

"The New Ministry"

2 Corinthians 4:1-7

Part 4

Introduction: In our study of 2 Corinthians we are in a passage where Paul is defending his ministry against those whom Satan was using to attack him. They had accused Paul of preaching a message that was not of God. His critics were Judaizers and they held on to the Old Covenant. They were blinded because of their unbelief and therefore they could not grasp on to the Gospel.

Notice 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

Their minds were blinded by Satan because they WOULKD NOT BELIEVE. The critics also accused Paul of not being honest in his ministry. Paul made it very clear to the Corinthians that there was absolutely no dishonesty in his ministry. He stated that his ministry was to proclaim the Word of God in its purest sense.

Notice 2 Corinthians 4:2

The false teachers of Paul's day used the Word of God for personal gain. Peter spoke of these false teachers.

2 Peter 2:1-3

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

² And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

*³ **And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you:** whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.*

Let me show you what Paul will later write to the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 12:16-18

¹⁶ But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, [some say] being crafty, I caught you with guile.

¹⁷ Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you?

¹⁸ I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps?

Paul never used his ministry for personal gain. But he was certainly accused by the false teachers of doing so. Tonight as we continue in the passage before us we shall see what it was that motivated Paul.

I. **Paul's Gratitude**

Notice 2 Corinthians 4:5-6

Verse 6 is the verse which we need to focus on here. Paul had said in verse 5 that he did not preach himself but he preached Jesus Christ the Lord. He also stated that he did not lord over the churches but he was a servant to all and this was for JESUS SAKE. He took upon him the heart of a servant so as to be used as a tool by God to help build the church/bride of Jesus Christ. His ministry was dedicated to Jesus Christ.

Then in verse 6 we can see what it was that motivated Paul. It was his gratitude for what God had done within him.

In the beginning of this verse Paul points back to creation when God commanded the light to shine out of the darkness.

Genesis 1:1-5

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

² And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

³ And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

⁴ And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

⁵ And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

When God created the earth on the first day of creation the earth was "without form and void". This simply means that there was no life on the earth and it was empty. The earth was cold, dark and empty.

This is a picture of each of us before we were saved. We are born into this world cold, dark, empty and lifeless, spiritually speaking.

On the first day of creation the Spirit began to move upon the face of the waters and then God created the light.

This is a picture of how the Holy Spirit began to work within our lives. He convicted us of our sin and He began to draw us to Jesus Christ as we heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ preached.

John 16:7-8

⁷ *Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.*

⁸ *And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:*

We we made the choice to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ it was then that God commanded the Light to shine out of the darkness within our hearts.

Notice 2 Corinthians 4:6 again.

God had shined the Light into Paul's heart. His heart had been dark and wicked. Then on the Damascus Road God shined the Light into the midst of the darkness of Paul's heart and he was forever changed. Paul remembered his spiritual condition prior to God's Light shining in his heart.

Ephesians 2:1-7

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;

² *Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:*

³ *Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*

⁴ *But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,*

⁵ *Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)*

⁶ *And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:*

⁷ *That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.*

Remembering where he came from and what God had done for him motivated Paul. This is what drove him to continue to serve the Lord. I need to also remind you that Paul's dedication cost him greatly.

2 Corinthians 11:24-28

²⁴ *Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.*

²⁵ *Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;*

²⁶ *In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;*

²⁷ *In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.*

²⁸ *Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.*

1 Corinthians 4:9-13

⁹ *For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.*

¹⁰ *We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised.*

¹¹ *Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace;*

¹² *And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it:*

¹³ *Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.*

This suffering however was not something which Paul despised or avoided. His attitude was like David's.

2 Samuel 24:21-24

²¹ *And Araunah said, Wherefore is my lord the king come to his servant? And David said, To buy the threshingfloor of thee, to build an altar unto the LORD, that the plague may be stayed from the people.*

²² *And Araunah said unto David, Let my lord the king take and offer up what seemeth good unto him: behold, here be oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing instruments and other instruments of the oxen for wood.*

²³ *All these things did Araunah, as a king, give unto the king. And Araunah said unto the king, The LORD thy God accept thee.*

²⁴ *And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing.*

II. Paul's Humility

Notice 2 Corinthians 4:7

There is a contrast here between the TREASURE and the VESSEL. The TREASURE is the New Covenant ministry it is the message of Jesus Christ. This is how God views the message of the Gospel. It is a Treasure which has been entrusted to us.

But I want us to notice the container which the Treasure has been placed in. Paul tells us it is in EARTHEN VESSELS. The word "earthen" here refers to "frail clay". It refers to plain clay pots which were very inexpensive and when broken they were just thrown away. But there is something else here that we need to see; this word "earthen" is only used one other place in the New Testament.

2 Timothy 2:20

²⁰ *But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour.*

There were often different vessels in the houses of Jesus' day. There were some made of gold and silver. Some were made of wood or clay. These vessels were used for many things. They were used to store valuables and some were used to store food. Those which held the valuables were often buried in a field where only the owner knew where they were.

Matthew 13:44

⁴⁴ *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.*

The dishonorable vessels were often used for human waste.

Notice the words of Robert Morgan:

"In Bible times, when they didn't have banks or safe repositories, they would bury their precious possessions in the earth or hide them in caves. They would often use clay jars for doing this. Have you ever read about the Dead Sea Scrolls? These priceless manuscripts date back 2000 years and were discovered in caves near the ruins of the village of Qumran, in the desert South of Jerusalem. They were stored in clay jars. Of course, clay

jars break easily. They are fragile. They are easily damaged. In fact, that's the way the scrolls were found. An Arab goat herder threw a rock toward the cliffs, trying to scare his goat back down the hill. The rock sailed through the opening of a cave, and the boy heard the sound of a jar breaking. The Dead Sea Scrolls were stored in jars of clay, but jars of clay are fragile. They break easily.

And Paul is using that as an illustration of you and me. We are God's depositories for His treasure, yet we are fragile and breakable and easily damaged. Every one of us can identify with that. I don't need to spend much time on this point. No matter how strong we think we are or how stoic we try to be, we are fragile people and we break and are easily damaged. That's true of us physically and it's true of us emotionally. Some of you right now feel like a jar of clay that's been chipped or cracked or broken. Someone has thrown a rock, and it's shattered something inside of you. Well, the benefit is that it keeps us humble."

Notice 2 Corinthians 4:7 again.

God places the Treasure in "clay pots" so that He will receive all the glory when the Gospel brings results.

Conclusion:

We all are like frail clay pots. We all have faults and weaknesses. We DO NOT HAVE TO BE PERFECT to be used of God. He delights in using frail clay pots for it is then that the POWER of God is seen in and through us.

We do not need to have a list of degrees. We do not need to be good looking or very wealthy. We do not need to be eloquent in speech. We just need to be available and God will use us.

Remember what the critics said about Paul?

2 Corinthians 10:10

¹⁰ *For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.*