



2 Corinthians 4:7-5:21

Taught at our Sunday evening service, 27th February 2022 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Ephesians 5:1-7

Good evening. Let's pray.

Introduction

This is our fourth week in our verse by verse study of 2 Corinthians, and tonight we'll reach the end of chapter 5. And by the time we get there, we'll have looked at some pretty famous and often quoted verses - ones that we sing in songs, or that you might see on fridge magnets, or maybe underlined in your Bibles. Whether it's chapter 4:8-9 that says;

2 Corinthians 4:8-9

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—

Or 5:7 that so famously says;

2 Corinthians 5:7

For we walk by faith, not by sight.

Or perhaps 5:17...

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Or the words of 5:21 that we've sung many times here:

2 Corinthians 5:21

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

These verses are good and helpful to our Christian learning and application of the Bible - but it is also important to read and consider them in context, which is what we'll do this evening.

Overview of 2 Corinthians

Now, as a quick reminder of the overall structure of this letter to the church in Corinth, we can break it down into these 3 parts:

- Chapters 1 to 7 - Christian living
- Chapters 8 to 9 - Christian giving
- Chapters 10 to 13 - Christian guarding

Last week, in chapter 3, we looked at the gulf between law and grace - how one kills, the other gives life. How one exposes sin, and the other covers it. And as we then reached the first part of chapter 4, we saw Paul say that the gospel that he is preaching is not about himself, but Christ - that all this is about Jesus, and no-one else.

Overview of chapter four

And that will continue into this next part of chapter four...

- ~~Jesus, not Paul~~
- To God be the glory!
- Light affliction

Overview of chapter five

Then, in chapter 5 we'll cover at least these three points about our bodies, our lives, and what God has done in us, which we can summarise as:

- Temporary dwellings
- Pleasing to Him
- A new creation

We'll come back to these at the end of tonight's study.

Chapter four

So picking up this letter in verse 7 of chapter 4 we read...

2 Corinthians 4:7

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

And, that, my friends, is always the way it has been - it's not some new idea that Paul was introducing. And why should it be any different for us now? for God is the one who has saved us - He is the author of salvation, *and* our Saviour. He must get the glory!

We see this in examples throughout the Bible. One that particularly stands out is in Judges chapter 7 where Gideon is facing a battle with the Midianites, and he's ready to go, with 32'000 men with him. But we read:

Judges 7:2-3

And the LORD said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead." And twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained.

So Gideon is left with less than a third of the original army. Yet just a few verses later and we see God further reduce the numbers to just 300 men. That's less than 1% of what he started with! And God indeed grants the victory, and gets the glory - because it wasn't in their own strength. However, the way in which this plays out is a further example to us.

First, just Gideon and his servant go to spy out the enemy camp - and Gideon overhears two soldiers discussing a dream one of them had, interpreting it correctly that God was going to give Israel the victory. And Gideon realises the enemy are now afraid.

So then, Gideon returns to the 300 men, and instructs them to take a trumpet in one hand, and torch inside a pitcher in the other. This torch wouldn't have been a MagLite or phone light, but a real burning torch - actual fire. And the pitcher was an earthenware jar. Why? Well, what happens next is the 300 men surround the camp of the Midianite army, and following Gideon's lead they break the jars, revealing the light, blow their trumpets, then shout "The sword of the LORD and of Gideon!".

The result? Well, anyone who's camped in a tent before, as these men were, will know that they're not known for being soundproof, and that any light outside is noticeable. So this army go from sleeping, to in a moment having trumpets blown, hundreds of torch lights around them and the sound of their enemy shouting! And we read that "the whole army ran and cried out and fled".

That's how God granted the victory.

But here's the challenge for us - we're the earthenware pots, the earthen vessels. And Jesus is the light. What is it that makes that light visible? It's the pot being broken. That is the frailty and brokenness of the pot allows the light to shine.

And how should happen, and does happen in our trials. You see, if you're full of confidence, and self assurance, loving yourself, even prideful in your abilities - people will look at you. But if you stand there and say "I've got nothing. I can't even offer you anything myself, but I can tell you about the goodness of God" - that's something that allows people to see Christ, and not you.

This world continually tries to teach us that we're brave, strong, and awesome. That we've got this life under control. And that's popular on Instagram. But our desire should be that God is glorified. Not us. That deep in the midst of our trials, we can say, as Job did, "though He slay me, yet will I trust Him". And there are great examples of this.

From Steven Curtis Chapman and his family dealing with the tragic death of one of their daughters, to Joni Eareckson Tada who has lived as a Quadriplegic since a diving accident at 17 years old, to Corrie ten Boom who endured the Ravensbrück concentration camp - God has use their trials, their brokenness, for His glory!

And closer to home we've seen people in our own church family lose jobs, relationships, and loved ones - and God has used them too for His glory.

AW Tozer went as far to say:

It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until He has hurt him deeply.

AW Tozer

While Charles Spurgeon commented:

The Lord gets his best soldiers out of the highlands of affliction.

Charles Spurgeon

But you know, these difficulties are not just ones that happen to us. Sometimes our own choices, actions, decisions are either what leads there. And if we are to pursue Jesus at any cost, we may need to make very difficult decisions, very deliberate actions, that will come at a cost.

Paul writes to Timothy:

2 Timothy 2:20-21

But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

Elsewhere, Tozer wrote:

We tend to think of Christianity as a painless system by which we can escape the penalty of past sins and attain to heaven at last. The flaming desire to be rid of every unholy thing and to put on the likeness of Christ at any cost is not often found among us.

AW Tozer

Let me ask you this: Are you willing to have nothing left of yourself that you might be useful to Jesus? Are you willing to depart from anything contrary to His Word and will, that you might glorify Him?

This is where Paul is going in this letter...

2 Corinthians 5:9

Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.

But first, we need to understand our frailty. And Paul continues in verses 8-9:

2 Corinthians 4:8-9

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—

That is, we're in an ever frail, temporary, and precarious state. But God sustains us that He may be glorified, and uses our trials that Jesus may be evident, as we read in verse 10 which says...

2 Corinthians 4:10

always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

Maybe you're thinking this all seems a bit much. That this doesn't give you a warm and fuzzy feeling. Well, you won't find much sympathy from CS Lewis who wrote:

If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity.

CS Lewis

Paul Himself wrote to Timothy saying...

2 Timothy 4:6

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.

But he didn't stop there. He said:

2 Timothy 4:7-8

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Paul was convinced that these trials were not only worth it, but that they weren't worth comparing to what's ahead. Around the same time He wrote this letter to the church in Corinth, he also wrote the following to the church in Rome:

Romans 8:18

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.

Furthermore, to those same Christians he wrote:

Romans 8:28

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

Not that all trials are enjoyable. Not even that they're good. But that they work together FOR good, for those who know Jesus as their Saviour.

It was with this knowledge, this conviction, that Paul could further write here:

2 Corinthians 4:11-12

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.

Jesus wasn't an addition to Paul's life. Jesus was Paul's life! Yes, his own trials were evident - but those trials had the purpose of strengthening the faith of others - including these folks in Corinth.

Next, Paul quotes from Psalm 116:

2 Corinthians 4:13-14

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, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.

Paul says, whatever our trials, whether we live or die - we will all live with Jesus. This is our blessed hope! He is what we're holding onto. Not our career plans, marriage plans, family plans, or retirement plans. But God's eternal plan.

Verse 15 says:

2 Corinthians 4:15

For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

That is, all our trials and difficulties count as nothing, if we can win you and others to Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:16-17

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

Now, hopefully we're starting to understand that Paul was not discouraged by frailty or troubles. But what is this he says about light affliction?! There is nothing about what Paul went through that you could describe as light. Later in this letter we'll read how he was imprisoned often, how he was whipped, beaten, stoned, shipwrecked multiple times, multiple people setting out after him. Yet he describes it as light affliction. Why? Well, it can be summarised in one word: perspective.

He continues:

2 Corinthians 4:18

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.

Look at the situation in Ukraine now - what is it that the Christians there are holding on to? It's not their church buildings, stained glass windows, or their Spotify playlists of worship songs - it's Jesus. It's the hope that we have in Him. Of course, it's easy for me to say that from the comfort of this country - but Paul is the one saying this with all that he'd been through.

Chapter five

Continuing straight into chapter 5, we read:

2 Corinthians 5:1

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.

This is it! Paul, who himself was a tentmaker, knew the temporary nature of a tent. Again, some of you that have been camping may know that a tent doesn't always last your whole holiday!

And Paul, with this perspective, is saying "look - what we see around is very, very temporary. But what is coming, is eternal". Not a body that needs fixing. Not one subject to NHS waiting lists, medical appointments and procedures. But a new body that will last forever.

2 Corinthians 5:2-3

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.

Boy, our bodies can groan. I know that from building a fence the year before last. Or last year after building a snowman my own size. And we all, sooner or later, start to look forward to that new body. But Paul says more - that when this tent finally wears out, we'll not become some disembodied spirit - this nakedness that he talks about - but rather we'll be clothed afresh, with a body that makes this one a poor tent in comparison. And we read:

2 Corinthians 5:4

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.

Look, it's not that we want to end it all, but that we know this is NOT the end of it all. Our bodies may ache, and none of us look forward to the process of dying, but the result - at least for the Christian - is actually wonderful.

2 Corinthians 5:5

Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

What assurance we have! The Holy Spirit, *His* Holy Spirit, our great helper, as our guarantee. No wonder Paul then writes:

2 Corinthians 5:6

So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord.

I had to smile as we looked at this verse just this morning in our study of John's gospel. And as was said, this rules out the idea of soul-sleep. That our souls somehow sit in the grave. No - the moment a believer dies they are with the Lord. Just as Jesus said the to thief on the cross, "today you will be with Me in paradise". Again, when a believer dies, they are home!

And we are confident why?

2 Corinthians 5:7

For we walk by faith, not by sight.

Don't rely on what you see, or what you think you know, but on what God has said. When we take God at His Word, that's faith! And who better to take at their word, than God? No one. And so Paul says:

2 Corinthians 5:8

We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

Again, the moment a believer dies, they are home. And it's because of that, that we can look at this world as the temporary thing that it is - and actually look forward to what happens at death. Not death itself - that's not what we look forward to, at all! But what happens at that moment is great news - if we know Jesus as our Saviour. And since all this is only possible *because* Jesus is our Saviour, we want to please Him. The next verse says:

2 Corinthians 5:9

Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.

This is what our faith should lead to. Not over-confidence, self-confidence, self-promotion, self-worth. But to be well pleasing - to Him!

How do we do that? By following His Word, by keeping His commandments. John writes:

1 John 2:3-6

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

And now Paul warns:

2 Corinthians 5:10

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.

What is this that Paul is writing about? Well, it's not the Great White Throne judgement that non-believers will stand before. But the bema seat, where believers will stand following the rapture of the church. This judgement seat isn't to determine if someone is saved or not, but to determine whether those that are saved receive reward. And, this is not a new idea to this church in Corinth, for Paul wrote in his first letter:

1 Corinthians 3:11-15

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

But also, the Corinthians would have been aware the bema seat was the place where athletes in the games were given their rewards. We read in 2 Timothy:

2 Timothy 2:5

And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

Let's take note. Only Christian fruit will be rewarded. And it is this reward, these crowns, that we get to lay at Jesus feet. We should want to please God, that we may not be empty handed as faithful believers lay their crowns. That we may be able to lay our own crowns at His feet. I don't know that we'll sing *Crown Him with many crowns* at that moment - but imagine doing so and having not one crown in your hand to offer Him? Awkward doesn't quite capture how we'll feel.

Again, this isn't to earn our salvation - but something we do in response to it. Let us run our race, so as to obtain the prize, that we may lay our reward - our crowns - at Jesus' feet in thankfulness to Him for all He has done.

But I wonder if, as Paul was writing this, that he couldn't but help of the Great White Throne Judgement that non-believers will stand before. Because we read next:

2 Corinthians 5:11

Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

That is, in view of this we persuade people to turn to God. Not through preaching ourselves, but by preaching Jesus. For He is the One they need!

2 Corinthians 5:12

For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart.

And so knowing our motivation, that it is for your good, and the salvation of anyone who will hear Christ, you can answer those who would question our motives, or have ulterior motives themselves.

2 Corinthians 5:13

For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you.

Paul wasn't interested in what people thought of Him. He was interested in what people thought of Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

In fact the very fact Jesus died for us shows that we were dead in our sins. But having been given new life through Him, our old lives are over.

Now of course, when we look at how Israel were saved from slavery in Egypt through the Red Sea, and then they not only disobeyed God but started to long for their old lives, we think they're crazy.

But what of us? Do we really obey God in all things? Or do we long for our old sins?

We should be living to please Him in all that we say, think, and do.

2 Corinthians 5:16

Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.

Paul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus changed everything. He no longer saw Jesus as a man who walked on the shore of Galilee, or around Jerusalem. But He saw Him for who He was. And from that point on, he didn't see men for what they could be here either. But what they could be in Christ. So likewise, neither should we evaluate anyone according to their racial, social or financial background. But how Christ sees them. Of course, James warns us of that.

Verse 17...

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Becoming a Christian isn't about going to church. It's not about starting, stopping or changing some habits. It's a fundamental change. Jesus describes this to Nicodemus as being born again.

And Paul here says we are a new creation, no longer subject to judgment and death. How? Not through anything we've done. But entirely through what Jesus has done.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Look friends, Jesus hasn't merely saved us. Merely, you might ask? Isn't that a wrong way to describe salvation? Perhaps - but what I mean is that Jesus hasn't ONLY saved us, but He has reconciled us too. That is, He hasn't ONLY saved us from the punishment we deserved, but he has restored our relationship to the Father. He has reconciled us. The dictionary describes reconciliation as the restoration of friendly relationship. And think of that - Jesus is not only our Saviour, but our friend. And now, Paul writes that He has given us the word of reconciliation to share with others.

This great and marvellous news we have isn't a treasure to be hoarded, but shared. And so Paul writes...

2 Corinthians 5:20

Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

So then, there are two things here -

First, we are to be ambassadors too. In the worldly sense that's an accredited diplomat sent by a state as its permanent representative in a foreign country. For us, it's to represent Christ faithfully in this world that also is not our home. And think of it like this - for I'm sure that most of you have called customer services for something you bought, or a service you needed to arrange - consider how that one person gives you an impression of the entire company! Well, that's your responsibility when representing Christ as His ambassador.

But second, Paul pleads for this reconciliation in us. Jesus has done *all* that is necessary to reconcile us. But surely we must now communicate with God again?!

2 Corinthians 5:21

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

This is where we'll end this evening, and no amount of time spent looking at or considering this verse will do it justice. So please - keeping thinking on it through this week. That Jesus, who was perfect, without sin, took on all our sin, that we may be righteous in God's eyes. The innocent lamb for the guilty sinner. What change that should bring in us! Such change as we read in Ephesians:

Ephesians 5:1-7

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them.

Next week, we'll consider more how we should live in light of this.

Summary

Looking back at this evening, we've covered a lot

- To God be the glory! (our brokenness should allow Him to shine through)
- Light affliction (compared to what awaits us)
- Temporary dwellings (let that be our reminder of what's ahead)
- Pleasing to Him (in all things)
- A new creation (literally changed from the inside out, now faithful ambassadors for Him)

Application questions

A few questions to help us apply this in the week ahead:

- Are you seeking your own glory, or God's?
- Are you willing to depart from anything contrary to His Word and will, that you might glorify Him?
- Are you a faithful ambassador?

Let's pray.

