

## 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Dear Friends in Christ,

I believe many of us now understand that the church in this country has largely become another organization existing for the purpose of promoting self-gratification for its members - with a smattering of Jesus and the spiritual here and there. After all, family, we've been lied to for a long time and the lies are taking their toll on the pew. And not just the pew, but every aspect of life.

There's the lie perpetrated by the exponents of *The Great American Dream*: Health, wealth and happiness. It used to be something for which one worked. Now it's a demand. We use the word "entitlement". There's the lie perpetrated by the atheist. There is no God so get and do what you want; something along the same lie as health, wealth and happiness. There's the lie perpetrated by those who represent Christ and claim a life of health, wealth and happiness if you follow their program. It all runs along the lie perpetrated by the greatest exponent of health, wealth and happiness who said, "...when you eat of it...you will be like God." (Gen. 3:5) Satan, of course. And look where all this takes humans: a hole in the ground or ashes in an urn or an experiment to be dissected.

God's Word takes us in an entirely different direction . . .

### **LOOK TO THE THINGS UNSEEN**

#### I. "Do Not Lose Heart."

I do understand why most want little or nothing to do with the Bible. It rips into the flesh; from Genesis 3 and the death that became part of humanity to Revelation and the promise of this world's "death"! It's a reality check. You might get tired of hearing it, but it's always there...in the Word of God. It's right there in the opening of our text: "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away...". (2 Cor. 4:16a)

**So we do not lose heart.** Well...let's see...I find mirrors a curse. You look at yourself not so much for admiration, but because you have to make sure you're properly pasting on all the goop and assorted stuff (sort of like decorating a Christmas Tree) - that your clothes hide the realities you don't want anyone to see (so you think) - that you can spend a few minutes in delusion before you walk the red carpet of life.

**Losing heart.** We want to avoid the reality, but it's there nonetheless. Years ago a fellow by the name of Ernest T. Campbell wrote:

Nothing humbles me more than my attempts at the crossword puzzles... My strategy is to begin in the upper left-hand section until I mess it up, then I move to the upper right and drop down to the right side of the lower right corner. Then to the lower left and up. I live with the illusion that when I get stuck somewhere I can move on and start over indefinitely. Always, however, I am eventually forced to face the fact that the puzzle is one piece. To keep moving away from life's difficult situations only postpones payday, it does not cancel it. ("Locked in a Room with Open Doors.")

We have a way of avoiding reality, for a while. But the reality is there. And it will catch up with us. Paul says, "Though our outer self is wasting away."

#### II. "Light Momentary Affliction"?

And then comes the statement that's so difficult to digest: "For this light momentary affliction...". (vs. 17a) What do you think of that statement? He summarizes life and all its parts as a *light momentary affliction*. Can you? Can I? And, to think, we drive ourselves in a tizzy trying to make everything here wonderful. Not that I'm criticizing every aspect of that, but sometimes we run ourselves into the ground.

What's astounding about this statement from Paul is what Paul had already endured as a spokesman for the Gospel. Remember? He said:

...we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness... through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as imposters...as unknown...as dying, and, behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything." (2 Cor. 6:4-10)

This, again, is the same person who calls life in this world a *light momentary affliction*.

### III. Can Afflictions Be a Good Thing?

How? How could Paul say this? How could any of the martyrs down through the ages say this? Can affliction be a good thing? Our text: "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison..." (vs. 17)

I know. It's hard to fathom that affliction is light and momentary. And then the statement it is "preparing" something for us - the reality that God actually sends affliction to prepare us - the reality that God isn't going to let any of His children get that rooted and comfortable with this world. And then those words from Scripture hit:

And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." (Heb. 12:5-6)

So what, exactly, did we have in mind when we said, "I believe!"? And maybe it's too easy to shelve these words of Peter: "(Trials) have come so that your faith...may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." (1 Peter 1:7 [NIV]) God will prove His children's faith. Test them. Not so He can discover the strength of our faith, but so that we can discover the strength of our faith!

It has been stated: "Faith is idle when circumstances are right, only when they are adverse is one's faith in God exercised. Faith, like muscle, grows strong and supple with exercise." (Author unknown.) Do we want to exercise our faith? Do we want a faith filled with comfort and assurance of things to come? Do we want a faith that values above everything the wisdom of God in Christ?

Christ suffered and died for our sin. Went through hell! Secured our pardon though we are still sinful. We belong to God through faith in Christ's standing in our place. And that changes everything . . .

### IV. That We Would See the Eternal.

As we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (vs. 18)

Catherine Bramwell-Booth, the granddaughter of the founder of the Salvation Army, was credited with this statement on the occasion of her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday: "It's a very strange experience, living so near to death as I do now. I know it must be next door, tomorrow perhaps, or even today. But I don't want to die as I'm in love with life." I'm convinced that the majority of what calls itself "Christian" sees it that way, as well.

But Paul writes, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain... My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” (Phil. 1:21,23) I have this strange feeling that most would put what I would call a “qualifier” on that statement by the Apostle. That is, for most it would read, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. However, I’d rather live a whole lot longer.” And why? Well, maybe some just aren’t convinced that Heaven is better beyond all comprehension. What do you think?

And later in 2 Corinthians Paul writes, “Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” (2 Cor. 5:8) The words we want to grasp are **would rather be...at home with the Lord.**

This is where our text takes us: “...we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.” This is to be our focus, no matter our age, because there is nothing anywhere guaranteeing that anyone will live to be 100 or 10. Looking to the unseen is to be our focus because this is what Christ has secured for us: unending and unchanging love, joy and peace.

And with this is the reality we must carry with us each day: “For the things that are seen are transient.” Transient. Webster defines it “passing especially quickly into and out of existence.” Take a good look! Everything - everything of this world is transient.

Then Paul ends our text with “the things that are unseen are eternal.” Unending. The unending Presence of God. Real life. Forever.

And so, the admonition I pray we take with us this day: *Look to the things unseen.* God help us!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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- II. “Light Momentary Affliction”?*
- III. Can Afflictions Be a Good Thing?*
- IV. That We Would See the Eternal.*

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