

4:7-5:1

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power the ESV says “the surpassing power of God” **may be of God and not of us.** This, along with 5:1, form our bookends on this passage.

Earthen vessels here and “earthly house” (5:1) form the thought of Paul, or at least a continuation. **Earthen** refers not to the planet, but to the matter out of which our “house” or “tent” was made. The idea that it is called a “**tent**” refers to the temporary nature as seen in 4:18. The “glory of God in the face of Jesus” (4:6) made clear by the indwelling Holy Spirit (3:2-3) is that which indwells our dirt-made house.

An earthen vessel is “quintessentially fragile,” prone to breakage, easily chipped and cracked. A breakable vessel offers no protection for the treasure (except from dust and water). The image therefore serves to emphasize the contrast between Paul’s own pitiful weakness and the great power of God.¹

Let us notice some connections to the preceding passage (after reading this passage)

1. **“For Jesus’ Sake”** 4:11 as well as in 4:5. Just as Paul said that he and his companions were serving the people on behalf of Jesus (4:5), so he is delivered to death on behalf or instead of Jesus. Why? because of the grace needed by the Corinthians. So, Paul serves the people because of Christ and His Gospel (4:5) because of the sins they sinned against God (4:15; they needed “grace to spread” through them) resulting in a death Paul would die for Christ (4:11).
2. **“We do not lose heart.”** 4:16 as well as in 4:1. Just as Paul told them on the heels of the news that we have a superior truth—more than even those that saw Moses after He saw God face to face (4:1), Paul tells them on the heels of reality that he must die for that same wonderful message. However, in both cases he uses the phrase “we do not lose heart” as a result of some stunning news. So what is so great about “dying the death” of Christ? Verse 10 and 11 close with these in almost parallel form.
3. **“We are earthen vessels” followed by confidence in the God of the Gospel:** 4:7-14 as well as 1:9-10

4:7-10

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. 8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, This, with “earthen vessels” or “jars of clay” in 4:7 give us the understanding that Paul says “we’re just about to break.” He follows this talk of feebleness and vulnerability with hope, as we stated, in the Gospel. In the first chapter this Gospel is found in verse 10, but in this chapter he continues to make reference to the Gospel like in 4:14.

We stated that Paul was dying on behalf of Jesus. When you speak for Jesus and serve for Jesus, you end up dying on His behalf. Jesus cannot die again. He is raised to live forevermore (Revelation 1:18). So those doing His work in His stead die in His stead. Do not think that we strangers on planet earth are to be spent for any other worthy cause. It takes no genius to see this same phrase used in verse 11, 12, 16 and 5:1 to know that “dying Christ’s death”—being defined as that which is brought upon us because we carry Christ’s message—is the expectation of the minister of this wonderful new covenant of the Spirit; this covenant of glory found in the face of Christ.

4:15-5:1

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’s once again, his concern.² What we find in the face of Christ, we carry in our bodies (4:7) as it was written on our hearts (3:2-3), we share with others through our service in His name (4:5) and we anticipate gladness pouring out to the Father. **5:1 For we know that if our earthly house, this**

¹ David E. Garland, 2 *Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 221.

² Did you notice the absence of preoccupation Paul has with the world? He’s not talking about politics, because the believer’s country is in his community of faith and his citizenship is in Heaven. His or her energy is to be towards with whom he or she is sojourning and his or her attention is to be on the payoff for the labor in the Lord.

tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. As opposed to “temporal” on earth (4:18). He seems pretty uninterested in dabbling with temporary and trite things when we are carrying around eternity in our bosoms.