

**Driven: Things that Enable, Empower and Inspire Believers**

***The Confidence to Age***

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

May 24, 2020 am

HDBC

**It's happening** . . . to all of us. You can hide it from others, for a time but it's still happening. It's happening to everyone at the same pace, though the effects vary from person to person. Want evidence? Look in the mirror? Notice the wrinkles? Maybe for you there is a little more gray than last time you looked. Shoulders are little more stooped. Stamina is nothing like it was 25 years ago. Less vigor, less energy. It's true! **The outer man is decaying!**

**Every day we are getting** a little older. Each evening when we retire to bed we are one day closer to death than we were the night before. From the world's perspective this is just downright depressing. That is because the world values what is seen, what is experienced in and with the body, more than what is not seen and what is invisible, but real. This is not so for believers. We may bemoan the effects of aging and the shortness of our lives, but we should never be depressed or discouraged about it.

**Why?** Because the inner man, the spiritual man is being renewed day by day. The most important part of who we are is not only not subject to the decay that plagues the outer man, but is actually progressing in the other direction. How cool is that!

**The Greek-Roman** culture of Paul's day took a very dim view of death. The prevailing sentiments about death were pretty pessimistic. **One Greek poet declared *There is death once and for all there is no resurrection.*** The Roman, Marcus Aurelius declared that death is ***dust, ashes, bones and stench.*** Yep, pretty pessimistic!

**It was into that culture** that Paul wrote the words of 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. This is part of a larger passage that challenges believers to embrace our calling to live out the gospel, fulfill our ministry assignments and impact the world. In this greater passage Paul writes of the things that ***drive us, enable us, impact us and inspire us.*** Last week we looked at 4:7-15 and noted that we are ***driven*** by the treasure that is within. The gospel is a treasure in earthen vessels. He now reminds us that these earthen vessels are decaying. They have a limited shelf-life.

**Being a believer** does not change the fact that we are aging, decaying in our bodies. But it does change what is happening on the inside. Outside is decaying. The inside is being renewed, growing stronger. That reality gives us confidence to age. Believers are to be great at aging, great at finishing strong. Our last years should be our greatest, not because we are physically or mentally strong but because we are spiritually strong.

**Read the text: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18**

Paul begins this short section by making a confident declaration of truth.

***We do not lose heart!***

Think about what has happened to him. ***Afflicted, perplexed, persecuted and struck down.*** Paul had experienced it all by this time. The enemy used a variety of weapons to neutralize Paul, but he was still in the fight. None of those things had caused him to lose heart. Not even the fact that he growing older could cause him to lose heart. In these three verses Paul offers three reasons he was able to . . . ***not lose heart.***

**He could** experience aging & persecution without losing heart because he valued . . .

### 1. **Spiritual strength over the physical strength (16)**

The *outer man* is like the *earthen vessel* we read about last week. Refers primarily to the physical body. John MacArthur points out in a quick sentence what most of us begin to realize slowly, over time. ***From birth to death, the body is constantly decaying.*** That one tidbit of encouragement made watching this sermon worthwhile.

Solomon describes this process graphically in Ecclesiastes 12:1-7

Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no delight in them";<sup>2</sup> before the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain;<sup>3</sup> in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through [a]windows grow dim;<sup>4</sup> and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low, and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will [b]sing softly.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, [c]men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags himself along, and the caperberry is ineffective. For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street.<sup>6</sup> Remember Him before the silver cord is [d]broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed;<sup>7</sup> then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the [e]spirit will return to God who gave it.

**For Paul** the outer man was decaying not only from normal aging, but from the pummeling he took at the hands of his persecutors. He was old before his time. For Paul is more about the mileage than the years. He word on his body the scars of beatings, imprisonment, whipping, a stoning and more.

**Yet, while the outer man was decaying** notice what was happening on the inside.

The *inner man* was being *renewed day by day*. There was a direct correlation between what was happening to the outer man and the inner man. One was fallen apart and moving to death. The other was gaining strength and being renewed daily. The *inner man* is the heart, the soul that lives forever. It is the part of Paul and any person that is born again at salvation. It is the part that is instantly made new at the point of conversation. But note what Paul wrote.

***The inner man is being renewed day by day.*** Paul writes of a process of renewal. He has in mind here the process of sanctification. We are growing in Christ on the inside. We are being made more and more like Him. So, here's an important principle to remember. Your spiritual growth and development is not dependent upon your physical health or strength. In fact, Paul certainly seems to be saying that they tend to go in opposite directions.

**One of the great paradoxes** found in scripture and in life is that when we are the weakest and the most helpless we are in a place to be made spiritually strong. Paul wrote, *I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.* (2 Cor. 12:1).

**He could** live without losing heart because he valued . . .

**Spiritual strength over the physical strength**

## 2. **Future reward over present comfort (17)**

Not only did the physical suffering and aging contribute to his spiritual strength and renewal, but they actually enriched his eternal reward. For Paul, it was clearly not just about the present, or even primarily about the present. His present actions and attitudes were largely driving by his value of the future.

**Note how Paul describes** his present trouble.

*Momentary* – lasting for a very brief time. Considered only in the present. We would think of this like a second. That which ends almost as soon as it begins.

*Light* – Easy to bear; insignificant. Something that is hardly worth mentioning.

Think about this. Paul's afflictions were constant and intense. However, he describes them as being momentary and light. How was he able to do that? He was looking them in view of eternity. He knew that life is just a vapor when compared to eternity. So, he knew the sufferings of the present time could be endured because of a wonderful future that was sure and secured.

**And there is more.** Paul actually wrote that the present troubles were impacting his future in a positive way. They were *producing an eternal weight of glory*.

When the glory that is to come is weighed against the troubles of this life, the scales are greatly tipped toward the glory that is to come. So much greater is the glory that is to come over the sufferings of the present moment that Paul uses the phrase *beyond all comparison*. Our English word *hyperbole* comes from this Greek word. It means *out of all proportion*. It exceeds the ability to be measured. Limitless.

**By the way**, not all suffering produces this eternal weight of glory. Only the suffering that is done for the sake of Christ or that honors Christ produces this. On the other hand, suffering as a result of one's sin will not produce this glory.

**He could** live without losing heart because he valued . . .  
Spiritual strength over the physical strength  
Future reward over present comfort

### 3. **Eternal things over the temporary things (18)**

Paul's words may seem strange. He calls for us to look at the things we cannot see, rather than the things we can see. How do we look at things that are unseen? He is not writing about things we can see with our physical eyes but things we perceive with our hearts. If we are to be *driven* to live in such a way that *we do not lose heart* then we must look beyond the physical to the spiritual.

**Paul knew** then what we know now . . . this world is pass away. Our physical bodies, the physical stuff around us, even the planet will not last forever in its current condition. By looking beyond the physical to the invisible, we are focusing on the eternal over the temporary. *Remember the words of Jim Elliott.*  
*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.*

This is exactly what Paul is saying. We focus not on the temporary, for those are things we cannot keep. We focus on the eternal for those are things we cannot lose.

**We do not** automatically focus on eternal things. Our tendency is to look to the physical, the temporary. It takes effort to look beyond this life to the next.

## **Takeaways:**

- 1. Don't grumble about your physical condition, celebrate your inner growth**  
Every believer has a new body waiting, anyway. It will be so much better.
- 2. Be ready and willing suffer graciously for Christ**  
It will be more than worth it. That suffering is producing an eternal reward.
- 3. Look to heaven as you live on earth.**  
Look to eternity while living in the present.

**As you do those three things you will be able to say with Paul . . .**

**We . . . Do . . . Not . . . Lose . . . Heart**