

## **The Promises of God: Seeing the Unseen, Secrets of Endurance**

**2 Cor. 4:16-18**

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Our text is primarily about Paul's ministry, but it provides tremendous help for our own Christian lives. We need reminders, we easily forget, life is full of joy. I hope you know joy and peace and hope. Grace and peace and hope, love and renewal such as we are studying in our Sunday morning Bible classes, and also in my Wednesday class on Deuteronomy.

Joy of children—even when they disappoint, joy of newness and accomplishment and starting again and.... Joy of grandchildren. Joy of parents, memories. Joy of the world in nature—skies and fog and rain and sun, joy to the world in Christ. Joy and goodness all around, thanksgiving and celebration. Good and fulfilling relationships, sights and sounds and smells.

Not want to spend too much time this reviewing, but here are the lessons in this series.

**God's Positive: Anchored by God's Yes (2 Cor. 1)**

**God's Perfume: The Smell of Life in Christ (2 Cor. 2)**

**God's Presence: Looking into the Face of Jesus (2 Cor. 3)**

**God's Proclamation: Telling the World Who Jesus Is (2 Cor. 4)**

**God's Promises: Secrets of Endurance (2 Cor. 4-5)**

**God's Power: In Powerless Pots of Glory (2 Cor. 4)**

**God's Point of View: Seeking the Lost (2 Cor. 5)**

**God's Purpose: Sharing the Hope of Reconciliation (2 Cor. 5)**

**God's People: Relationships Restored--Hearts Shared (2 Cor. 6-7)**

Twice in the fourth chapter Paul writes, "We do not lose heart." It is easiest (and perhaps most obvious) to title this section, "Seeing the Unseen." That is an important subject. A Christian by faith sees what is generally unseen. Christians can by faith and hope see beyond today. We do not do what we do today for immediate gratification. We do not expect a reward or benefit by this evening for being here this morning. We recognize that walking in the light of the glorious gospel is a process, it is continual, and we reap if we do not faint.

In a more practical sense, here are spiritual secrets to "sticktuitiveness" (my mother's word). Most would say endurance, or perhaps perseverance. But those words don't begin with "s". Now you understand my description: spiritual secrets to sticktuitiveness. That is a word—I know, my mother used it a lot. This is the key to life. Being able to cope is everyone's goal. Adjust to the pain, avoid the collapse, admit the apathy and adapt. Deal with the burden, break down, break up, burn out. I don't want to give up, give out, or give in. That means I must learn to stick with it—to endure.

Paul earlier in this book has said his life has been filled with trouble, the life of Paul troubled. Job—man full of trouble, James—fall into various trials, Jesus—in this world tribulation. Life brings disappointment, dread, disaster. Pain, grief, loss. Unexpected events, unanticipated turns, dark days, dreadful nights, debilitating experiences. That is life.

The question is, how can we endure? That is our subject, and we ask that question in this particular section of text because Paul had a triumphant perspective on his suffering. We will look at that in more detail tonight in the earlier parts of chapter 4.

How can we be an enduring people? How can we be an enduring church? Handle life and its troubles, challenges, conflicts, trials? Crucial questions, for our endurance individually and as a body of Christ.

Here we have insight into the thinking of Paul, the key to Paul's faithfulness, the secrets of his endurance. Mark them well. It is not easy to endure, to persevere. It is easy to give up. Many have given up. I remember the challenge of the little saying that suggests it is more important to end well than to begin well. In the spiritual life, many begin well but do not end at all.

Now sometimes we think our suffering is unique and belongs only to us. We think no one else can understand. That is both true and not true. No two lives are exactly the same, but Heb. 4:15-16 says there are standards in temptation, and Jesus was tempted as we are. He understands. We understand even though we do not understand.

Satan is busy trying to get all of us to give up. Life is filled with obstacles—for everyone. We live in a fallen world. Some suffer more than others. Later in this book, Paul writes that none could match his suffering, especially his concern for the churches. His suffering was indeed severe, and the cost of his discipleship dear, and he thus is an example for us in our desire to persevere. There is an interesting sequence—severe, but persevere rises above the severity. Also, earlier in the book he reminded of his affliction, 2 Cor. 1:8, despairing of life, bearing the sentence of death. In 6:4-5 he gives a list, “in much endurance.”

But when his life is nearing its end, probably 5-7 years after he wrote 2 Corinthians, he says that God stood by him (2 Tim. 4:16). This text is less well known than the earlier verses of 2 Tim. 4:7-8.

How did he endure all of this? That is our question, and we must get to the biblical answer. Well, he had seen the face of Jesus, he knew who Jesus is, he knew the newness of his ministry in freedom and liberty from the Lord, he knew the changed life, renewed/restored from his former position as chief of sinners, he was aware of triumphant, he accepted God’s promises.

**All of this is true, but look especially at the last 3 verses of chapter 4.**

**First, look at life inside out.** Not many things look better inside out. But life looks better inside out. Consider and measure life by its inside more than its outside. Look inward rather than outward.

We do not lose heart “even if, even though, although, but though.” Two opposing concepts, can’t have both. Adversative construction. Here’s the way it looks on the one side, here’s the way it looks on the other.

The outer man here is our body, the perishable part of us, that we pamper and fix up, and make look pretty, we preen, and we spend an awful lot of energy and resources to support and make comfortable and dress, and nourish.... We are fixing up something that is decaying, we are covering up the decay and diminishing. Plastic surgery, Botox, face lifts, tummy tucks, whatever.... Paul knew none of that, but he would have had a good chuckle. Rotten, decaying outer person kind of concerns. We are all experiencing it—normal part of aging. And Paul was not terrible old at this time—maybe about my age, maybe 60 or 61 in 57 A.D.

It was not just the aging; it was also the wearing out. Better to wear out than rust out. Henry Martin, missionary to India, “Let me burn out for God.” And most of us do not run much risk of burning out for God, or even of wearing out prematurely, and so we have trouble in the Christian life, because we sense that we are looking at all of this in the wrong way.

Look at life from the inside out. Paul wrote in Eph. 3:16, inner man is strengthened by the Holy Spirit. How much have you felt the HS inner strengthening in the past week? Did you feel it last Sunday morning? Last Sunday afternoon when you sat and dreamed about the future? Last Sunday night when we looked into the face of Jesus to understand the liberty of the Spirit? In our daily quiet times, prayers, reading, meditation, silence? Wednesday night in the delightful beginning we made in Deuteronomy? Friday in the blanket of God’s earth-level clouds? Early Saturday morning, I mean 2 a.m., when this text came to life once more. Well, no, that is my experience, but what is your experience? The HS strengthens our inner man, but only if we let him, seek him, are sensitive to him, think about it, look at the inside.

That’s the only way you are ever going to find the new creation that Paul mentions in chapter 5, the new creation in Christ. We feel so old, but it is because we look at the outside, and measure life in the outward, and ignore the inward. New self, new creation, renewed.

I am concerned about what happens to me physically, to my family, to my friends. But I am more concerned about what is happening to us spiritually. Is Christ at home among us? Are we measuring life by the inner standards of God? Love filling our life, power filling our life.

It is overcoming the trials and temptations of the physical side of life that leads you to spiritual strength. It is the constant winning the battle—I got in my quiet time, I prayed, I heard God again in his word, my family was in Bible study, my grandchildren saw my faith....

That is all that matters in life. Look at the inside.

### **Second, Value Spiritual more than physical.**

How do you measure life? What we have, what we do, what we accumulate, what we possess. It is natural. But here is where Paul towers over his enemies. He towers over his troubles and they cannot touch him. He far surpasses his sufferings and they cannot cause him to slip.

Now sometimes the inside depends on the outside, and the spiritual depends on things that seem to occur in the physical realm. How much we pray, the maturity of the spiritual man, ultimately—what we are becoming.

So here is the second thing, not just what we look at—the inside and the outside, but what we value. Value the spiritual more than the physical, because it has an overwhelming weight of glory. It is so much more glorious, so much more fulfilling, so much more inviting, appealing, attractive, and eternal. Wow! What a statement. I say that because it doesn't generally look that way in our world. Why do parents not insist that their children be in Bible class from their infancy—value physical above the spiritual. Sleep above the spiritual task of getting up and going to Bible class.

Or perhaps because value Saturday night entertainment above Sunday morning edification. We give up the eternal for the momentary. So much suffering---no it is only momentary. So much trouble—not it is temporal.

We know not how to measure life, prepare for life, value the spiritual. Not accidental that Jews had/have a serious ritual for getting ready for the Sabbath—perhaps one reason their Sabbath began on the preceding evening. I came to understand that better when as a junior in high school I met Harlan and Sally—Jews, Andover, Massachusetts, Samuel Phillips Academy. Incidentally, Jan and I went by there a few years ago on way to a preaching appointment in New Hampshire, not as large as I remember, different, but what memories!

You will hear the same perspective from Paul concerning this world in Rom. 8:28, preceded by Rom. 8:17. This does not deny pain, trouble, sorrow. Not Christian Scientist saying there is no pain. Saying that our experiences here have a causal effect, they are causing the greater weight of glory. Don't know how that is occurring, not meritorious, but productive. Which brings us to final point in this text.

### **Third, to endure, Value future more than the present.**

When we see what Paul sees, we see that all that is occurring here is generating our future, and tipping the scale in our favor, something heavy is tipping the scale, and it is tipping it toward the future not the present. When we can see this, when we can have this in present reality, then we can be confident in the way Paul describes in the early verses of chapter 5. This is the essential component before we can "Walk by faith, not by sight."

Now this eternal glory is not a bigger mansion, but we are more and more like God, praising, exalting, imitating, honoring, confident. This is a comparison: hyperbole upon hyperbole (*hyperbolane eis hyperbolane*). Can you see how trivial is the present? Mere fluff? No substance? When you value the future more than the present, you value the eternal more than the temporal. You value the unseen more than the seen.

How? What you look at! Here we are, nearing the end of the service, what are you looking at? I'm looking at the clock—that's temporal! I'm wondering about lunch. That's temporal! Look here is really "gaze." Constant look.

Here's what Paul was looking at. God, knowledge of Christ, ministry, liberty, Spirit more than law, face of Christ, image of God, glory, power, eternity. Paul lived for the souls of those he knew and loved. He paid any price to insure their eternity.

#### Conclusion

There it is. How you endure. Endure, as Moses, by seeing Him who is invisible. Store up treasure in heaven.

Look at life from the inside out. This means you have to fix the inside and the outside follows. You don't fix the outside so all looks good, you fix the inside.

Value the spiritual more than the physical. This is a problem in our religious world. People diminish baptism because they only see the physical aspect of it. It is the answer of a good conscience toward God, and an indication of one's commitment to see and value and pursue the spiritual. No wonder it is the beginning point of one's walk with God, and God's plan for saving participation in the blood of Christ. Death of old, and birth of new.

Keep your gaze fixed on the future.

Let's do it. Let's endure. You can begin. You can begin again.