

## 2 Corinthians 4: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Such an earthen vessel is a vessel of God's creation, and a vessel that is completely at his disposal. In Jeremiah chapter 19 verses 1 to 2 and 10 to 11, Israel is compared to a potter's vessel, which the Lord will break. Thus says the Lord, go buy a potter's earthenware flask, and take some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests, and go out to the valley of the son of Hinnom, at the entry of the potsherd gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you. Then you shall break the flask in the sight of the men who go with you, and shall say to them, thus says the Lord of hosts, so will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended. A final possible allusion is to the story of Gideon and his 300 men in Judges chapter 7, who held torches inside earthen jars that they broke.

On the outside, what people see when they see Paul and his companions are people afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, struck down, and near to death. However, there is the power of a new life contained within them, so that their afflictions, sufferings, difficulties, and struggles are not the full picture. In all of these trying situations, they are not crushed, not despairing, not forsaken, and not destroyed. They are carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that Christ's life might also be made manifest in them. Paul quotes Psalm 116 verse 10, words of confident faith declared by the psalmist, even when in the greatest affliction. Paul has the same sort of faith, confident in the resurrection power that will one day raise them up. Death will not be the final word. They will one day be presented with the Corinthians in the Lord's presence. Paul's entire purpose in undergoing suffering is to bring glory to God and to minister to the people of Christ. As Christ's glory reaches more and more people, the result will be increased thanksgiving to God and greater glorification of him.

[ 13 : 09 ] Paul began this chapter by saying that they do not lose heart, and he concludes it by underlining that same point, repeating the same expression. He draws a succession of contrasts between the inner and the outer self, between the self that is visible, temporary, and to be stripped off him in time, and the enduring, invisible, and inner life that comes from the illuminating work of God within.

The inner self-outer self opposition is not based upon a soul-body dichotomy. Rather, the inner self is the self in the sight of God. The outer self is the self in the presence of other human persons. Paul draws a succession of contrasts here. Outer self, inner self. Wasting away, being renewed day by day. Light affliction, weighty glory. Momentary affliction, eternal glory. Things that are seen, things that are unseen. Transient things, eternal things. Paul is teaching the Corinthians a new way of perceiving reality and their situation here. And he isn't just drawing a contrast between these two states. There is also a paradoxical connection. The light momentary affliction is exactly what is preparing us for the eternal weight of glory. The two states are bound up with each other.

Philippians chapter 3 verses 10 to 11. That I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Being conformed to Christ's death prepares us for resurrection. The inner self is daily being renewed. Just as the outer self is wasting away, the inner self is having its youth continually restored.

[ 14 : 52 ] Recognising all of this, we must get our values straight. We must think about time differently, measuring the difference between that which is momentary and transient, and that which is eternal.

The difference between that which endures and that which wastes away. We must have a sense of gravity, discerning the difference between those things that are light, and those things that truly have weight.

And as the things that really matter the most are things that are unseen, we must learn to walk by faith, rather than by sight. A question to consider. What are some of the ways that the experience of Paul, as he describes it in this chapter, connects him with Christ?