

## Lesson 3      18 May 2014

### The Christian's Eternal Vision

**Lesson Scope:** [2 Corinthians 4:7](#) - [2 Corinthians 5:16](#)

#### Lesson Focus

In the previous lesson, Paul showed how greatly the power and glory of the Gospel ministry exceeded that of the Law. The Holy Spirit fills the believer's heart with light and glory and prints the Gospel message in his inner being.

In this lesson Paul shows that the infinite treasure of the Gospel is committed to men who are living in, but not after, the flesh. Satan and the world assault this earthen vessel and cause the Gospel minister much distress. In spite of this, divine power and love fill the believer with a glorious hope that preserves him in trial, presses his spirit to witness, and prepares him for his Lord's presence. This hope is not only joyous but also solemn, because all men are accountable to God.

The power of the Gospel in the believer's life dispels unbelief and reveals eternal realities. The believer now has the assurance "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Too often we are like Martha—cumbered with the cares and worries of this life. We need heavenly vision to teach us what life is really about.

As for enduring hardships for the sake of the Gospel, we have it extremely good in America and many other Western nations. We read books about suffering but experience little of it firsthand.

Do we really know Jesus? The Jesus of modern Christianity is forgiving, understanding, and good to get to know. Perhaps our Jesus is the imagination of our flesh. This lesson teaches that we must know Jesus as the Holy Spirit reveals Him in the Scriptures.

**Lesson Aim:** To consider how eternal vision affects the Christian's life and service.

**Theme Verse:** [1 Peter 5:10](#). But the God of all grace, who has called us

unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.

## Lesson Text

### "Treasure in Earthen Vessels"

2 Corinthians 4:7-10<sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.<sup>8</sup> *We are* troubled on every side, yet not distressed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair;<sup>9</sup> Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;<sup>10</sup> Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

### "We Look ... at the Things Which Are Not Seen"

2 Corinthians 4:13-18<sup>13</sup> We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak;<sup>14</sup> Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present *us* with you.<sup>15</sup> For all things *are* for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.<sup>16</sup> For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day.<sup>17</sup> For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory;<sup>18</sup> While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

2 Corinthians 5:1-5<sup>1</sup> For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.<sup>2</sup> For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:<sup>3</sup> If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.<sup>4</sup> For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.<sup>5</sup> Now he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing *is* God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:8<sup>8</sup> We are confident, *I say*, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

## **"The Love of Christ Constraineth Us"**

2 Corinthians 5:9-16 <sup>9</sup> Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. <sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad. <sup>11</sup> Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences. <sup>12</sup> For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to *answer* them which glory in appearance, and not in heart. <sup>13</sup> For whether we be beside ourselves, *it is* to God: or whether we be sober, *it is* for your cause. <sup>14</sup> For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: <sup>15</sup> And *that* he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. <sup>16</sup> Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we *him* no more.

### **Questions for Study**

#### **"Treasure in Earthen Vessels"**

1. Why are Christians not overcome by the difficulties they face?
2. How does the life of a Christian manifest the death of Christ? the life of Christ?

#### **"We Look ... at the Things Which Are Not Seen"**

3. What is faith, and how does it affect the Christian's view of life?
4. In this temporal world, how can we increase our consciousness of the eternal?
5. What blessings do we anticipate having in our eternal bodies?

#### **"The Love of Christ Constraineth Us"**

6. For what things will we need to give an account at the judgment seat of Christ?
7. Why does the love of Christ constrain us?
8. How does the Christian's eternal vision affect his daily life?

### **Analyzing the Passage**

This treasure (2 Corinthians 4:7) refers to the Gospel—"the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" (2 Corinthians 4:6). Earthen vessels (2

Corinthians 4:7) are our physical bodies. The vessel is of much less value than the treasure. If God used a spectacular vessel, such as an angel, men would worship the vessel (see Judges 13:17-18). In itself, an earthen vessel is fragile and defenseless. By the excellency of God's power (2 Corinthians 4:7), both the vessel and the treasure are sustained in tribulation, bringing great honor and glory to His Name.

"Our house which is from heaven" (2 Corinthians 5:2) is our glorified eternal body, which stands in sharp contrast to our present, temporary tabernacle (2 Corinthians 5:1).

Earnest (2 Corinthians 5:5) is a pledge. The Holy Spirit is our assurance of future blessedness.

Godly fear or "the terror of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:11) and "the love of Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:14) constrain [take hold of, press] the believer to proclaim Christ.

Consider Paul's logic in verses 14 and 15. If all needed Christ's death to give them life, then all were dead. Since Christ gave everything, even His life, for us, our entire life belongs to Him.

## **Principles and Applications**

### **"Treasure in Earthen Vessels"**

1. Human weakness and limitation provide opportunity for God to demonstrate His power (2 Corinthians 4:7). Gideon and his army looked like a cake of barley bread (inferior and worthless) to the Midianites. But the torches hidden in their pitchers represented the power of God. The publican who smote upon his breast and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner," became a living evidence of God's saving grace. When we, like Peter, have toiled all night and caught nothing, we are at our wit's end and are ready to yield to Christ. Then the glory can be ascribed only to Him.

2. Difficulties beset but cannot defeat the child of God (2 Corinthians 4:8-9). The difficulties Paul mentions result specifically from identity with Christ. They do not overcome us, because we follow a victorious Leader. "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

3. Identifying with Christ in sacrifice gives evidence of His life within us (4:10). An early martyr book was called (in English) *The Sacrifice of*

the Lord. We might not face a martyr's death, but we yield our lives a "living sacrifice." How does the sacrifice concept affect our daily choices of food, furniture, clothing, and vehicles? Are you satisfied with an out-of-date tractor or kitchen range? Does sacrifice influence your witnessing, your prayers, or your use of time?

Sacrifice as an end in itself is doleful asceticism. We should joyfully testify to the world that we are not a part of its system; we live in expectation of a better world to come.

### **"We Look ... at the Things Which Are Not Seen"**

4. Eternal vision springs from faith (4:13, 14). Faith is a firm conviction producing a full acknowledgment of God's revelation or truth. Abraham "believed in the LORD" (Genesis 15:6). His faith rested on a living Person, God Himself. God's promise was not the object of Abraham's faith; it merely provided for faith's exercise. Abraham stood on the hills of Canaan with God and looked for a city with foundations. Lot stood there also, but he saw the well-watered plains of Sodom. (See Hebrews 11:9, 10, 13-16.)

5. Earthly afflictions are brief and light compared to our eternal reward (2 Corinthians 4:16-17). Men may mock or condemn us. If Jesus says, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," what does it matter? Men may take away our earthly possessions or treat us dishonestly in business because we are nonresistant. When we sit down with Jesus in His throne, what will that matter? (See Revelation 3:21.) We may have tribulation during our brief earthly existence, but when we receive a crown of eternal life, the time of trouble will seem like a few days. (See Revelation 2:10.)

6. Eternal vision focuses on the unseen and permanent rather than on the visible and temporary (2 Corinthians 4:18). Which is more real, that which can be seen and felt or God and all the hosts of heaven? What seems real on earth is only a bubble that will soon disappear. Health and strength fade, wealth evaporates, and human relationships disappoint us.

Men of faith lay up treasures in heaven. These treasures are God's reward for giving a cup of cold water to a little one, praying for the lost, visiting the sick, ministering to those in prison, teaching our children, and sacrificing for schools, publishing efforts, and missions. The more

treasure we lay up in heaven, the more our perception of what is truly real will grow.

7. For the Christian, death is the door to immortality in the presence of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:1-5, 8). For the present, our communion with Christ is limited by our earthly finiteness: we cannot grasp His infinity; we see through a glass darkly; maintenance of this earthly body requires much time and energy; trials and temptations distract our minds. But a great change is coming! This corruptible will put on incorruption, and this mortal will put on immortality. Death will be swallowed up in victory. We shall see Him face to face, and we shall know Him as He now knows us.

### **"The Love of Christ Constraineth Us"**

8. Eternal vision fosters a strong sense of accountability (2 Corinthians 5:9-11). Accountability is personal. "For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:10-12). We will give an account for our words (Matthew 12:36), for our efforts to warn the wicked (Ezekiel 3:18-21) and to spread the Gospel (Matthew 28:18-20), for the use of our abilities and resources (Matthew 25:14-30), and for our influence on others (Luke 17:1, 2).

9. Divine love motivates an effort to win souls regardless of their superficial differences (2 Corinthians 5:13-16). Urgent! Preach the Gospel! How can we be lethargic if salvation required the sacrificial death of God's only begotten Son?

The Gospel message has universal appeal. Have we comprehended the simple truth that Christ died for all? Do we believe that Christ desires to save the President, the senator, the dishonest banker, our friendly neighbor, our family doctor, and the addict?

### **Important Teachings**

1. Human weakness and limitation provide opportunity for God to demonstrate His power (2 Corinthians 4:7).
2. Difficulties beset but cannot defeat the child of God (2 Corinthians 4:8-9).
3. Identifying with Christ in sacrifice gives evidence of His life within

us (2 Corinthians 4:10).

4. Eternal vision springs from faith (2 Corinthians 4:13-14).

5. Earthly afflictions are brief and light compared to our eternal reward (2 Corinthians 4:16-17).

6. Eternal vision focuses on the unseen and permanent rather than on the visible and temporary (2 Corinthians 4:18).

7. For the Christian, death is the door to immortality in the presence of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:1-2, 4-5, 8).

8. Eternal vision fosters a strong sense of accountability (2 Corinthians 5:9-11).

9. Divine love motivates an effort to win souls regardless of their superficial differences (2 Corinthians 5:13-16).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. Why are Christians not overcome by the difficulties they face? Christ is with them to comfort, encourage, and guide them. Christ has overcome the world, and He enables them to do the same.

2. How does the life of a Christian manifest the death of Christ? the life of Christ?

When we reject the appeals of our carnal nature, the world, and the devil, we show that we have been crucified with Christ.

When we joyfully sacrifice our wants and desires for the cause of Christ and bear the fruit of the Spirit, we exemplify the life of Christ.

3. What is faith, and how does it affect the Christian's view of life?

See Hebrews 11:1. Faith is a firm conviction that God Himself is as He has revealed Himself, that He is able to fulfill His promises, and that He will do so.

By faith the Christian counts the cost of sacrificing for Christ and knows that the rewards are immeasurably greater than the cost. He does not complain about the toil, weariness, and inconvenience of the Lord's work (Philippians 4:11). He is satisfied with a simple lifestyle so that he can give to the Lord's work. By faith, the Christian knows that, although the American business model might produce funds for missions, it will not promote the humble Gospel of Jesus

4. In this temporal world, how can we increase our consciousness of the eternal?

We focus on heavenly things by reading Scripture, praying, placing our

treasure in heaven, and by making decisions in light of the future. By placing our treasure in heaven, our hearts are drawn there. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." We should often remind ourselves and each other that we are only strangers and pilgrims on this earth. Our homes, businesses, and general equipage should agree with our talk.

5. What blessings do we anticipate having in our eternal bodies? We anticipate a release from all the burdens our natural bodies place upon our souls. We anticipate freedom from persecution and affliction for the cause of Christ. We anticipate freedom from the need to continually crucify our carnal nature and flesh. We anticipate a fuller and richer communion with Christ throughout eternity.

6. For what things will we need to give an account at the judgment seat of Christ?

We will give an account for our personal lives, for our brotherhood relationships, for our witness to the Gospel message, and for our efforts to warn men of sin and the coming Judgment.

7. Why does the love of Christ constrain us?

When we consider the great cost of Jesus' sacrifice, we realize the greatness of men's need. When we consider the universal extent of His great provisions, we understand that all men are in need of salvation. When we understand that His death gives us spiritual life, then we know that our life belongs to His service.

8. How does the Christian's eternal vision affect his daily life?

Because of his eternal vision, the Christian is joyful in persecution, separate from the world, holy in his character, zealous in witnessing, and diligent in laying up treasures in heaven.

## Summarizing the Lesson

### Ten Thousand Times Ten Thousand

Ten thousand times ten thousand, in sparkling raiment bright,  
The armies of the ransomed saints throng up the steeps of light:  
'Tis finished, all is finished, their fight with death and sin;  
Fling open wide the golden gates, and let the victors in.

What rush of alleluias fills all the earth and sky!  
What ringing of a thousand harps bespeaks the triumph nigh!  
O day, for which creation and all its tribes were made!  
O joy, for all its former woes a thousand-fold repaid!

O then what raptured greetings on Canaan's happy shore;  
What knitting severed friendships up where partings are no more!  
Then eyes with joy shall sparkle that brimmed with tears of late;  
Orphans no longer fatherless, nor widows desolate.

Bring near Thy great salvation, Thou Lamb for sinners slain;  
Fill up the roll of Thine elect; then take Thy pow'r and reign:  
Appear, Desire of nations; Thine exiles long for home;  
Show in the heav'n Thy promised sign; Thou Prince and Saviour, come.  
—Henry Alford

## Research Guide

1. Find out where Paul was when he wrote 2 Corinthians. What trials had he recently endured? What was his experience as he wrote this?
2. List all the rewards given to overcomers in Revelation chapters 2,3,21, and 22. Surely this is an "exceeding and eternal weight of glory."
3. Read about John M. Brenneman's zeal for the Lord (The Mennonite Encyclopedia).

