in a position to fulfill the longing of Job: “If only there were

someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both, someone to remove God’s rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more. Then I would speak up without fear of him, but as it now stands with me, I cannot” (Job 9:33).

Christian theism is, in fact, the only worldview which can consistently make sense of the problem of evil and suffering. Christians serve a God who has lived on this earth and endured trauma, temptation, bereavement, torture, hunger, thirst, persecution and even execution. The cross of Christ can be regarded as the ultimate manifestation of God’s justice. When asked how much God cares about the problem of evil and suffering, the Christian God can point to the cross and say, “That much.” Christ experienced physical pain as well as feelings of rejection and abandonment. He experienced the same suffering as many people today who know the bitterness of isolation, pain, and anguish.

- Are you suffering?
- Do you feel it is unfair or do you have a Biblical view of suffering?

We HIGHLY recommend you go to www.VOM.org and sign up for their free monthly magazine. Read this as a family, pray without ceasing, get to know your brothers & sisters in Christ that are suffering the unimaginable all around the world.

FRIDAY

Paul knows this path, this work of carrying the gospel, is killing him physically. He is wasting away on the outside. He refuses to quit, though, because inwardly he is being made new every day. No matter how hard the circumstances of this life are, the glory of eternity far outweighs and outlasts anything that can happen to us now. Paul's confidence is in unseen things that will never end, not in the visible things of this life that will quickly be gone (2 Corinthians 4:16–18).

2 Corinthians 4:16, NIV: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."

2 Corinthians 4:16, ESV: "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day."

2 Corinthians 4:16, KJV: "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day."

2 Corinthians 4:16, NASB: "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day."

2 Corinthians 4:16, NLT: "That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day."

2 Corinthians 4:16, CSB: "Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day."

A main point of this passage is that God uses fragile vessels to carry his powerful truth. Paul, for his part, never pretended to be Superman. He was merely human. All the suffering he experienced truly hurt him. It left scars. He was discouraged at times. For those looking from the outside, he must really have seemed to be wasting away. Perhaps some wondered—and some in Corinth might even have said—"Why are you doing this to yourself? Haven't you done enough? Why not take some time to focus on yourself?"

Paul, though, insists that he is not going to give up. He refuses to lose heart, meaning that he will not give in to the temptation to live in despair. He wants his readers to know that his outward appearance is deceiving. Yes, he is physically wasting away because of his suffering for preaching about Jesus. Inwardly, though, he is being made as good as new every day. He is strong and determined and more convinced than ever of his purpose to carry the light of the gospel to the world.

2 Corinthians 4:17, NIV: "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."

2 Corinthians 4:17, ESV: "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,"

2 Corinthians 4:17, KJV: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory;"

2 Corinthians 4:17, NASB: "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,"

2 Corinthians 4:17, NLT: "For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!"

2 Corinthians 4:17, CSB: "For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory."

Paul's suffering for the sake of his mission for Christ was not easy by any human standard. In chapter 1 of this letter, he described a recent incident that left him and his friends "so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself" (2 Corinthians 1:8). In other words, he felt the impact of his suffering. His experiences were not trivial—they were brutal.

Now, Paul wants his readers to see that, by comparison, the very worst suffering experienced on earth is only a "light and momentary affliction" when compared with the glory of the eternity with God that is to come. The comparison he makes is one of magnitude and time. Weighed on a scale, any suffering in this life is far outweighed by the glory of the life to come. Measured in time, the suffering here happens in an instant and is replaced by glory forever. Because he knows this to be true, Paul refuses to lose heart, to give up, even when the suffering in this life feels unbearable (Hebrews 11:14–16).

Paul does more than just compare his suffering to the glory to come. He also describes it as preparation. His suffering here is not meaningless; it serves a purpose. It is getting him ready to experience the far "heavier" glory of eternity. He put it this way in Romans 5:3–4, "knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope." The hope of glory is what keeps Paul from losing hope as he continues to carry out the difficult mission of carrying the light of Jesus to the world.

2 Corinthians 4:18, NIV: "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

2 Corinthians 4:18, ESV: "as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."

2 Corinthians 4:18, KJV: "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal."

2 Corinthians 4:18, NASB: "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

2 Corinthians 4:18, NLT: "So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever."

2 Corinthians 4:18, CSB: "So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

Paul is describing the reason for his refusal to lose heart in the face of suffering for his faith in Christ. He wrote in the previous verse that his current suffering, though nearly unbearable at times (2 Corinthians 1:8), can't even be compared to the far weightier glory of eternity.

Now he adds that this perspective requires a focus on what cannot be seen in this life, meaning the spiritual world. The things that are visible to humans in this life are here for just a moment and then gone. Paul describes them as transient. This is true in two senses. Obviously, anything that exists in this world lasts a very short time in comparison with those things that last forever. Secondly, though, human lives are far shorter, yet, than human history. What is visible to us will come and go very quickly.

The invisible God, though, is "eternal," meaning "outside of time." Whatever exists with Him in the spiritual world will never end. Paul is able to keep his focus on the glories of eternity by keeping his inner focus on what is eternal. This allows him to endure suffering in this life that is "light" and "short" in comparison to the glories and pleasures of eternity to come (Hebrews 11:14–16).

Paul commanded believers to exercise the same focus in Colossians 3:1-4, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (NIV)"

What did you learn this week?

How do you see the Lord at work in your life this week?

What are some questions you still have after this week's study? Join us on YouTube Live Saturday at 12 EST to ask- or always feel free to email them any time!

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Thank you to BibleRef.com & GotQuestions.org for the study resources!