

2 Corinthians Class 5 Transcript

Welcome back to FI Online.

We're starting into class number 5, but we had **one question** that was turned in from the last class, so we'd like to begin by answering that question.

The viewer wrote in:

In **2 Corinthians 4**, Paul is addressing false accusations being leveled against him by brethren. And I wonder, in the light of Matthew 24 verse 24, is it possible that the very elect could be deceived by such accusations?

Well yes, I think that's definitely a possibility. Paul was obviously concerned that the people in Corinth were being deceived. If we couple this with the warnings he gives in **2 Thessalonians** about the *man of sin*, along with the warnings that he gives here in **2 Corinthians 11** about "false gospels, false Christs, false teachers," well, it begins to make it clear that, yes, it is a concern that the elect can be deceived.

I think some have confusion about that because of the way **Matthew 24 verse 24** was written in the old *King James* [KJV]. It says this:

Matthew 24:24 *For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*

Now this has led to some unusual explanations. I remember hearing one person try to explain this by saying: "Well, apparently there are the 'elect,' and then there are the 'very elect.'"

No, that's not what this is saying. That's probably a difficulty with the translation. The *New King James*, I think, makes it much clearer. It says:

For false Christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

That gives more the sense of it. It certainly is not saying it's not possible for the *elect* to be deceived. There are many other passages that show us that. Nowhere in Scripture are the *elect* assured that they are not capable of being deceived. As Paul said in **2 Thessalonians 2** [verses 9-10], the best defense against being deceived is to build a love for God's truth. That will protect us from deception. But, apart from that, simply being chosen doesn't guarantee you can't be deceived.

Thank you for your question. Again, we will remind everyone that you have one hour after the end of the class to turn in any questions that you might have, and we'll try to answer those before the beginning of the next class.

As always, we want to have God's blessing upon our classes. So, if you would bow your heads and join me please, we'll ask God's blessing.

[Prayer]

[3:47]

Last time, in class number 4, we got started in **2 Corinthians chapter 4**, and we just made it through a few short verses at the beginning, but they're important. So, let's go back and at least briefly remind ourselves what those verses said, and then we'll pick up where we left off.

In **verse 1** of **chapter 4**, Paul says: *Therefore, since we have this ministry* (this ministry of reconciliation),

as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. **2** But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

And as we explained, Paul was saying: "While we teach the truth, we also presented ourselves as something for you to look at to see: are we really living the way of life that we talk about?"

In **verse 3**, he says: *But even if our gospel is veiled*, —

There are people who don't understand it, who can't see it, who think that what we're saying makes no sense. He says:

—*it is veiled to those who are perishing*,

And then we went to **verse 4**: *whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.*

It's one of those passages that very often we refer to, to remind ourselves that there is a god of this age who wants to blind people, who is not truly the One who is revealing. And yet, here we are in a world today where people are so completely consumed with the idea that man understands more than he's ever understood before.

Stop and think about that for a moment. An example that we could quickly bring to mind would be the area of evolution, which seems to permeate virtually everything in our society today. For centuries people believed what the Scripture said, that God is the Creator. But now in our "enlightened age," that's all set aside as if there is no God. And you're not even allowed to **mention** that possibility when it comes to teaching biology or history or origins in those ways.

[6:09]

So here we are in this wonderful, enlightened age where we are so proud of our knowledge. And yet, what we've lost is the knowledge of God. We've talked before about how in the book of **Psalms [111:10]** and the book of **Proverbs [1:7]**, it tells us that *the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge*, and because man doesn't have that *fear of God*, he goes off in all kinds of other directions.

Romans 1 [verse 28] tells us that because people didn't think it was worthwhile to *retain the knowledge* of God, *God gave them over to a mind* that makes judgments that really are not accurate. We certainly can see that in our world today. So, it is *a god of this age who has gradually blinded* the minds of those who don't believe. It's not, in a sense, their fault. It's not a matter that they're going out seeking to be blinded. But, it's his world. And he's the one who has the power to blind, unless God does something. And we're going to see that as we go a little bit further.

Now again, notice there in that **verse 4**, he says: *lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.*

So, he desperately seeks to blind individuals so that they can't see the light. It's not there. They can't comprehend it. You know, one of the things about blindness—sometimes people think that all blind people can't even detect light. And in most cases, that's not true. They truly can. They can detect light and dark, but, everything is so blurry that they really can't see and distinguish things. So, in a sense, Satan is trying to blind people so that maybe they think they see light, but the light doesn't reveal what God's truth really can reveal. So we're told this is the source of the problem.

Now that brings us to where we left off. So let's pick up here in **verse 5**: *For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake.*

Now I think there are a couple of ways that we might look at this as we go through this next section. As we brought out in the background, the church in Corinth is going through a very difficult time. There are a number of people who are kind of exalting themselves, who are trying to diminish Paul's influence, or imply that somehow he is not really the apostle he claims to be. So, Paul is addressing that in one level. And, we can read this passage as if Paul is, in a sense, confronting those individuals. And he's saying: "Well, we don't preach ourselves. What are they preaching? Are they preaching their own ideas? Are they preaching their own speculations? Because if they are, they're not preaching what a minister of Jesus Christ should preach." So, that can be one way in which this is taken.

[9:04]

There's also another way, though. Because undoubtedly in that congregation there were many very fine, converted people who were not swept up in this spirit of aggrandizing the self and the spirit of pride. But instead, they're trying to live the right way: "How do we do that? What does that look like?" And in a sense, that's kind of what Paul is saying too. So I think there's kind of two sides to the message as we go through it. And one of the principles that we were taught in college years ago is that, if there's a passage of Scripture that seems to be applied in more than one way, probably it's written because it's supposed to be applied in more than one way. So, I think we can see both of those as we go forward. If you're the individual who thinks you're special, then Paul is saying: "Okay, what are you preaching? What are you talking about? What is your message? Is it genuine? Is it true? Or, is there something else that you're preaching? Are you just giving your own ideas, your own speculations about what **you** think things are and the way things should be?"

Through the years we've certainly seen many people who've come to the Church of God with their own ideas and their own speculations. They have their own "prophetic schemes." And, so many times they want the Church to see that they're right, instead of coming to recognize that: "I'm here to be taught. I need to learn. I didn't understand these things on my own. I was out there in this world, and *the god of this age* had blinded **me**. So what I may have thought I saw, a lot of the times it really wasn't accurate."

So, Paul says: "If you're one of those, then what are you preaching? What is your life showing? Are you showing yourself as a **bondservant** for Jesus Christ's sake?" That's an important concept that we need to have in our mind. And if you are one of those humble people who's really trying to do things the right way, what are you looking for? Are you looking for honor or prestige? Well, probably not. But, what should you be known as? Well, how about being known as a bondservant? As an individual that you can rely on, just as if that individual were your personal bondservant, you can rely on these individuals to help you.

So, Paul is addressing these situations. He says that he is not one who is preaching himself, *but Christ Jesus the Lord*. Now this doesn't mean that he is simply going around saying: "Oh, you need to love Jesus," and, "Everybody just accept Jesus, and that's it, and the whole story—Jesus is Lord" —and the kind of the evangelical approach.

Preaching *Christ Jesus the Lord*. Okay. *Christ* refers to His Messiahship. *Jesus* refers to the kind of Person He is. And *Lord* refers to His position in your life and mine. It is the position of Ruler. It is the position of the One who has authority to tell me how I'm supposed to live my life. Jesus Christ is that. So to preach *Christ Jesus the Lord* isn't just preaching "Jesus came to die for you"; it is a message that tells us: "What does Christianity look like? He is the **perfect** example of what Christianity looks like." And, as we understand that, it teaches us what we are supposed to be.

[12:35]

So we did not come to *preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord*. And, how do we present ourselves?

Do we present ourselves, again, as apostle and as minister in a sense that we could say Paul is talking about? Do we present ourselves as those individuals that are to be honored and looked up to and make sure that everyone treats us with the proper respect?

In the Greek society it was believed that an honorable man will not allow himself to be disrespected by someone. But he will make sure that anybody who should respect him shows him the proper respect.

William Barclay says that the idea of “humility,” as it is expressed in Christianity, was a totally new idea to the Greek and Roman world. It was not something they understood at all. Paul very clearly understood it. He said: “How do I want you to think of me? I’ll tell you what: Think of me as your personal servant. Think of me as your personal bondservant that you can call on when there’s a need.” He said: “That’s what I want to be known as. That’s how I want to be seen.” And, quite honestly, **that’s** the example that you and I should look to and follow. We, likewise, should be individuals who are counted upon to be able to serve. Now again, we may have certain limitations. We may have certain physical things that keep us from serving in certain ways. We can’t all serve in the same way. Paul doesn’t say: “Think of me as a bondservant who is really good at this.” No. “Just think of me as your servant. When you need something, call on me.”

Now, having been a pastor for 35 years before I came here to FI, I really cherish the experiences, the opportunities we’ve had through the years to work with God’s people in the pastoral ministry. And I know your pastor cherishes that as well. Oh, sometimes it’s very demanding. Sometimes it’s difficult. But, at the same time, to be able to share in people’s lives and to share the truth of God, to help people become more like Jesus Christ, is one of the greatest blessings that anyone could ever have. What an honorable calling to be called to pastor—or “shepherd,” as the word means—to shepherd God’s people.

And I know one of the things that used to frustrate me, as a pastor—and I would imagine that your pastor feels in a very similar way—is when someone really has a need, and yet, they’re reluctant to call the pastor. “Oh, well, we know you’re so busy.” Yes, we are busy. But, we’re busy serving God’s people. That’s what we want to do. So please, if you have a need, don’t hesitate to call upon your pastor. If he needs to talk with you for a period of time, he needs to set up an appointment where you can work through something, and it may take a few days; that’s all right. Don’t worry about that. Give him the opportunity to serve. That’s what he wants to be known as—your servant. And that’s the way that each of us should strive to be.

[15:42]

Now, certainly those who serve in the ministry should be respected. But there is involved in this no sense of respect because this individual is superior to—not physically, not spiritually—not superior to God’s people in any way. But the basic responsibility of the pastor or any minister of Jesus Christ is to set a very good example, to help God’s people in any way they can, but, make sure that their own personal example is what it should be.

Sometimes people have looked to certain individuals too much, relied too much. I remember, years ago when I was in college, one of our ministers telling us that when he served as a pastor, he occasionally had people ask questions that really were nothing to do with what the ministry should say. For example, someone may come and say: “Well, what kind of car should I get?” Or, “What,” in one case, even, “What color car should I get?” And this pastor said: “Well, you know, that’s really none of my business. That’s something for you to decide, whatever works best for you.”

So, it’s not a matter of we want to exalt the ministry to some strange position where everybody has to look to them. No, that’s one of the things that years ago many people did where Mr. Armstrong was concerned.

I think those of us today who look back with great fondness on Mr. Armstrong and his work and what God did with him recognize—as he **always** told us—that he was not a perfect person. He came short in some ways, but he was certainly a tool that God used very powerfully in a unique and special way. But Mr. Armstrong never asked to be treated like he was “royalty,” like somehow, we’re supposed to bow before Mr. Armstrong. No, that wasn’t his approach, and it certainly should not be ours. The ministers strive to be good examples, but the ultimate example for all of us is, as Paul said here, Jesus Christ, who is our Lord, our Master.

[17:43]

So let’s go on. We obviously can’t spend that much time on every verse. So let’s move on to **verse 6**.

He says: **6** *For 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 the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

The god of this world has sought to produce darkness. When he rebelled against God, what do we find right there at the beginning of **Genesis chapter 1**? It tells us that God created the heavens and the earth. And then, as we understand it, the earth became chaotic and confused and **darkness** covered the face of the deep. This was a ruler who wanted darkness, not light. And it’s interesting that the very first thing that God does when He begins that re-creation process is, God says: “*Let there be light.*” Bang! Out of the darkness! There’s no light out there; there’s darkness. And suddenly God says it, and there is light! And the darkness **cannot** overcome the light. When God says: “*Let there be light,*” there’s light.

And that applies not simply in the physical world; it also applies to an individual’s personal spiritual life. When God chooses to give that individual the light of truth, Satan can’t stop it. Now the individual can turn away from the light. That’s still a choice that we have. But God commands light.

Now again, there’s also kind of another message there. Probably it seems that Paul is being criticized, as he was later in Rome, for the fact that there are not a lot of conversions, especially among the Jewish people. You would think that: here are the ones that have the background to understand God’s truth; they should be responding. And instead, there really wasn’t a lot of response there. And there were people who were criticizing Paul and his message because they wanted to see more numbers. They were **measuring** whether something was good or bad by the **numbers** that they get—how many followers you get. And, that wasn’t happening.

So, in a sense there’s a reminder here as well: ... *it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts...* You and I don’t command light to shine out of darkness. We don’t have that power. We don’t have the ability to do that; God does—whether we’re talking physically or we’re talking spiritually. I can’t open the mind of a single person. It doesn’t matter how **effective** my speaking is, my presentation, my Power Points and all the rest that go with it. It’s **totally** irrelevant when it comes to opening a mind. Only God can open that mind. And when God **opens** that mind, He really doesn’t need some fantastically eloquent individual to help the person understand the truth. God can use a bondservant and to help that individual understand in that way.

[20:53]

So *it is God who commands the light to shine out of darkness.* He is the One *who has shone in our hearts.* He’s the One who’s looked down deep inside of us—because, you know, it is the heart that is at the core of what we are, in the metaphorical sense that it talks about here. God’s light of truth doesn’t just shine on the outward things. It doesn’t just shine on us outwardly in the appearance that we give and the impression we create. The light of God’s truth shines at the very deepest levels of who and what we are. And, we’re able to see there. And, we’re able to recognize that there are things there that shouldn’t be, that need to be

rooted out. There are other things that maybe we didn't realize were good things that are there, that God can work with. But God's Spirit, the light of God's truth, shines at the very deepest level of what we are. We need to remember that the only reason any of us understand the truth—whoever we are, whatever our position, however many years we've been around the Church of God—there is one and only one reason why we understand: because God chose to cause His spiritual *light to shine* in the *darkness of our hearts* and minds. And that *light* has brought us to truth.

So he says there that God has given us *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face*—or in the kind of the personality—*of Jesus Christ*, in the way that He presents the person of Jesus Christ or the presence of Jesus Christ. We're able to see God in a unique way because of the example Jesus Christ set before us. But we'll note there: What is it that we've come to see?

I don't think many times we really stop to think about God's glory and how glorious He is. But, what is it that really makes God glorious? Is it the fact that He shines in the darkness? Is it the fact that He is so powerful? Well, all of those things are fine. Those are wonderfully glorious things about God, and there are many aspects of it. And certainly, when we finally are able to see what God is like in a level that we can't in this life, I'm sure that we will be very impressed with the great glory that's there. But, what about right now? What is it that makes God glorious to you? What is it that makes you stand in awe of God today? We can look at the creation. We can draw upon those things. But I'll have to say that—let me make a suggestion for something to consider in that way.

[23:36]

One of the things that I find to be absolutely stunning and awesome about God is His unchangeable, perfect character. He is perfect. He always has been. He always will be. He deals justly, perfectly, righteously with every individual. And God doesn't waiver. Wouldn't you like to be like that? Wouldn't you like to have character that is so perfect that you **never** waiver from what you know to be right? I'm afraid I waiver way too much. There are far too many times when I look at myself and I come short. And it's not because I don't know. It's because of weakness in character. God has no such weakness. He is **always** perfect. He is **always** true to His own character, to His own values. That's awesome! That's an amazing thing! And God offers to share that kind of character with you and me, when we're changed, when we become a part of His family. We have to show **now** that we want that character. But ultimately God's going to share that perfect, unblemished, unchanging, righteous, just character with you and me. We're going to be able to have that too. I hope you look forward to that.

Now there are many things about God that are glorious, but I have to say that's one of the things that really strikes me, that puts me in awe of this amazing God whose light has been shed in my mind, as it has in yours. So He shows us that.

Let's go on here, **verse 7**: *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.*

Paul begins to introduce, I guess, what we could call a series of paradoxes that are found in the Christian life—the first one being that something of absolutely inestimable value is contained in a very unimpressive vessel. The concept of the paradox isn't new. For example, we may realize that [when] giving God His tithe. When we give that, we recognize that God blesses. To the mind that is apart from God, from what is truly, as Paul uses the term, a "carnal mind," a mind which may be a wonderful mind—may be very fine in many ways—but which doesn't really consider God, that mind doesn't—it doesn't make sense to that mind for you to take 10 percent of your money and send it somewhere else and think that somehow you're going to be better off. But, you and I believe that. Not only do we believe it, we've lived it; we see it.

Sometimes there's no way that you can possibly show that on a piece of paper, or as we do today, an electronic spreadsheet. But we see in our own lives ways in which God blesses us so very much. So, we get this principle. It's defined in **Acts 10:35**—or **20:35**, I believe it is, where we're told: *It is more blessed to give than receive*. And that's not the way the world functions. But you and I live this, and we understand that: Yes, as a matter fact, giving is better than receiving. And we learn that process as we go forward. It's a paradox to many people. But, we see here that God has taken something that is absolutely precious **beyond words**, beyond any description—no way to describe the preciousness of the gift of the Spirit of God and what it produces in us—and He has taken that, and He didn't place it in individuals who are the mighty, the powerful, the recognized of the world around us. Instead, God chooses just ordinary, everyday, unimpressive people. He describes this—what He has given us—as a treasure. His truth is a treasure.

[28:00]

Now it's interesting when you look at some of the commentaries. They try to say: "Oh, well, what it's talking about there is the immortal soul. God gave us this immortal soul in this physical body." No, that would've been a totally foreign idea to Paul. In fact, it would've been a repulsive idea to Paul. It's what the pagans believed. It's what they taught. It's not something that God ever showed in His Word. We all know that the phrase "immortal soul" doesn't **exist** anywhere in Scripture, and yet **millions** of people who profess Christianity believe in it. You know what else is true? **Billions** of people who **don't** believe Christianity believe that there's an immortal soul inside of us that goes on and on and on and never ends. That's a part of the pagan belief that's traced back to the very beginning. And quite honestly, I think we can trace it all the way to the Garden of Eden when Satan told Adam and Eve: "You shall not surely die." The idea of the immortal soul is planted there, and it goes forward from that.

But for Paul to have used that? No, he would've been offended by the idea that someone would think that's what he meant here: that God had taken this physical body of clay and placed this "immortal soul" in it. No, that's not the treasure he talks about. Instead, he says: "God has placed this amazing truth in clay or earthen vessels."

I enjoy the graphic that I found that showed that: an old, broken clay pot with pieces of gold in it. You see, all kinds of things were kept in clay vessels. Some of them were ordinary. Some were of value so great you couldn't find a way to even express it. Generally speaking, you have no way of knowing what's inside by looking at the outside. Now this is a good example of that. You would not know by looking at this old, dirty, beat-up, broken pot that inside was a fortune in gold. But, it's there. Now what does that tell you? What does it tell us? We need to look further.



In some cases, you might have an absolutely beautiful vessel, because, again, if you look at porcelain or whatever it may be in that way, some of it is absolutely almost—it's so beautiful, it's hard to describe. Some of the most beautiful glazed china, and so on, is just absolutely beautiful to see. You may go to museums or places like that and see these things. And wow, this is beautiful! But ultimately, it's clay. Ultimately, it's made of clay and what you do with that clay. And so, looking at a vessel like that, you might think: "Oh, this is absolutely beautiful! It's wonderful!" But when you find out about it, you find out that maybe this is what was called a "chamber pot." It was a place where human waste was placed during the night so you didn't have to get up and go to some other outdoor restroom. You could look at the outward vessel, and it may be quite beautiful, but, its contents were not so much so. Or, there might be a great treasure inside of it. You don't know. Likewise, you may look at an old, beaten clay pot that doesn't look like it's very impressive, but, you don't know what's inside by looking at it.

[31:32]

In a similar way, think about the people that God uses. We can look at individuals, and, we can be so completely unimpressed with the outward appearance. But, there may be an amazing treasure inside that individual. If we just look at the outward part, and of course, in a sense that's all a human being can see, is the outward part. If we assume there's nothing of value there because the outward part is not all that impressive, we may be missing out on a treasure.

As you get to know the people of God—and probably many of you've had this experience, not only here, but abroad as well—as you meet some of those that God has called and chosen and made a part of His family as children today and ultimately to be in that family forever, you find people who, just looking at them outwardly, you wouldn't think there was anything special there at all. Some cases, they may be quite elderly and can't get around very well. Others may have physical infirmities. Others just look so very, very ordinary. There probably aren't many people in the Church of God that, when you see them, you think: "Wow, that person ought to be a movie star! That person ought to be a model." No, most of us don't look that way. But what God has been doing **inside** of His people is where the treasure is.

And that's what Paul is saying: Be careful you don't evaluate on the wrong basis, because God has chosen to put treasures in these clay vessels. There's nothing there that may be impressive outwardly because, after all, as he says: "What's the reason for that? ...*that the excellence of the power may be of God, not of us.*" None of us are ever going to be able to say: "God chose me because I was **so** wonderful. I had so many wonderful characteristics. God chose me for a really special purpose." No, God chose us for a special purpose, but that purpose is one we all share: to be a part of His family.

So God has placed a treasure. Now, again, there's another aspect of that. You know, isn't it amazing how when you try to go through these verses—we've been through three verses—almost, not quite—so far, and we're halfway through this class. There's so much that's embedded here for us, if we stop and think about it. Sometimes, when we look at other people, we may fail to recognize the true spiritual treasure that's inside of them. But you know what? Sometimes we may look at ourselves and fail to see the treasure that's there too. If God has been working in your life for any period of time, He's begun to build a treasure in you. And we want to make sure that we don't take for granted what a wonderful thing it is that God is doing in us as well. That doesn't, again, exalt us. We're the clay pot; we're the vessel. But it's God who is gradually placing in you and me a treasure. Let's never take for granted the awesome value of that treasure that God's putting in each and every one of us.

[34:51]

So, Paul goes on to say: "Okay, what are we facing?"

He says: **verse 8** *We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;*

Now I'm going to go a little bit faster through these. We could spend time looking at each of the phrases here. But again, I want to approach it from two sides. On the one hand Paul is saying: "Okay, I've said I'm a bondservant. I'm one of those individuals—I want you to look at me as a servant you can call upon whenever you have a need in this life." So, he's there in that way. He says: "I'm not trying to impress anybody. I just simply want to be a servant that God can be pleased [with]—a bondservant ultimately of Jesus Christ."

But he said: "I'm not trying to impress anybody. What do I face in life?" Well, you know, sometimes things are difficult. Sometimes we have a lot of pressure put upon us, but God keeps it from crushing us. It's still there. The pressure doesn't go. It isn't like God says: "Oh, I won't let any pressure come on you. You're a

good Christian. I'm putting a treasure in you." No, God allows a lot of pressure. But, He does keep it from destroying. It's a pressure that produces something good.

I was just talking to—or actually got an email from a person the other day that was talking about a sermonette that they heard at the Feast a decade ago. And, they said: "You know, I never really understood what the point [was] that was made. But now, because of things that I've been through in my life, I think I understand it a lot better." Sometimes it takes a while for us, even under difficult trials, to be able to understand.

Now the point that this particular sermonette had made, I, frankly, had never heard the point myself. I thought it was a very good point. The individual who gave the sermonette said that, you know, when we go through a trial, very often we think of it as: Okay, it's an opportunity to build character. And that's true. Trials do enable us to build character. But what about a trial that just keeps going on? I mean, if I've had this trial for months or years, or in some cases, we all know people who have had some very difficult trials that have lasted for **decades**. Well, is it really that hard to build the character to stand up for what's right? I mean, when I go through this trial, I try to do the right thing in the first place, and I ask for God to help me have the strength of character to do it. What happens when it goes on and on? And the person who gave the sermonette said: "Sometimes when we go through a trial, it's for building character. But sometimes when the trial lasts a longer time, it's not just for building character; it's for **setting** the character." It isn't just being built, but it's being solidified and set and made a part of us. Because, day after day after day we have to exercise that exact same character. Yes, it's been built, it's being strengthened, and it's being **set** in us so that we never ever change from that.

I think that was a really good point. I appreciated that. God is placing this in us. And I think, in part, that's where Paul's going with this. He's saying: "Okay, I would love to be thought of as—or I want to be thought of as a bondservant. And as a bondservant, you know what? God allows me to go through some pretty difficult times." And he's going to talk about that.

[38:22]

Now, we could take that on the one hand as if Paul is saying: "Okay, you need to realize how things are for me—what I'm going through. It's difficult. So, you know, you need to understand when you're being judgmental or critical of me, you may not know all the things that are going on and that I'm dealing with in my life." And that's true. That's a certainly good, valid lesson for us to understand.

It's a very interesting thing. Years ago—well, we've seen it a number of times—but sometimes it's been said that people look on a minister—and that could be even a minister who's not a part of the Church of God—and they look at it as: Well, what a great job to have because you only work one day a week. And again, I was told one time—jokingly, I was told: "Well, being a minister is the next best thing to honest work." And it was meant as a joke. It wasn't a putdown at all, and I understood that when it was said. But many people will look at: "Well, you know, the minister, we see him once a week. We see him on the Sabbath, and he's up there speaking, and we appreciate that. And every once in a while, he may come visit with us, or, you know, we hear about he went to see someone else. And that's all fine, but what does he do with all of his free time?"

Well, again, it's one of those situations where people very often really don't understand what the life of a minister is like. We did a survey, quite a number of years ago—it goes back to the days of Worldwide Church of God—we did a survey among the ministry, and we found the average work week for a minister was something near 70 hours a week. That that's really the way it worked. That he was doing various things that were involved in the ministry through all of that time. Now again, I'm not saying that: "Oh, poor ministers, they have a tough life." No, that's not my point. My point is simply that Paul may have been

saying: “There are a lot of things going on that you may not fully understand.”

That’s one way of looking at this, but again, I think there’s another message here too. These individuals—the people that Paul is writing to—understand what it means to be *pressed on every side*, to be confined, to have this pressure put upon you, because they’re having pressure put upon them too. And Paul is saying: “Don’t forget that in the midst of that—I go through that; you go through that—and yet, God has been absolutely faithful. We’re *not crushed*. We’re not destroyed. God’s faithfulness is there.”

I think that’s one of the things for us really to remember many times in our lives—that God is faithful. Look back over your life, however many years it’s been. Have you been through some difficult trials? I’ll bet you have. If not, well, you will. Life brings those things to us. But throughout all of that, no matter how difficult it may have been, God was there. God was still there. Now we’re going to see that as we go a little bit further here.

[41:12]

He says: “We were *pressed on every side*, but we weren’t *crushed*. We were *perplexed*, but not in *despair*.” There’s actually kind of a play on words there in the Greek, that: “We were *perplexed*, but not totally.” Not like, “Okay, we’re confused; we don’t know what to do.” But, “It’s not like we have **nothing** we can do. Actually, we can still do certain things.”

Verse 9 *persecuted, but not forsaken* (God didn’t stop the persecution, but He didn’t forsake us in the middle of that.); *struck down, but not destroyed*—

Yes, sometimes in life we are struck down by situations that come up. But God doesn’t destroy us. God sometimes doesn’t stop the blows from hitting, but He may limit the damage that they can do.

He goes on to say, **verse 10**, *always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body*.

Now again, that may be a little more awkward to understand.

But what is he saying—*the dying of the Lord*? Another translation—I like this better: *the putting to death*.

We continually carry about in our own bodies, in our own lives, the recognition that Jesus Christ was put to death for us. That’s not something God does to us. None of us are put to death for someone else. It doesn’t mean we can’t die. But we are not the sacrifice for someone else. Jesus Christ was. And we remind ourselves, as we go through difficult times, that Jesus Christ went through something far more difficult than we ever have, and He did so willingly, on our behalf. So, we are reminded of that. We accept the fact, as we look at the example of Jesus Christ, that His life was not an easy road, and it makes no sense for us to think that ours will be as well. In whatever situation we find ourselves, there’s the constant realization that we have a hope **because of** the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Even if we face death, we can do it with the confidence that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ has paid the ultimate death penalty for us, and we still have the hope of being in God’s family.

But he also tells us here that the life of Jesus also is to *be manifested*, or shown, outwardly visible in our lives. Jesus Christ came and lived a physical life and showed us what it means to be a Christian. Now He’s supposed to be living **in** us. So, we are to be showing that in our lives as well. Jesus Christ showed what it was like to be a Christian in **difficult** times. Is it likely that you and I, with Jesus Christ living in us, are going to have to show what it means to be a Christian in difficult times? Yes. But He’s been there. He knows what it’s like. He has the ability to bring us through. And God Himself has promised He will not destroy us. Remember **Philippians 1 verse 6**? ... *He that began a good work in you will perform it until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*. That is a great promise.

[44:20]

Verse 11 *For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.*

Another translation puts it: *We who live are always or continually exposed to death.*

We live our lives with the recognition that life belongs to God, that we are bought with a price, that we are not our own; we belong to Him. We've surrendered our lives to Jesus Christ so that His life can be shown in the way we live our lives.

We also note there that it talks about: "It's to *be manifested in our mortal flesh.*" What does that tell us?

Again, it's very easy to just kind of read over that, but it makes the point: Sometimes people will say: "Well, you know, God is just really concerned about what's in our hearts." Yes, God is concerned about what's in our hearts, but the manifestation of Jesus Christ isn't just something we have in our hearts. It's supposed to show itself *in our mortal flesh*, in the way that we live, in what we do with the bodies that we have right now. Those bodies that are carrying around that treasure in the clay body—we are to be using it to **show** Jesus Christ. It isn't enough to **think** Christianity; it must be **lived**. And that's something that is shown by the way we conduct ourselves.

So, Paul says: **verse 12** *So then death is working in us (or is at work in us), but life in you.*

Now again, that almost sounds like Paul is putting some people down, and there may have been a little bit of a barb in that, at least for some who thought of themselves as being so wonderful, as if somehow, they're not subject to the same things that other people are. And Paul is saying: "You know what? Death is at work in our lives. It's there. Our lives are being spent. They're being used up in service to God's people, and death is getting closer and closer."

You know, we're all aging. We talk about the Church having an aging ministry, or an aging membership, and that's certainly true. None of us are going to live forever in this flesh. It's not going to happen. So, every day when we get up, we're grateful for that day. But that day brings us one day closer to the last day of our physical lives, whenever that may be. Now, I think probably for most of us, we truly hope that we'll be alive physically until Jesus Christ returns. But we don't have that promise. God never told us that that will be what we have. We have, as we know, a limited lifespan. God designed human beings with a limited lifespan. He never intended that humans should live forever in the flesh. So, however old you are, you're, each day, one day closer to the end of your days.

In a sense, that's what Paul is saying. He's not being morose. He's not saying: "Oh, I'm afraid I'm going to die any day now." No. But he's saying: "Okay, I am moving closer and closer to the end of this physical life." So, there's no way we can recover that. Paul isn't saying: "Oh, I wish I hadn't spent all my time serving people. I wish I could've spent more time doing this or that." No. The time that he spends is producing something good. It's producing the hope of life, eternal life, within the people of God.

So he said: "Yes, my life is being used up as a bondservant in service to God's people. And what's the result of my service? People have a hope of eternal life. I'm able to help them grow in this way, to become more like Jesus Christ, to show that in their lives, in their mortal flesh."

[48:17]

Verse 13 *And since we have the same spirit of faith, —*

Now again, that can be taken two ways. If there are individuals who think they're something special, Paul is saying: "You know that *spirit of faith* that you feel you have? I have the same spirit. You don't have it

exclusively.” But, there’s also the encouragement to those other people. And Paul is saying: “You know, we all share *the same spirit of faith*, whatever our trials are. We’re going through difficulties, yes, but we have that *same spirit of faith*.”

He goes on to say: —*according to what is written, “I believed and therefore I spoke,” we also believe and therefore speak,*

Now, that may sound a little odd. What does he mean by that: “*I believed and therefore I spoke*”? Well, when you go back to **Psalm 116**, where this quote comes from, the psalmist is writing about a terrible trial he had gone through and how **difficult** it was. We don’t know who the psalmist was here. It doesn’t tell us. It may have been David—certainly could’ve been. There are others who have written many of the **Psalms**, so we don’t know for sure exactly which one. But whoever it was, was going through a really severe trial. And, in the midst of that trial, he was trusting God.

As he gets to **verse 10** of **Psalm 116**, which is what we’re talking about here, he assures the reader that even in the midst of the trial, when he’s crying out to God about his affliction, he’s not crying out because he doubted God. That wasn’t the reason. His affliction was difficult, and he was asking God to intervene. He was asking God’s mercy. He was asking for God to step in as soon as possible to relieve this difficulty. And that was perfectly fine. But in the midst of it, he wasn’t saying: “I really doubt whether God’s going to help me or not. No, I believe God’s going to help. I’m just asking Him to go ahead and help.” That’s the idea here. So, the psalmist, when he wrote this [said]: “I believed God, and therefore, because I believed God and His perfect, unchanging, just, righteous character, I therefore could cry out to Him for His intervention and help.” Likewise, that’s true for us.

[50:28]

[2 Corinthians 4] verse 14 He says: *knowing* —

Okay. “Why do I have this confidence?”

14 *knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.*

We all have this hope before us of a resurrection. Now again, note what Paul says. He says: “I know this. Why? Because I know the One *who raised up the Lord Jesus*.” Paul does not say: “I know that God is going to look at me and He is going to say: ‘Oh, that Paul really manifests Jesus Christ. He **deserves** eternal life. I’m going to resurrect him.’ ” No, Paul has no such thought whatsoever. He said: “I know that I have this hope because I know the God who promised it. I know the God who told me that I should have this hope.”

Notice a similar passage—or one that says much the same thing—in **Romans 8**. Well, it says here in **Romans 8 verse 11**: *... if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.*

Or, as another translation puts it, the *New King James Greek-English Interlinear*. *... His Spirit indwelling in you.*

In other words, when you really look at the Greek, it doesn’t say: “the Spirit **who**.” It says that *through the Spirit that is indwelling in you*, God is going to raise you up.

Now again, here’s our promise. It’s one of the most important promises of Scripture: *... if the Spirit of God dwells in you*, then **God** will raise you up. What an amazing gift the Spirit of God is!

Now again, we haven’t been through **Galatians**. We hope to do that at some point in the future. But when

you look in **Galatians chapter 3**, Paul asks them—they were having some serious problems—he said: “How did you get the Spirit of God? Was that something you earned?” And of course, the obvious answer is: “Well, how could I ever earn the Spirit of God?” When you consider what the Spirit of God does: it opens our minds to understand things we’ve never seen or understood before. It shows us God’s truth. It strengthens us in difficult times. It is this **light** that God has shined in our heart to show us things that we **never** would’ve seen without it. It is the light that enlightens us to read His Word with understanding when we didn’t understand it before. And, as this verse shows, it is the power that is going to grant to us, give to us, eternal life. And if it *dwells in you now*—through the very way that God said it would, through repentance, baptism, the laying on of hands—you will receive the gift.

Remember **Acts 2**, what is it? **verse 39**, that says: *For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, that the Lord ... will call to Him.*

[53:44]

This is a wonderful promise that’s given, the promise of the Holy Spirit. And if it’s there, then it is a promise of eternal life. You have the promise of eternal life dwelling in you. What an amazing thing! In the midst of difficult times, what a great promise! The same God who raised **Jesus** from the dead, will also raise all of us. Paul is saying that, just as he has confidence that he will be resurrected, he’s confident the brethren in Corinth will be resurrected as well, because he knows the Spirit of God’s dwelling in them. He can see that. And we’ll see as we get a couple chapters further up why he says that. It’s a very encouraging section of Scripture.

Our ultimate hope, no matter how any specific trial may turn out, is the resurrection from the dead into eternal life in God’s family. We’ll be there together, regardless of whether our lives are ended by persecution, prematurely snuffed out by some tragic accident or disease, or if we simply go to sleep and never wake up again. The promise is the same—the promise based upon the gift of God Spirit.

He says in **verse 15**: *For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.*

I want to give a different translation of that here. Notice what’s said here in the *Amplified Version* of **2 Corinthians 4** and **verse 15**: *For all [these] things are for your sake, so that as [God’s remarkable, undeserved] grace reaches to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of [our great] God.*

Paul recognizes that the people of God, as they **live** godly lives, bring honor and glory to God right now in this life, as well as the glory that will come in the future.

It makes us ask a question: (I think it’s an important one.) are we thankful to God for those that God has called? Are we thankful for the wonderful examples of those around us—those with whom we share services on the Sabbath or a Holy Day, those individuals that we hear about in other parts of the world, or for that matter, all of those who’ve gone before us? What an amazing legacy they have left! Are we thankful? Are we—as we see the grace of God extended to them—are we increasingly thankful to God for that same grace, not only extended to them, but what He extends to us as well? We should appreciate those people. But ultimately the credit, the thanksgiving, goes to God. He’s the One who made it possible.

So, when you and I are raised up into God’s family at Jesus Christ’s return, we’re going to deeply know that all of the credit belongs to Him, not anything we’ve ever done. We will be, I think, more amazed than anyone else that we’re actually there, that God has produced this change that He’s promised. But I think you and I are going to be amazed. It’s not that we’re going to look around and say: “Well, I never thought that person would make it.” I think we’re going to look at ourselves and say: “I can’t believe that God was

able to do this—with all of my flaws, with all of my failings, with **all** the ways I come short, God's able to do this. What an **amazing** God He is!"

Let's go on and finish the chapter.

[57:30]

16 *Therefore (he says,) we do not lose heart. ...*

Remember in **verse 1** he says: *We don't lose heart.* Now he's going to focus on why.

16 *Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.*

You look in the mirror every day, as I do, and you probably see that outward person aging, sagging—just can't do the things that you used to do. But, we recognize that there's something else going on here. It isn't the outward person that matters; it's what's going on inside. The outward person is the clay vessel, and clay vessels get beat up over a lifetime. But, what is going on inside is the building of a treasure. This, what's going on inside, even though the outward part is decaying—and that's kind of the idea of the word there, is a progressive decay that takes place—the inward part is being renewed. Or as another translation [says]: (I like this one.) *receives fresh strength.* We're strengthened every day.

Verse 17 *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,*

We recognize that what's going on in our lives is much more important than just the physical, outward things, or even the maintaining of life.

Now Paul is not in any way minimizing the difficulties that we face—with persecution or trials, whatever they may be—but he is saying we always need to look beyond the immediate and recognize the bigger purpose that God is working out. These trials, these difficulties, are not just random experiences with no purpose. They're teaching tools, preparing us for the future.

So, Paul says in **verse 18**: *while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

Those words are so important for us to have a right perspective on life, to have a right perspective on ourselves. Physical things are going to perish. We can look at those physical things. We can be so impressed with those physical things. When we were younger, as **Proverbs** says, we may exalt in our strength or our appearance. And that's not necessarily a wrong thing in some way. But we also recognize that ultimately everything in this life is physical, and therefore, whatever we have in this life is temporary. We must never forget what is going to endure, as opposed to what's temporary.

Well, that finishes **chapter 4**. We didn't cover as much as I had hoped to, but that's all right. I hope we're coming to a deeper understanding of what's here.

So, thank you for joining us. We'll look forward to continuing in **chapter 5** in class number 6.

[1:00:26]