

***Responding to Trials: Death Working Life in Us (2 Cor. 4:7-18)***

**I. TREASURE IN THE EARTHEN VESSELS: THE POWER OF GOD IN US**

- A. ***Overview:*** In 2 Corinthians 4-6, Paul develops the theme of how to experience the manifest presence of God in a greater way. He gives insight into how our response to God in pressure can result in two great blessings. First, is an increase of the God's presence in our lives in this age (4:10-12). Second, is an increase of our experience of God's glory in the age to come (4:17).
- B. ***Great blessing #1:*** Increase of the manifest presence of God in our life and ministry in this age.  
*<sup>10</sup> That the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. (2 Cor. 4:10)*
- C. ***Great blessing #2:*** Increase of our experience of God's glory in the age to come.  
*<sup>17</sup> Affliction...is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. (2 Cor. 4:17)*
- D. Foundational to understanding God's purpose for pressure in our life is the revelation of eternity and the continuity of our life choices in this age to the measure of glory we experience in the age to come. Every believer will experience a different measure of glory in the age to come.  
*<sup>41</sup> For one star differs from another star in glory. <sup>42</sup> So also is the resurrection of the dead. (1 Cor. 15:41-42)*
- E. Paul declared that the power of God works inside of us now (4:7). Then he described four pressures (4:8-9) that work in us enabling us to experience more of God's two great blessings.  
*<sup>7</sup> We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. <sup>8</sup> We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed... (2 Cor. 4:7-9)*
- F. The four pressures work in us enabling us to experience more of God's power now (4:10-12). The life of Jesus speaks of His presence touching our heart and flowing through our ministry.  
*<sup>10</sup> Carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body...<sup>11</sup> Delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh...<sup>12</sup> death is working in us, but life in you. (2 Cor. 4:10-12)*
- G. ***The treasure in us:*** The Spirit lives in us to empower our hearts in love, meekness, revelation, and our ministries to impact others with the life of Jesus as we fellowship with the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). Paul had just given an overview of the new covenant (2 Cor. 2:14-4:6) emphasizing the ministry of the indwelling Spirit (3:3-18) that was shining in the hearts of believers (4:4-6).
- H. ***Earthen vessel:*** Fallen humanity with our weak mind and heart, with wrong ideas and desires.
- I. ***The dying of Jesus:*** We embrace Jesus' teaching and example to die to our own interests.  
*<sup>24</sup> If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me...<sup>25</sup> Whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (Mt. 16:24-25)*

## II. THE DILEMMA

- A. **The dilemma:** The very breakthrough of God's power in our circumstances and ministry often awakens pride in us that hinders God's blessing in our life. Many become easily preoccupied with the increase of God's power and blessing so that their relationship with Jesus diminishes (Rev. 2:4). It is pride to have confidence to continue in this way without being troubled by it.  
<sup>7</sup> **Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted... (2 Cor. 12:7)**
- B. God protects His people who experience His power, with problems. Pressure causes us to connect and dialogue more earnestly with Jesus, which leads to greater humility and thus to increased blessing. We should always contend for the fullness of God's blessings and trust God to administrate the measure and timing of its release.

## III. FOUR SOURCES OF PRESSURE IN OUR LIFE

- A. **Father's chastening:** The Father will chasten or train us by resisting all that hinders love and all that prevents us from being prepared for our assignment in the age to come (Heb. 12:6-12).
- B. **Satan's attack:** He rages against us as he seeks to devour us (1 Pet. 5:8).
- C. **Man's sin:** Sinful actions bring many unnecessary pressures on our life and on others.
- D. **Creation's groan:** We work in the midst of resistance to restore the environment (Rom. 8:22).
- E. We submit to the Father's discipline with endurance and gratitude. We resist Satan's attacks by the Word of God. We repent of wrong ideas and desires as we humble ourselves before people. We work in the midst of lack and resistance (heat of the sun) to cleanse and restore the earth.

## IV. FOUR PARADOXES THAT ARE COMMON TO EVERY BELIEVER

<sup>8</sup> **We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;**  
<sup>9</sup> **persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed... (2 Cor. 4:8-9)**

- A. **Paradox #1** (attacking our emotions): **We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed.** This speaks of circumstances that pressure our emotions. Pressure comes from every direction including finances, sickness, broken relationships, accidents, failures in sin, etc. The enemy wants us to feel crushed so that we will give up in our resolve to pursue Jesus and His kingdom.
- B. The most common temptation in life is to quit with the feeling that we cannot bear it any longer.  
<sup>13</sup> **No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. (1 Cor. 10:13)**

C. Paradox #2 (attacking our understanding): ***We are perplexed, but we are not in despair.***

1. This speaks of circumstances that perplex us, causing us pressure in our understanding. We ask the question: “Why, God?” It is common to yield to despair when perplexed, leading people to lose confidence in God’s goodness. People in despair often become hopeless and aimless because they cannot connect their struggle with the good that it is producing in them.
2. One of the biggest issues of perplexity is boredom while waiting for a breakthrough.
3. Paul wrote 13 books in the NT, but continued to struggle with perplexity.
4. God uses perplexity to train us. The Father purposely hides many details of our lives, including how He will bring deliverance to our problems. Why does God do this? He wants us to have confidence and security by virtue of intimacy with Him, rather than in having all the details of how God will provide for us in our need.

D. Paradox #3 (attacked by people): ***We are persecuted, but not forsaken.***

1. This speaks of persecution, causing us pressure from people. Instead of being appreciated by others as we serve and stand for truth, they resist us and influence others to join them. All who stand for truth will be resisted; sometimes it even comes from within the Church.
2. The enemy lies to us, saying that because some people have forsaken us God has also forsaken us, and that He has overlooked us when we are mistreated. When man’s favor is lifted from you that does not mean that God has taken His favor from you. When people feel forsaken, they lose sight of God’s love for them and become fearful.

E. Paradox #4 (attacking our life purpose): ***We are struck down, but not destroyed.***

1. This speaks of major setbacks in life that threaten to destroy our primary life purpose. Over an entire life, there are usually only a few major setbacks that are life-altering enough to make one feel struck down.
2. These can include suffering through the death of a loved one, a divorce, abuse, prison, a sickness, a serious accident, financial calamity, a natural disaster, etc. The enemy lies, telling us that such calamities have the power to destroy our primary life purpose in God.

- F. We are to respond to God with faith in the pressures by speaking in agreement with God’s Word.  
<sup>13</sup> ***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... (2 Cor. 4:13)***

V. HAVING AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE (2 COR. 4:16-18)

- A. **Great blessing #2:** Increase of our experience of God’s glory in the age to come (2 Cor. 4:17). Paul saw the benefit of pressure as working to bring a greater weight of glory in the age to come. <sup>14</sup> **Knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus...** <sup>16</sup> **We do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.** <sup>17</sup> **For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory...** (2 Cor. 4:14-17)
- B. **Weight of glory:** Involves Paul’s nearness to Jesus, the glory in his resurrected body, and his ministry assignment in reigning with Jesus on earth. The size our heart (inner man) is more important than the size of our circumstantial blessing and ministry impact (outer man).
- C. Isaiah gave us insight into how Jesus viewed His life and ministry in this age. This passage does not describe Jesus complaining; it reveals His confidence in God’s evaluation of His life. Men concluded that Jesus spent His strength in vain because He did not achieve anything notable in their eyes. His strength was spent on nothing outward that they would celebrate. Jesus had confidence that God saw His life as glorious.  
<sup>4</sup> ***I said, “I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain; yet surely my just reward is with the Lord...*** <sup>5</sup> ***I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD...*** (Isa. 49:4-5)
- D. Before Jesus preached one sermon or healed one person, the Father was well pleased with Him.  
<sup>17</sup> ***A voice from heaven, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*** (Mt. 3:17)
- E. **Premise:** Life on earth in this age can be likened to a 70-year internship (Ps. 90:10) which prepares us for the next season of our life on earth in the age to come. Our next ministry calling begins in the Millennium and will last for 1,000 years (Rev. 20:4-6; 2:26-27; 3:21; 5:10; 22:5).
- F. In our 70-year internship, we have two issues that we determine in the grace of God. The first is whether we want to ***be in God’s family*** as voluntarily lovers of God. The second is whether we want to ***function in His government*** for the next 1,000 years in the age to come.
- G. The measure that we develop in love, meekness, and revelation determines our place and function in His millennial government (Mt. 7:14; 19:30; 20:16, 26-27; 22:14; Lk. 13:24).
- H. Our ministry in the age to come has nothing to do with how much we accomplished outwardly in this age, but how much we developed inwardly. The choices we make in our 70-year internship determine where and how we will function in our 1,000-year ministry assignment.  
<sup>21</sup> ***You were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things.*** (Mt. 25:21)  
<sup>17</sup> ***Well done...you were faithful in a very little, have authority over 10 cities.*** (Lk. 19:17)