

PAUL'S SUFFERINGS FOR THE GOSPEL | 2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-5:4

- Verse 7 -
 - **This treasure is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God** (v. 6) or, more simply, **our gospel** (v. 3).
 - This **knowledge and gospel and treasure is in earthen vessels**.
 - This does not imply (as the modern mind may think) a *temporary* or a *low quality* vessel.
 - Rather, the **earthen vessel** is where treasures in the ancient Middle East would be stored. Consider, for example, the Dead Sea Scrolls, all of which were preserved for 2,000 years in earthen vessels.
 - Jeremiah was instructed to store the title deeds to purchased property **in an earthen vessel, that they may continue many days** (Jer. 32:14).
 - In context, Paul & companions were the **earthen vessels**, God being the master Potter, and the One to whom the glory belongs. But God did not want the **vessels** to be glorified, but rather the **treasure** within the vessels.
- Verses 8-10 -
 - Paul uses the **earthen vessels** illustration (v. 7) to explain *why* he has not been *healthy and wealthy* but rather **troubled on every side** (v. 8), etc.
 - These verses should cause us to be grateful for Paul's faithfulness and should give encouragement to us when life is not "a bowl of cherries."
- Verse 11 -
 - Paul (and his companions) recognized that he was always at risk of death in order that **the life of Jesus might be made manifest** in their death (thus, not just "in our flesh," but **in our mortal flesh**, with the emphasis on *mortality*).
 - While believers through the ages may have experienced times of persecution, this verse is not about them, nor about you and me.
 - Indeed, for the vast majority of us today, we have almost no risk of being **delivered unto death for Jesus' sake**.
 - We should not inflate our own troubles by trying to insert ourselves into this verse, which is about Paul and his companions, not Randy and his students.
- Verse 12 -
 - The big problem with making the **we which live** in v. 11 to be *me and you*, is that now there is no meaning left for **you** in v. 12.
 - You will notice that all the commentaries and sermons that read *me* into verse 11 have to gloss over or skip completely verse 12.
 - Because Paul was risking **death**, the **life** of Jesus Christ was **made manifest** (v. 11) and *we today* are able to live in Christ.
- Verse 13 -
 - Paul claims that he has **the same spirit of faith** (that is, the *same faith*) as that which is **written**, and then Paul gives the quote, **I believed, and therefore have I spoken**.
 - The quote comes from Psalm 116:10. Psalm 116 is a Psalm that speaks of one under suffering and affliction but who will not back down nor be silent.
- Verse 14 -
 - Paul's confidence stemmed from his knowledge of the coming resurrection.
 - He has said that if there is no resurrection, then **we are of all men most miserable** (1 Cor. 15:19). Paul was confident not only of his own resurrection, but also that of the Corinthians (whose lives had not always been noble, thus an argument against so-called *Lordship Salvation*).
- Verse 15 - Paul has gone through his personal turmoil so that many would give thanks to God, and thus God would receive glory. His motto: **I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some** (1 Cor. 9:22).

- Verse 16 -
 - Paul's testimony is that, because of his desire to display **the glory of God** (v. 15) he will **faint not**, and his strength will come by being **renewed day by day** in the **inward man**.
 - The word **inward** is ἔσωθεν [esothēn], from which we get *esoteric* (*eso-* words have something to do with *inner*, such as *esophagus*, which is the *inner* channel that *carries* (Greek *phero*) food).
 - In this passage Paul does not discuss the manner in which **the inward man is renewed**, and much Christian literature that describes inner renewal is based on mysticism or psychological principles rather than Biblical instruction.
- Verse 17 -
 - Paul considers the ordeals through which he has been to be **light affliction** that is **but for a moment** in light of the **eternal weight of glory**.
 - Indeed, each of us would be blessed by considering the things that are **eternal** (v. 18) rather than **the things which are seen** which are **temporal**. Of course this takes great patience and mental fortitude, which can really only come when we have a Biblical worldview that reminds us that there is more to come.
- Verse 5:1 -
 - Though the insertion of a new chapter may indicate otherwise, the topic of suffering with willingness continues.
 - Paul speaks of **our earthly house** which he calls a **tabernacle** (i.e.: tent). The Greek word for **tabernacle** is σκῆνος [skēnos], from which we get *skin*.
 - He says that if our bodies were **dissolved** (an English word well-chosen, for the Greek speaks of "utterly letting loose," then we would have a **building**, using the word οἰκοδομή [oikodome], an *oikos* (house) with a *dome* (roof). John 14:2 speaks of the **Father's house** which has **many mansions**.
 - Note that we shouldn't make a huge contrast between **building** and **tabernacle** because both are a **house**. For more on this, see notes in vv. 2-4.
- Verses 5:2-4 -
 - These verses are mystifying without knowledge of Greek and of the Bible.
 - When Paul says, **in this we groan**, he is speaking of *this skin*. The Greek *skēnos* is only used twice in the New Testament, in verse 1 and 4. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (i.e., "Kittel's") says,
 - "It means "tent" but is seldom used of real tents...The normal use is...one for a body dead or alive, the human body...This use is so firmly established that one may ask how far there was still any sense of the meaning "tent" or whether the rendering "tent" does not stress this too much, so that it is better simply to transl. by 'body'."¹
 - When we understand that *skēnos* means "skin" more than "tabernacle," then verses 2-4 make more sense.
 - Paul speaks of a desire to be **clothed** rather than **naked** (Greek *gymnos*) and desires **not for that we would be unclothed** (not using *gymnos* but *ekdyo* [stripped]) but rather **clothed upon**.
 - His word for **clothed** is also only used in these verses (and thus not the normal word for *clothed* that is used 14 times in the New Testament). The word used here has a change that comes to the *skin* in our eternal bodies.
 - Verse 2 could read, "we are earnestly desiring to put on our heavenly dwelling."
 - Note that it would be a *wrong conclusion* to say that "without works you will be naked in heaven, not having the clothing of rewards." Such a conclusion cannot be drawn from the Greek.

¹ Wilhelm Michaelis, "Σκηνή, Σκῆνος, Σκῆνωμα, Σκηνώω, Ἐπισκηνώω, Κατασκηνώω, Σκηνοπηγία, Σκηνοποιός," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 381.