

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of
January 2023

(added progressively for each Sunday)

(see following pages)

2 Corinthians 4:1-6

Paul Answers His Critics

Based on S Olyott

2 Corinthians 4:3

³ ***And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing.***

We surely do thank God for His Scriptures. In the Scriptures there is 'milk' and there is 'meat' (1 Corinthians 3:2 & Hebrews 5:12). 2 Corinthians is mostly meat! We are trying to make it as palatable and easy to digest as possible.

2 Corinthians 4:1-6: We will remember that the Corinthian church was in trouble. Trouble from inside. Which is the worst sort of trouble. The trouble had come from outside, but they were now inside: these false teachers. They were trying to get the church back to Moses. They had a sort of Christianity. Which wasn't Christianity at all, because it wasn't Cross-centred and it wasn't Christ-centred. It was very much centred on the personality of these teachers. And very much centred on working for your salvation and doing enough to get things right.

Paul is combating these people. There is a great number of them and they have taken the church over – more or less. This whole letter is a 'collision' between Paul and these teachers, who have infiltrated this Christian church and have as a consequence ruined the Christian lives of boys and girls, and men and women.

Now someone might say: "Well, my biggest problem is getting through Monday. I don't really find that these Sermons about false teachers and such help me very much!" BUT if the teaching is wrong and the Gospel is perverted. You can't enjoy God and glorify your life on a Monday, or Tuesday or Wednesday, ... We've got to keep a pure message for our Christian lives to be fed and nourished and strengthened. That's exactly what was not happening with these false teachers. Then and particularly now in the Bunbury region. Works salvation is subtly and often quite blatantly preached from every pulpit! So here, once more, Paul answers his critics.

In today's passage we will see four accusations – rejected; then we will look at four key words; and finally 'take to heart' four lessons.

Four accusations – rejected. Of course, as we have been doing, we have to pick them out by implication. But because of what Paul says, we can be certain of what they had been saying. Verse 1: *1 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.* "Argh," say the false teachers, "Paul, he's demoralised. He's lost all fight. He's become apathetic. He's one of those people who had so much energy and vigour years ago, but look at him now. That's one of the reasons he hasn't come back to Corinth recently. Things are too tough for him. That's why he fled Ephesus recently – things were too tough for him there. That's why he stayed only a few days in Troas – he just couldn't face it. The 'heat in the kitchen' was too great. He had to get out. He's pathetic. Here we are! We are triumphing. 'Sweeping everything

in front of us', here in Corinth. But Paul? He's nowhere to be seen. He's not turned up – even yet. He's just lost heart.

“So therefore since we have this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.” says Paul. “You – the false ones – have your ministry and I and my colleagues we have this ministry – the one from God. You have your ministry, where all the attention is drawn to you and we have our ministry by which we draw all the attention to Christ. You have your ministry by which you tell people that they must obey a whole set of rules to at last be saved. We have this ministry! By which we preach the kindness of God, through Jesus Christ's Cross. You have your ministry, because you have just taken it into your own hands. To have that sort of ministry. We have this ministry, because God has been so kind and been merciful to us to save we sinners and has given us this ministry – the ministry of our lives.”

“There you are stamping around with all your triumphalism. But it is simply not true,” says Paul, “to say that we have lost heart! We do not lose heart. We haven't given up on you in Corinth. We've visited you. I've written to you. And again, and very soon I will be back in Corinth. I'm not giving up, because I have this ministry, given to me by the mercy of God!”

“Argh,” say these false teachers, “be that as it may. This man Paul isn't 'straight up!' Look at verse 2: ² *But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practise cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.*

“That Paul:” said the false teachers, “basically he's a dishonest man. He's devious – you can never 'nail him down. He's cunning. He's crafty. He's not 'straight up'. He's not a man that you can trust. We've already told you about him.” They say. “How he promises to come and doesn't. How he says he'll do certain things, but doesn't keep to his word. Don't have anything to do with this devious, deceitful trickster.”

“But we are not like that at all,” says Paul, verse 2, “we act in the sight of God. Our great principle,” says Paul, “is that only God matters: so we are not going to be 'moved' by your praise or censure. Only God matters. We are not going to change our programme, our ideals or our way of doing things, simply because of the pressure of the hour. Because it is what God thinks, that matters. Only God matters.

We do it all,” he says at the end of the verse, “whatever we do, in the sight of God. “And as we minister,” says Paul, “people's consciences bear witness to the fact that we are being 'straight up' – straight forward, clean dealing. And all we do,” says Paul, verse 2, “is we open up the truth, and state it. We've renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We are not using any tricks or gimmicks. We are not practising cunningness. We're not trying to get round you in any way at all. We are not handling the Word of God deceitfully – making it say what it doesn't say. We are not diluting the Message or adding to it. All we are doing is manifesting the truth. We stand in front of congregations and we say, 'This is the truth!' and your own consciences bear witness to the fact that our dealings with you are as plain as that.”

“Yes,” say the false teachers, “but he subtracts from the message. And he adds to the message. He handles the Word of God deceitfully.” You can see why they were thinking that. This is their third criticism. Paul has been teaching that God’s Covenant with Israel is ended – it’s fulfilled in all believers¹ in Christ. But they want to get you back to Moses. So they can’t take that on board. Paul has been teaching – he’s mentioned it in this letter – that all God’s promises are “yes”, in Christ Jesus. In other words: God has nothing for you, outside of Christ. But in their religion, God has lots of things for people – outside of Christ.

Paul has been teaching that the Old covenant – however Godly it was and God given – has been superseded by the glorious light of the New Covenant! But they want to live in the Old Covenant! Paul has such high views of Christ, that it leaves them completely bewildered. Because as he is teaching in this particular passage – Christ is the image of God. “We don’t alter the Message at all,” says Paul, “all we do is just say what the truth is! ² ... *the open statement of the truth* ...

“Yes,” say these false teachers, verses 3 & 4, “but! When that Paul preaches, people can’t see what he’s getting at. So he preaches and preaches, but it’s like there is a veil over his understandings. It’s all very well his talking about veils like he did in the last Chapter. But when he preaches there is a veil. People actually listen to the so called Apostle Paul preaching ... but when he’s finished preaching they don’t know what he has said!

“Yes,” says Paul, ³ *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing.* ⁴ *In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

“People don’t understand,” says Paul, “because they are the people they are. That’s the facts of the matter. There is a devil at work. These false teachers don’t seem to make any allowance for that!”

Paul is making it clear that when he is preaching he is preaching to fallen sinners. The fall of mankind – the ruin of the human race – the moral and spiritual catastrophe that has come upon us: Is the work of the devil. It can be traced back to the devil. The devil’s tactic is, first of all, to destroy the thought processes, so that people don’t think straight. Their minds are affected, therefore, of course, their emotions are affected and their will. (Their emotions and their will being two aspects of the same thing.)

What stops them seeing is not in fact that the Message is veiled. What stops them seeing is that their understanding is clouded. The sun can be as bright as bright can be. If somebody can’t see it, it’s simply because they are short-sighted or have cataracts or are totally blind. There is a problem with their sight.

“The fact that people don’t understand my Message,” says Paul, “is a spiritual problem about understanding because of the devil’s work in the human mind. The Gospel can’t be appreciated until the mind has been clarified and illuminated. Until God does something in the thought processes of people!”

1 In the old and new administration.

[There are numerous examples in our modern day experience that confirm the assertion that fallen mankind's mental processes are degraded and consequently are exploited by the devil to keep us from seeing the Message of the Gospel. Here are two examples: of unconverted minds having a limited ability to understand:

A. Inability to appreciate spiritual ideas.

Recently I saw a discussion on a TV programme. Three 'notables' were involved: A woman representing the "LGB..." and pro-abortion lobbies – who had a 'hard done by', petulant demeanour; the female 'anchor' – also defending the anti-Christian view; and a sports commentator – who was vainly trying to present a neutral view.

Their topic was the 'disgraceful fact' that a recently appointed new CEO of a prominent AFL club had affiliation with a Christian Church with published anti 'gay' and anti abortion policies.

In fact the otherwise very suitable candidate who was the Chairman of his particular church group, when faced with the expression of anxiety of the club over the 'inclusiveness' issue, resigned after 1 day in the job! So the topic being pursued in the TV discussion was the despicable cheek of such a Church to have such beliefs. Hence the demeanour of the first participant mentioned.

The idea that there can be things that are against the will of God, unable to be contemplated.

B. Logical conclusions blocked by denying the action of an omnipotent God.

Early last Century a famous scientist (the 'father' of nuclear physics), Ernest Rutherford, deliberately (as with the majority of 'scientists') omitted the possibility of creation by an omnipotent God in applying his 'discovery' of the natural decay series² of U-238 to Pb-206 to measure the age of rock samples since the 'beginning' of the Earth. Results that have been used to 'prove' the 'long' age of the Earth – apparently in order to disprove the validity of the Bible.

Embedded in his theory is the assumption that at the beginning of the decay of an original quantity of U-238, in a small specimen of rock, there was no Pb-206 present. Because denying the creation by God allows the logic that there can be no way of Pb-206 coming into existence other than at the end of the decay series. The proportion of these two isotopes then, in close proximity, in a present sample can use the known half-life properties of the decay series to arrive at the age of the sample.

Whereas if such an original sample came from the creation by God. The proportion of the two created isotopes could have any value. Any amount of Pb-206 would lessen the time that was calculated.]

(Returning to consideration of the passage in 2 Corinthians 4:1-6)

So Paul stands face to face in an open confrontation and rejects these four accusations. They say he's demoralised; not straight up; distorting the Message; and they say his preaching is not clear. He says that it is exactly the opposite: that God is with us; we tell you the truth; we haven't altered anything; and if you don't understand, the problem is in your own spiritual life.

Next week we look at four 'key words' as we continue with this passage.

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Pray also for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we, may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today. Amen.

2 Corinthians 4:1-6

Paul Answers His Critics – Part 2

Per S Olyott

2 Corinthians 4:5

⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

Last week we commenced this passage in which Paul Answers His Critics. There was trouble in the Corinthian church, which was from within the church but brought about by those false teachers that had joined the church since Paul had left. So far, verses 1-4, Paul has addressed and refuted 4 accusations put by these self styled, super-apostles, against him.

Now he continues by **clarifying four key words, found in verses 5 & 6:** *⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness", has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

The first key word is '**proclaim**' (preach KJV). Paul has a ministry. How does he exercise his ministry? By preaching. The moment we mention preaching, people have a whole lot of ideas that come to mind. Long dreary sermons in cold and damp buildings, from people often dressed in a most peculiar way, compared with the customs of this Century, with a certain intonation and inflection of the voice. That may be a popular, but misinformed, view of religious proclamation – preaching.

But the word *kérussó*³ which he uses here, isn't like that at all. It doesn't carry any of those negative images. A news reader on TV would be more like *kerusso*. More like a proclamation by a herald as the New Testament actually uses it. Where someone has a message which has been given to them, which they don't alter, which they transmit. That's all they are to do, but clearly.

This is the preaching which Paul does. The Message, of course, is divinely given. "I don't alter it. I don't shape it. I don't tailor it. I proclaim. (I preach.) I take a Message and transmit it to you." Says Paul.

There was no media scrum in those days. No TV. No internet. Nothing like that. But there were heralds. Much of the population couldn't read! (That's why we see the remains of enormous amphitheatres from the Roman Empire times. Where the acoustics were so cleverly constructed to allow dignitaries like the current Caesar to instruct thousands of *plebs*⁴ at a time, directly by voice alone.)

But when Caesar had anything to say to his Empire he also sent out heralds. They had his given message which they gave word for word on street corners and in public

³ **κηρύσσω** *kérussó* (*kay-roos'-so*) to be a herald, proclaim

⁴ **Plebs:** The common people of ancient Rome

buildings – wherever people could be found. In schools and places of study and theatres. They transmitted the message. That’s all they did. “That’s all I’m doing,” says Paul. “I haven’t invented anything. I’m just giving to you what’s been given to me. I preach!”

The second ‘word’ is: ⁵ ... *Jesus Christ as **Lord*** ... The focus of Paul’s preaching was the **Lordship** of Christ. His Message wasn’t basically about me and you. Though it bears on that. His Message wasn’t basically about the listener. Though he has plenty to say to the listener. His message is basically about the Lordship of Christ. He’s telling the world about Christ! Who He is. What He’s done. What He’s doing. What He’s going to do. His Message is focused on Christ. While if he, Paul, has any place at all, Verse 5. It is simply, that he is a servant of his congregation for Jesus’ sake.

Now false teachers draw attention to themselves. That’s particularly what they were doing as we read in 2 Corinthians. They were parading themselves as ‘super-apostles’. People of strange drawing power, wonderful gifts and compelling power to move congregations and sway you. But Paul says, “We’re preaching Jesus as Lord.”

The third key word is the word, ‘**glory**’: He’s already mentioned it in verse 4, but he mentions it again in Verse 6, in this passage. (Together with the earlier Chapter, and the rest of Chapter 4, he uses the word 16 times.)

What is ‘glory’? In the old Tabernacle, they had this wonderful Shekhinah⁵. A burning flame came over the Tabernacle at night and this great cloud hung over it in the day time. It was called the Shekhinah, glory. But it was really only a symbol, a ‘picture’ of glory. What actually is glory? Glory is the god-ness of God. (Not the goodness of God!) It’s the god-ness of God. And when we look at Christ, we see the god-ness of God in Christ. We see the otherness, the wonder, and the majesty of God. And we haven’t got the words to do this justice. The Scripture uses the word ‘glory’. When I see that God is God. Then I am seeing glory! The wonderful thing about heaven which we often call glory. (And sometimes even called glory in Scripture). Is that there is where we see the god-ness of God. Without any obstacle.

“The Lord Jesus Christ,” Paul tells us, in Verse 4, “The Gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ, is the image of God.” So that when you see Christ you see all that God is. He is the image of God. Looking at Christ, you see the glory of Christ who is the image of God. You see, therefore, the glory of God when you see Christ. The god-ness of God when looking at Christ!

He will say the same thing in verse 6. It is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness. Who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ. We come to know the god-ness of God. The light breaks upon us. But we see it in the face of Jesus Christ.

⁵ The **Shekhinah** was often pictured as a cloud or as a pillar of fire and was referred to as the **glory of God**. The Shekhinah was also understood to be present in the [Tabernacle](#) and the [Temple in Jerusalem](#), and to be seated at the right hand of God.

This brings us to the fourth key word, which is the word **'light'**. As Paul stamped down the Damascus road that day, as a Pharisee – and as a Christian killer. Suddenly he was struck down by a light. Which shone at noon-day: brighter than the sun! It was a physical light, but only a 'picture' of the spiritual reality which was taking place in his life.

We, men and women, live in darkness. Then the glory bursts upon us and what do we see? We see the truth of it all. The wonder of it all and the fact of it all. Which we didn't believe in before. And where do we see it? We see it, Verse 6, in the face of Jesus Christ!

We don't bring people to God by sitting down and using medieval arguments for the existence of God, because the light of the knowledge of the glory of God is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. That's why all this talk about: all religions being basically the same. Is just a manifestation of the speaker's ignorance. Because all religions are not basically the same thing. Because the light of the knowledge of the glory of God is seen only – and is seen, thank God – in the face of Jesus Christ. We look at: a baby; a child; a Nazarene; a teacher; a crucified victim; a buried corpse; a risen Son of God; an ascended Mediator; a coming King; a divine Judge. And as we look at Him, we see the glory of God.

This brings us now, with all that in mind, to **four points to take to heart:**

The first is: **Do we understand why people don't believe?** It's not that intellectual proof is lacking. It's not that the Gospel is unreasonable. It's not that the Gospel Message is so difficult, that only members of MENSA can understand it. People don't believe because of a spiritual problem in the mind.⁶ They actually can't think straight. Because all their thought processes have been poisoned. Everything is out of tune: wrong; disorientated; broken! There has to be a miracle in their mind. There has to be something done in their mind. There has to be an illumination of their thought processes. Something has got to go on in their thinking.

The problem why people don't believe is a spiritual problem. And the only answer to death is life, and the only answer to the darkness is light! The only answer to the spiritual problem is the 'new birth', the regeneration by the divine light of God in the Gospel coming into their minds.

Now the second lesson: **How does that 'light', that "life", come into their minds?** Not by adopting their presuppositions! Let's explain: The ordinary man in the street believes, without any proof, that you've got to have proof to believe anything! But he believes that without any proof! In other words he's got a presupposition. He has an idea which he takes for granted without testimony. You can't, for example, believe in God without proof. You can't believe this or that without a certain measure of evidence.

6 See the added examples mentioned last week.

Unfortunately, so many Christians, recognise others with these presuppositions, and go on to adopt them themselves when they talk to these others. Paul is saying that that is exactly what you should not do. You must go with an open statement of the truth. That's what you do. You don't play their game. You play by God's rules. Presenting an open, unaltered, undiluted, un-tailored, non- tampered-with, Message. You tell them the truth. Without deceit or gimmicks. You give them the Gospel! In words. God takes over His own words and honours His own truth and sets them free. So we understand at last what Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free." (John 8:32)

People are set free by proclamation! So what do you proclaim? Whether it's public preaching; private conversations; radio broadcasts; recordings: or personal emails and letters. What do we proclaim? **What is the content of the Message.** This is the third point to take to heart:

We have the answer in verse 5. ⁵ ... *not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, ...* What the world needs. And my 'lost' neighbour, and family members need: is the truth about Jesus Christ. They need to hear the truth.

Tell them about the Trinity; tell them about two glorious Natures in One Person; tell them about the facts of His life and death and burial, resurrection, ascension, place in glory; and coming again! Tell them about His teaching; His parables; His promises; His warnings; His threats; His predictions. Tell them about Christ.

Which brings us to the fourth point to take to heart: People don't believe because of the spiritual dampening of their thought processes. They are delivered by the truth. The truth that delivers them is the truth about Jesus Christ. But ... **God uses human instruments!** Human instruments. Not super-human instruments. Paul has already talked about weakness. He will talk about it more and more as the letter goes on. He's already talked about feelings; mixed emotions; fears; ordinary people. Send ordinary people – with truth in their mouths. But now they have to persevere. The world is hostile. The world is indifferent – and even worse. They have thousands of ideas in their heads. So many are evil ones. We are not coming to neutral ground. We are not coming to open ears! To 'good' ground.

But still God uses humans to speak the Word and we have to persevere. Often, like Paul, we will have problems because of what is going on in our church or churches. But the human instrument must continue to persevere and give out the truth. And the Ministry of the Gospel will do its own work.

At the end of the day this passage is very exciting. God is stronger than the devil. All the damage that the devil has done can be undone. It is done by the power of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Presented by ordinary people in simple words. Which are taken by God's Word and Spirit to effect the result. A result for which we get none of the credit. God gets all the glory! [2008]

Pray also for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we, may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today. Amen.

2 Corinthians 4:7-18

Treasures in Earthen Vessels

Per S Olyott

2 Corinthians 4:12

¹² **So death is at work in us, but life in you.**

Various Hymns sing of the wondrous light of God in the lives of men, especially through His Word. So we come again to the Scriptures and 2 Corinthians 4:7-18.

Paul taught us four things last time when we were studying the earlier part of Chapter 4:

- Consider a Christian Congregation, where most are actually believers, thank God, but some are not. Why is it that some are believers and some are not? What actually is the problem? Is it because the Gospel is too simple or too difficult? What is the problem?

The problem is spelt out to us in verse 4: ⁴ *In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* There is a spiritual person at work. He's working in their minds. He's corrupted and perverted people's thought processes. So that is why they don't believe.

How is it that you believe? How are people delivered from unbelief? By philosophy. Argument. Clever persuasion. Salesmanship. Pressure.

Verse 2: ² *But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practise cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.* God spoke into the 'darkness' and said, "Let their be light!" God speaks through *the open statement of the truth*. Bringing light into polluted, diabolically twisted minds.

So people are brought to faith in Christ by the open statement of the message.

- What is the message? Verse 5: ⁵ *For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.* So the message is not primarily a message about man and his needs. (Though this can be a welcome consequential blessing.) The message is first of all a message about the glories of Christ – to the ultimate glory of God. His Person and His Word. It's a proclamation. A statement. An announcement. A heralding ... of Jesus Christ. It's the message of Christ! Which enlightens the mind and brings people to conversion.
- How is the Message proclaimed? Verse 1: ¹ *Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God,^[1] we do not lose heart.* Verse 5: ⁵ *For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.* The Message, for all who are made capable to understand it, is pro-

claimed by human instruments.

- Which brings us to today's passage: what sort of instruments? What sort of people. "Super Apostles", said these new people in the Corinth church, "It has to be somebody special. You have to have special gifts. Have a particular personality. Be dynamic. You've got to be compelling." That's exactly the opposite from what Paul is going to teach us now. However that is still the mind-set today! We are led to believe that you cannot speak up for Christ, even in the situation you are in, because you are not 'somebody special'. Many people believe that nobody can be a preacher of the Gospel unless they are very special indeed. This mentality is running right throughout our churches. It's exactly the opposite of what Paul is saying.

What sort of instrument does God use? We will find five points in this passage. The first is in verse 7:

- **Ordinary people.** ⁷ *But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.* "What do you have Paul?" Treasure! We have in our hands this wonderful treasure – a diamond. Look at it's light shine. Look at the value of it. The beauty of it. But what is this treasure? Look at verse 6: ⁶ *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness", has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* Our Message is a treasure. It is a jewel. It is beyond all value. It is knowing the god-ness of God through Jesus Christ!⁷ We have that treasure. But what contains the treasure?

Verse 7: Is it some beautiful casket? Some gold box. Some startling container. Or even something a little more ordinary with beautiful wrapping on it and ribbons. What holds the treasure? Note that if you have ever bought a jewel they always put it in a nice box. But God's jewel is not in a nice box. It's in a clay jar – a humble, everyday, earthen-ware jar. Nothing particular to look at. Easily broken! Very – and here is a key word – fragile!

Why does God put this glorious jewel in something so despicable? Verse 7: ⁷ ... *to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.* The ordinary – ordinary – ordinary people speak the Gospel. Ordinary people proclaim the truth. Ordinary men and women talk about Jesus Christ. Ordinary people become Gospel preachers. So that the power can be seen to be in the Message. In the power of God. In the sheer force of truth. And not in the instrument! That way God gets all the Glory and praise all the time. ⁷ ... *the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.* We all should love this truth.

Olyott is able to witness, that he walked into a church in 1957 as an unbeliever and walked out of it as a Christian. An ordinary – ordinary man preached. So ordinary that they was nothing to say, particularly, about him. But the power was in the Message!

⁷ See an earlier Sermon (Paul Answers His Critics – Part 2) for the origin and definition of the Olyott invented word which means God's full and unique glory.

The power is in the Message. That's why there is hope. It's the power of God. We don't need Super-Apostles. We don't need those people with their great gifts and compelling personalities. With startling, dazzling, attractive Ministries. Ordinary men and women – speaking the truth. Ordinary people. Earthen vessels.

- Now let's look at verses 8 & 9: **Suffering (afflicted) people.** ⁸ *We are afflicted in every way ...* (Here afflicted⁸ means to be hard pressed from outside myself) "O the pressures! We know the pressures", says Paul. Physical pressure. Emotional pressure – mental pressure. "We know all about that!"
Verse 8: "We are *perplexed*. Sometimes we just don't know what to do. We haven't got all the answers. We haven't got quick solutions. We don't always know what the right thing to do in every situation. We're muddled up very often. Completely puzzled. Perplexed.
Verse 9: ⁹ *persecuted*. "God doesn't deliver us from being hounded, by unbelievers." Hounded⁹ – put to flight – is the word actually used there. "There are people on our tail all the time trying to pull us down. And we haven't had any miraculous deliverance from that!"
Verse 9: ⁹ ... *struck down*. We might say in modern English – caste down or de...pressed – depressed!

Suffering people: pressure, puzzlement, physical danger, depression. We are physical and mental jars of clay. There is nothing about us that is 'macho' – physically or mentally. We just don't have the resistance that other people have got. We are not 'bouncing' triumphantly through life. We are ordinary, suffering people ...

But! Verse 8: "We are afflicted – hard pressed – in every way. We do know the pressure! But we are not crushed. We never get to the point where the life has been completely squeezed out of us. (Thank God for that!)
We are perplexed – often we just don't know what to do. But we never despair – throw up our hands, 'throw in the towel' and say, 'That's it!'. Because there are some things that sustain us – holding us up. Something that is super-natural (The whole Christian life is super-natural)." That's what Paul is saying, of course.

Verse 9: "Persecuted. We've got people on us all the time but we are not abandoned – forsaken. We do have a sense of the presence of God in our lives. Cast down – struck down, depressed, but not destroyed." We come to the end of ourselves, we say. Yet when we come to this point we find that we have not come to the end. There is still something there that stops us going under completely! "It is the power of God! *the surpassing power (which) belongs to God and not to us*. There is something supernatural. Inexplicable. Beyond human definition. Some spiritual resource that doesn't make us mighty, dynamic or su-

8 **θλιβόμενοι** (thlibomenoi) from **θλίβω** (thlibo): (a) I make narrow (strictly: by pressure); I press upon, (b) I persecute, press hard.

9 **διωκόμενοι** (diōkomenoi) to put to flight, pursue, by impl. to persecute

per, but does stop us caving in completely” That’s what the Apostle Paul is saying. “We are all ordinary people, Suffering people and ...

- **Dying people.** Verses 10-12: ¹⁰ *always carrying in the body the death of Jesus*, ... Now Paul will come back to this theme later in the letter. He will give us a whole list of the things that he suffers. He will talk about his ‘dying every day’. There are things that happen to us, which are mentioned in Verses 8 & 9, but we haven’t even begun the list. There are all sorts of things, which happen to us, which would not happen to us if we weren’t Christians.

So you’re at work and you refuse to ‘bend the rules’. So they pass over you for promotion. That wouldn’t have happened to you if you hadn’t been united to Christ! You are a medic – a doctor – you decide to go abroad to some poor mission station, which needs help at this moment. When you come back. You find, that because of the salary structures and everything else. The fact that you’ve been ‘out there’ and ‘not here’, means that you will lose out professionally – to the end of your life. It would never have happened to you if it hadn’t been for your love of Christ and His people. Or you go into some Christian work and you put your whole security on the line. Not just for a year or two, but for ever afterwards. It wouldn’t have happened to you, if you were not motivated by love for Christ.

There are countless examples: there are Christian children without friends; there are single persons, without husbands or wives; there are families who are ostracised by some of their neighbours. There’s all sorts of dying going on. All the time. In the Christian life! Things that would never happen to us if we hadn’t been united to Christ.

But the Scriptures teach, Verses 10, 11 & 12, that ‘life comes out of death’. That’s the glory of the Gospel. My Saviour dies – I live! My Saviour goes into the tomb, but comes out. The corn of wheat goes into the ground and therefore it bears a harvest. Where there is no death there is no life. That’s the Gospel. But where there is death – there is life. Which is the message of 2 Corinthians.

Verse 10: ¹⁰ *always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.* Paul – all and any Christian – your under pressure, but you never quite have all the life squeezed out of you. That is the life of Jesus in your body. Verse 8: You’re perplexed – but never completely done for. It’s the life of Jesus in your emotions. You’re hounded – but never completely abandoned. Always having the sense that there is somebody else with you. It’s the life of Jesus in your body.

Depressed! Christians can be depressed. Read up on Church History to find many examples, where the great leaders were prone to depression. But not destroyed! It’s the life of Jesus in your body.

Verse 11: ¹¹ *For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, ... Every day is a dying day, because Christianity is all about dying – ... so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. We are living testimonies to the life of Christ, in a human life.*

So then Verse 12: Of course! There would be no spiritual life in Corinth, if it hadn't been for this sort of death for Paul – he didn't die in the final sense, but was 'dying daily': Such sacrifices! Such suffering. Shipwreck. Travel. Hunger. Nakedness. Prison. Persecution. Beating. So much more ... But at last the Gospel came to Corinth. Through a thousand 'deaths' he eventually got to that city. So a 'dying' man preached a message and spiritual life came to the Corinthians. ¹² *So death is at work in us, but life in you.*

Ordinary people. Suffering people. Dying people. Convinced people. But this may raise a question! Which we will answer next week as we continue with this passage.

[2122]

Pray also for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we, may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today. Amen.

2 Corinthians 4:7-18

Treasures in Earthen Vessels – Part 2

Per S Olyott

2 Corinthians 4:16

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

In a previous week we were exploring that the Message of the Gospel, for all who are made capable to understand it, is proclaimed by human instruments.

Which brings us to today's passage: what sort of instruments? What sort of people? "Super Apostles!", said these new people in the Corinth church, "It has to be somebody special. You have to have special gifts. Have a particular personality. Be dynamic. You've got to be compelling." That's exactly the opposite from what Paul is going to teach us now.

However that is still the mind-set today! We are led to believe that you cannot speak up for Christ, even in the situation you are in, because you are not 'somebody special'. Many people believe that nobody can be a preacher of the Gospel unless they are very special indeed. This mentality is running right throughout our churches. It's exactly the opposite of what Paul is saying.

What sort of instrument does God use? We will find five points in this passage. So far, last week we have found that the human instruments, used by God are to be: **Ordinary people, Suffering people and Dying people**. But this may raise a question, a problem, in the mind of an unbeliever! "If the Christian life brings all that on a person. Why bother with it? If speaking up for Christ and being true to your principles, brings all this on to you. Why bother?"

The answer is there in verse 13: ¹³ *Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke", we also believe, and so we also speak, ...* Because true Christians all, if you are truly born again— whereas many in 'Christianised'¹⁰ congregations are not! If you are truly born again you've got a fire lit inside you! Sometimes it's very low – but you can't put it out. So you can't keep quiet forever. It can't be done. Eventually a fire catches something else and burns again.

a. We are **Convinced people**. That's why we can't quit. We are convinced of the glory of God. We've seen it in the face of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are convinced of the truth of Scripture. The integrity of the Gospel. The wonder of the Christian life – the certainty of heaven. We are convinced about it. It's burnt into us. If we are the only one in a school who believes this. We can't stop believing it. If we are the only one in a family who believes it. We can't stop believing it, because it's a fact! And God forbid, if we were the only one in a church who believes it. We couldn't stop believing it because it is a fact.

¹⁰ See an earlier week where being Christianised implied taking on a Christian flavour without being actually a true Christian.

We are convinced people – that’s why we speak! Besides, Verse 14, this life isn’t the real life. We believe and so we also speak what we believe: ¹⁴ *knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.* We know that Christ rose from the dead!

Olyott reports his experience when in a class learning French: “We were asked if we would discuss the existence of God. Everybody was happy to discuss the existence of God. I said, ‘No. Let’s discuss the resurrection of Christ.’ At that moment nobody wanted to go any further.”

You can talk about the existence of God all day long, because everybody can have their own ‘airy fairy’ ideas. But when you’re talking about a God working in history, who brings out of a Jerusalem grave a real Jesus of Nazareth, it’s a different issue altogether. We Christians believe that God moved and raised that body – crucified body – out of the tomb. The Spirit of God worked. And that way He was publicly paraded as the Son of God. Which He was, of course, always, but was publicly paraded as such.

We’re convinced of that, but we are also convinced of the meaning of that. That when He came out of the grave, we came out of the grave with Him! That’s why we have spiritual life now. That’s why we will have a physical life after the end of the world. When we are raised from the dead: in the likeness of His glorious body. So, for us, the real world is that one! Not the present one. This is a real world only in a sense. Because it is passing. It’s temporary. All our ambitions, at the ‘end of the day’, are merely for just a few decades. Our world will be gone. Every part of it will be gone. No more space, Sun, Moon, Planets. No more Galaxies. All melted down and remade. The real world is that remade world. Because we are convinced that, that is the real world, we are not going to be quiet about it in this one! We are convinced people.

Verse 15: ¹⁵ *For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.* “So we keep going,” says Paul, “We keep going proclaiming the truth, because that’s how you Corinthians got saved and other people shall get saved. As God’s grace spreads through this life, that life, the other life the many lives. The number of people saved by the grace of God is being built up all the time. He’s thanking God. She’s thanking God. They’re thanking God. The praise goes up to God. As the Gospel is proclaimed, the swell of praise to God increases in number and volume. He gets all the glory!

We are convinced people! We are ordinary people. Suffering People. Dying people – we really are! But we are convinced people and ...

b. We are **Heaven-bound People**. Verses 16-18.

Verse 16, the middle of the verse: *Though our outer self (man), is wasting away, ...* When Paul is saying *our outer self* (or man) he is not saying this as the Greeks would. To them the outer man was the ‘fingers and toes’, while the inner

man was the thoughts and emotions. Not with Paul: the outer man is the fingers and toes and all that makes me a mortal man. My thoughts and emotions – everything else about me. And it's perishing!

Older people are not as strong as they used to be. Blemishes on the skin and wrinkles on the face that weren't there years ago. Climb Bluff Knoll¹¹, when at Albany - Mt Barker, and find that it is taller than it used to be. Don't know why you might want to do this, but that's the way it happens. At 18 you can run to the top. Now the last 20 minutes nearly kills you. The outer man – all that makes a mortal man – is perishing! We don't remember like we used to. Get names mixed up. Think that certain things have happened and they haven't happened. Mix dreams with reality. Become senile – sometimes completely afflicted with it. The outer man is perishing!

But we walk by faith, not by sight. God is taking down this present structure – the outer man. Why would He take it down? Why would God take down a structure which He Himself has put up? Because He's got something better behind that structure – the true inner self, being renewed day by day. Behind the hessian, plastic and scaffolding, there's a new building. While that hessian, plastic and scaffolding are getting older day by day. Feeble and worn out. It will come down. And when it comes down you'll see the real building behind. That's Paul's picture. ¹⁶ ... *Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.*

Behind all that scaffolding, hidden by barriers there are bricklayers working away, plasterers, architects surveying and directing, electricians and plumbers. The glorious building is going up. Unseen to the human eye. That's exactly what is happening to us. So. We don't lose heart.

The poor unconverted man or woman. They think that this life is the only one. But their conscience is telling them that it isn't. They believe that in a few short years they'll be dead in the grave and forgotten. Yet their conscience won't let them live with that thought convincingly, because they know in their soul that there is a judgement. Nevertheless they keep thinking about death as the end. So they choose not to think about it.

The Christian mind can't think like that. We don't lose heart! It isn't the end. Our outer man is perishing. But there is something else going on. So let's 'weight up' the alternatives: on one side of the scale, 'affliction' – it's real – depression, distress, difficulty, pain, illness, old-age, depleting faculties, persecution. Everything which makes this life painful and difficult and tiresome. What's on the other side? Glory – the god-ness of God!

Verse 17: How does our scale balance up? One side goes right down. The other so very light by comparison. No comparison! The one is very, very heavy

11 Olyott uses the example of the Welsh running up Mt Snowden.

– it far outweighs the other. It is worth infinitely more. There's no balance at all. The imbalance is there right from the start! The lesser? Affliction – which is but for a moment. It is really nothing when measured to eternity. It's very light. Nothing compared with hell. It's but for a moment!
It's working for us a much more – exceeding – eternal way to glory. Eternal!

That's why we can say that this life is not the real life. That's the real life – eternal – that's why we don't lose heart. That's where we are going. That's where we belong.

So that's where we look, Verse 18. ¹⁸ *as we look not to the things that are seen ...* (At this point, may we pause briefly to make an observation: every mistake that can be made in the Christian life can be traced to forgetting this verse! Every mistake you've ever made as a Christian. Every fault. Every fall, which has ever been in your spiritual life. Can be traced to you or me forgetting this verse. ¹⁸ *... we look not to the things that are seen ...* Because the moment you do ... everything goes wrong.

If all a student can see is the good time they're having or the heaviness of your studies or the hope of your degree ... see, see, see. Then your Christian life will go very wrong at University. God intended life to be good; it's important that you study; it's great that you get a degree. But if that's what you see, then you are in real trouble. See the present as the time preparing you for that destination. The studies preparing you to glorify God here, before you go there. That diploma is something that will convince men and women that you have done what you have done, but the studies are for the glory of God who has made you and whose god-ness – glory – you will one day behold. You've got to look to the unseen.

So, ¹⁸ *... we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, ...* Partners, children, houses, schools, jobs, churches: transient! *... but the things that are unseen are eternal.* God the Father/God the Son – His divine nature, God the Holy Spirit, the holy angels, the New Jerusalem, eternal reward: the things that are not seen are eternal.

So Paul has taught us a further two things: He's taught us about the reality of the Christian life. Do you expect to go through the Christian life without ageing, without illness, difficulty, bereavement, without problems, without distress, or emotional trouble, depression, sadness, persecution? Don't kid yourself. The reality of the Christian life is that all those pains which come to ordinary people will come to you and extra ones. Because of all sorts of things that happen to us, which only happen to us because we are Christians. That's the reality of the Christian life!
The excitement is at the end of the Christian life. All this is leading to that. This is light weight – that is glorious; this is temporary – that is eternal; this is what we see – but that's where our 'eyes' should be fixed!

Meanwhile the Gospel goes on being proclaimed in the world, by ordinary, suffering, dying, convinced in being heaven-bound, people, such as ourselves.

Lord God we are men and women and you are God. We are very grateful that you are our God and that we see Your Glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Give us grace to 'walk by faith' and not by sight, until we see Him as He is. For His Name's sake. Amen.

[2140]

Pray also for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we, may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today. Amen.

Delivered Sunday 29th January, 2023