

Being Renewed Day by Day 2021
2 Corinthians 4:7, 13-5:1, 6-7

2 Corinthians 4:7, 13-5:1, 6-7 (New Revised Standard Version)

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—"I believed, and so I spoke"—we also believe, and so we speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal. For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight.

If you leave a plastic ruler in the back window of a car,
with the heat of the sun beating down on it,
the ruler will **melt, and be misshapen and distorted.**

And since it's melted, and now curved and crooked,
it can't be used to draw a straight line,
or to measure anything accurately.

One time I did forget my sunglasses in the back window of my car,
and sure enough the plastic lenses got hot, melted and warped.
And anything I'd look at through them
would appear garbled and distorted...
... and I couldn't see things as they really are.

Like many who grew up quite poor during the Great Depression,
my father found it difficult to throw anything away
that might possibly be repaired or used again somehow.
Struggling to get by in his youth left a long-lasting distortion.

The troubles we endure, our struggles, trials and disappointments,
the mistakes we make, our sins, our losses and failures in life --
-- these can warp and distort our perceptions & expectations
much like looking through my old melted sunglasses,
and can throw-off our ability to see straight or measure life
much like trying to use a plastic ruler warped by heat.

This world can be very difficult, disappointing and destructive
in ways that can warp and distort our sense of hope and trust,
and then it's very difficult to make an accurate assessment.

If the standard
by which we measure and evaluate life is unreliable or false,

and if that lens through which we perceive the world
is distorted, that can warp our sense of reality...
**... then how can we possibly make wise and faithful choices,
assess and evaluate, determine and separate
what really matters from that which does not?**

That's the same issue at stake in the Corinthians passage we read...
... for they were looking at things in a distorted way
and missing the point about what really matters most.

Paul had started the Christian community in Corinth,
but after he left to preach the Good News elsewhere,
other teachers and preachers had come along
who seemed far more impressive and successful.

The context of these verses is that his critics assumed
that if God really approved of Paul's teaching and ministry,
then why was he suffering persecution, beatings & prison?,
and why wasn't he a more impressive & successful leader?

But the Apostle Paul had a whole different perspective. vs. 7

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary
power belongs to God and does not come from us.

Paul recognized that his struggles, his suffering and weaknesses
served to reveal more clearly the glory and wonder of the Lord,
and that it was all God doing the accomplishing and not Paul.

God is the potter and we are the clay. God stoops down,
scoops up some mud, and molds that mud shaping it into human form.
God's the Master Potter, we are the clay being formed into a vessel
into which God then breathes and we are given the gift of life,
to which God declares, "**You are a treasure to me!**"

It's incredible that despite our **mortal** limitations & fragility,
God wonderfully entrusts and places his own treasure into us.
And like wrapping a priceless diamond in a filthy muddy rag,
God has placed extraordinary treasure in each one of us, 1 Cor 3:16
Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

**By that Spirit within we have the capacity to know and love Christ,
and to walk guided by the very indwelling presence & power of God.**

Therefore, Paul's confidence, trust and assurance aren't based
on his own skills or abilities, **but solely in the promises of God,
therefore, his future in Christ was way more important
than any struggles, difficulties or failings in life.**

But the problem was
that the Corinthians were measuring Paul with a warped ruler,
and evaluating his ministry through a warped-distorted lens,
which was to miss recognizing what matters most.

They're focused on the cover, rather than the contents of the book,
**evaluating and judging by the standards of this world,
rather than focusing on the Kingdom of God that awaits.**

The Apostle explaining his mission and trust in God, writes,
that adversity could not and did not distract or disturb him
because his focus was on the glory of God's coming promises...

... vs. 16-18, 5:1, 7

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens... **for we walk by faith, not by sight.**

Paul endured struggle and adversity not as a mistake or failure,
but as one of the ways that God builds and develops our faith ...
... preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.

His focus was on the sure and certain glorious promise of the Lord.

Back when I was a Boy Scout, we were taught
that said if we ever got lost or confused in the wilderness,
be careful not to panic or you'll wander around in circles.

So instead, the best way to avoid making that mistake
is to identify a distant point such as a mountain peak
and stay focused on heading toward that distant spot...

... **and that's how Paul urges Christians to live out our mortal lives,
focused on the sure and certain glorious promises of the Lord.**

Now Paul is not minimizing or denying that our mortal lives
can be difficult, disappointing & even seem hopeless at times.

**But we can look beyond our troubles, problems and disappointments
by trusting God to fulfill his promised kingdom and glory,
& that the Lord is up to something amazing, glorious & wonderful.**

**For the Christian, our life is not defined by the problems we face,
but by God's promises of love, hope, joy and steadfast mercy.**

**Scripture teaches that God's gracious love is so profound that
it can potentially change everything about everyone it touches,
including our values, priorities, goals and our perceptions...**

... **for even amid our darkest and most difficult seasons of life,
yet God is with us, sustaining and blessing us,
and providing signs of God's loving hope and grace.**

But has Paul got it right? Is that really truthful?

Are these just words, a childish illusion or placebo of comfort?,
or can we reliably trust them, even amid disaster & tribulation?

**Several years ago I tested them, and was tested by them,
when I sat with my mother on the painful night of her death.**

Sitting by her hospital bed, I didn't feel like a pastor right then,
but was her frightened, wounded, hurting and grieving little boy,
as I desperately read this 2 Cor. passage aloud,
hoping for hope in that crushing place of loss,
that place where faith is either real, or else it fails.

In my grief and sadness, in the distress of that long night,
of course I wondered, but are these words really true?
And will I for sure, ever see and know my mother again?

Well, that night was special, in a way I'll always treasure,
a gentle and powerful sense of full assurance and security
swept over me in a way that transformed that hospital room,

as the presence of the Holy Spirit filled and surrounded us,
reassuring & comforting me that everything would be alright --
that she was going to a better and wonderful place,
and that I could entrust her in hope to Jesus Christ.
**And so I can and do live into hope by clinging to that hope,
based upon God's own faithfulness and steadfast mercy.**

The point is, that as Paul writes in this passage,
**even the amid our darkest and most difficult seasons of life,
yet God is with us, sustaining and blessing us,
and providing signs of God's loving hope and grace...**

**... and yes, I do truly believe and trust entirely
that we do indeed serve such an amazing and wonderful God,
and that we are his beloved treasure wrapped in clay.**

Shortly after Kathy and I got married,
I had to take the youth group to a distant church retreat,
and had to be away all weekend, for the first time since our wedding.

I hated to leave her alone & be away, so I got some colorful stickers
with little hearts that said, "I love you" and "I miss you",
which I put on just about everything in our apartment --
on her toothbrush & makeup, inside her shoes, on the mirror,
on the dishes & silverware, pots & pans, knobs & switches...

... and for years, she kept finding more of those crazy stickers
still stuck on her things — a continuing sign of my love.

Like those "stickers" proclaiming my love, **Holy Communion**
is a sign of God's love and abiding presence and grace with us...
**... reminding us that God really has something significant for us,
and wants to do something special & meaningful with our lives.**

**The Christian life is not defined by the problems we face in life,
but by promises, gracious love and steadfast mercy of the Lord.**

For we walk by faith, not by sight (vs. 7)

And that, is the hope, the promise and truth that we celebrate and receive at the Lord's Table.

But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:21-25)