

Not Losing Heart (2 Corinthians 4:16–5:10)

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Introduction

1. Paul explained his perseverance in the gospel ministry, despite all the opposition and suffering, was due to God's mercy on him. Although he had been blind to God's truth and, therefore, a violent persecutor of the church (1 Timothy 1:12–16), he deserved the wrath of God, but God in mercy opened his eyes to the truth. God chose Paul and purposed to use him to display his perfect patience as an example to others.

Success in ministry must not focus on the minister but on Jesus Christ. If God is the only one who can open blind eyes and He does so through His servant, then the servant must be careful not to mishandle the Word of God (v. 2).

The burden to see the gospel change hearts and the grief resulting from rejection and opposition can be difficult (1:8, 9). God allows this burden so that we do not "*rely on ourselves but on God who raises the dead*" (1:9). The Lord wants the glory to go to Him, not us. Thus, Paul declared, "*We do not lose heart.*"

2. Again, "*We do not lose heart*" because "*on him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again*" (1:10). Paul stated as much in 1 Timothy 4:10. This is the foundation of patience unto perseverance (Romans 5:3; 2 Corinthians 6:4). Jesus declared, "*The one who endures to the end will be saved [or delivered]*" (Matthew 24:13).

The gospel *treasure* had been placed in *jars of clay*—weak and fragile vessels (v. 7)—in order that the "*surpassing power [of the gospel] might be understood as belonging to God, not the vessels of clay*. Believers must experience the continual reenactment of Christ's sufferings (vv. 11, 12).

3. The source of Paul's strength and courage in these trials was that he had the "*same spirit of faith*" as did David (Psalm 116:10). David's and Paul's confidence was (as ours must be) placed in the present work of the Holy Spirit and the future hope of transformation.

Christians have a great hope (1 Corinthians 15:19). Believers must not only face a naturally hostile environment; they must also live with spiritual animosity. This present world is neither to be loved by us, nor should we expect that we shall be loved by it.

The focus and expected fulfillment of our present lives must be Jesus Himself. He must be our all-in-all. To encourage us to keep our focus on Him, He prevents us from being comfortable by allowing us to face trials and hostility.

I. A Present Understanding (4:16–5:1)

1. When we understand what God is doing, we can walk by faith and not lose heart. What we experience is the wasting away of the outer *self*. In effect, we are two parts in the same space—an *inner* and *outer* person. As the believer's outer self is wasting away, the inner self is being renewed. Through the Word of God, believers grow in the knowledge of God, causing them to be transformed into Christ's image daily through the work of the Holy Spirit in preparation for His return (Philippians 1:6; 1 Corinthians 15:48, 49). How is this possible? Paul answers this question in his resurrection chapter (1 Corinthians 15:50–53).
2. Our spiritual self must have a body that corresponds to the spirit. The outer person is a body, a *tent*, temporary and destructible due to sin and its effects (5:1). At the same time, the daily renewal provokes glorious hope for a permanent and indestructible body.

No matter how severe the affliction we are called upon to endure, comparison with the eternal glory that awaits us makes the trials *light* and *momentary*. Paul argued that hardships were temporary and much easier to bear when viewed from the perspective of eternity. Paul could do this because he kept his eyes, “*not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen*” (4:18).

Jesus has prepared a new tent for His own, “*a building from God, ... eternal in the heavens*” (5:1). This replacement is (1) a house from God, who is eternal. (2) It is not made with hands; that is, it is free of all temporal characteristics. Therefore, (3) it is eternal in the heavens.

II. A Present Desiring (5:2–5)

1. While our spirit has been regenerated, desiring spiritual and eternal things, we are confined to our earthly tents. This causes us to *groan* or sigh with longing to put on our new heavenly tent. On the other hand, Paul warned of those who “*walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things*” (Philippians 3:18, 19). By contrast, our “*citizenship is in heaven, and from it await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform [their] lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself*” (vv. 20, 21).
2. Paul speaks of not being found *naked* (v. 3), which hints at the error of those who developed into the Gnostics of the first century. They taught that when we die, we become disembodied spirits, free of the material world.

III. A Present Hoping (5:6–10)

1. “So,” Paul concludes, “*we are always of good courage*” (v. 6) because we have an “*earnest*” of the Spirit to assure us that “*what is mortal may be swallowed up by life*” (vv. 4, 5). Two things guarantee this transformation: (1) God is working for us; therefore, it cannot fail. (2) The Holy Spirit has been given to us as an *arrhabon*, an earnest or down payment. (In modern Greek, the word is used of an engagement ring.)
2. Understanding the nature of things, we know that now we are, in a sense, *absent* from the Lord—not present with Him in glory (see Hebrews 11:13, 14). A believer can never be truly absent from the Lord (Hebrews 13:5b).
3. In the present state, we are to “*walk by faith, and not by sight*” (v. 7). We do not see Him or feel Him, although we are looking, as it were, through an obscure mirror—*Scripture* (1 Corinthians 13:12: “*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face*”).

The attitude that separates true believers from mere professors is that His children “*would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord*” (v. 8); however, in the meantime, “*we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil*” (vv. 9, 10).