

Keys to Courage

2 Corinthians

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What is always an incredible and fearful blessing to bring the word of God and especially when you only do it so often and there is so much that you want to say, the challenge is to hold back and it's also different because you're not just working your way through a passage or through a book. I've specifically chosen the subject and the passage today in response, really, to what I see as a very very common issue and a very common need in the church among our people and just really throughout the course of my life I know, just in my ministry working with college students and here I've chosen this specifically for you. So if you're wondering am I speaking about you, the answer is yes. The answer is yes. I'm speaking to all of you and I pray that the Lord will grant me safety after I speak to you today.

I want to speak to you on the issue of courage and the reason for this is because what I see repeated over and over and over again and I see it in my own life and the lives of pretty much everyone that I talk to is a desperate need for courage. You know, courage, it's a trait that's been admired throughout the centuries for all kinds of reasons. Again, we could define courage in a lot of different ways but here are some definitions I found: the ability to do something that frightens one; it's the strength to face pain or grief; Webster's defines it this way, mental or moral strength to venture, persevere and withstand danger, fear or difficulty; and one other dictionary defined it this way, the ability to control your fear in a dangerous or difficult situation. And I recognize in my own soul and in the people that I talk to, often a tremendous lack of courage. Courage to do what is needed. Courage to say what is needed. Courage to refrain from saying something in an effort to control out of fear.

We need courage desperately. To say someone is courageous is to say that they're bold, confident, they have a backbone, fortitude, nerve, or that they're brave, and it's exhibited by all sorts of people. It's not just restricted to believers or Americans. It takes courage to go bungee jumping. It takes courage to return a kickoff in football. It takes courage to speak publicly. It takes courage to ask a girl out on a date or to have your parents accompany you with a girl while you court, or whatever you do. It takes courage to try something new, to go to college, to interview for a job, and for some of you it takes courage to take your toddlers shopping. I mean, these are small things but it takes some measure of courage to do these things, right? Beyond that, it takes truly, a truly admirable

level of courage to run into a burning building, to charge an enemy fortress, to stand for what you think is right in the face of persecution. You know, we think of firefighters and soldiers and police officers as common examples of these traits. We think of Martin Luther standing before the entire Catholic Church, and Martin Luther King, Jr. standing against a corrupt and racist culture. We think of those as powerful examples of courage and, of course, courage should be admired as a quality but it's not always used for admirable purposes. Nazi soldiers were famously courageous but they served an evil purpose. Caitlyn Jenner, the man who thinks he's a woman, called the most famous transgender person in the world. At the ESPY Awards, he received the Arthur Ashe Courage Award for 2015 and he was the third consecutive LGBT person to receive the award, and I don't doubt that it took a measure of courage to do that but it served an ungodly end.

So I don't want to talk to you this morning about just courage in general, I want to present you with the keys to courage but to a godly courage. I want to present you with the keys to a godly courage, courage that pleases God. You know, we see it over and over in Scripture, courage is something that's praised. You know, Joshua, Caleb and David, all men marked and admired for their courage. David was known as a man of valor. His men were mighty men and what made them mighty was great acts of bravery and courage. Courage is not only praised but it's commanded by God. Joshua was commanded to be strong and courageous to take the Promised Land. Jeremiah, the prophet, was commanded to be courageous to speak God's word in the face of violent opposition.

Courage is also something that marks followers of Christ. Listen to Acts 4:13, this is talking about how John and Peter presented the Gospel before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish rulers who had just crucified Jesus, and it says this, "Now as they," the Sanhedrin, "observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus." Those who were with Jesus were marked by confidence and courage in the face of opposition, and then it was this sort of courage that the church prayed for after this. Peter and John left that meeting and went and told all of their friends and then they all prayed and asked that God would give them boldness to declare this Gospel, and it says in verse 31, "when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with [all] boldness." That when you are led by the Holy Spirit, filled by the Holy Spirit, when you pray and ask God for boldness to do his will, the result is that you act on that with courage and that is the mark of a believer who is walking in the Spirit. Bold courage.

There are many examples of courage in the Scriptures, of course, and Jesus was the perfect example of courage who for the joy set before him endured the cross, knowing exactly what he was about to face and went anyway. But today I want to focus in on one person who sort of gives us a first-person perspective of the issue of courage and that's the Apostle Paul. We get to see his own thoughts on it from the inside out, and from his example I want to draw five keys to biblical godly courage. Five keys to godly courage and I'd like to start by going to 2 Corinthians 5. If you could open your Bible to 2 Corinthians 5 and we'll read verses 6 through 10 and Paul says this,

6 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord-- 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight-- 8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. 9 Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. [And the first part of verse 10] 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ

Before we take a closer look, let's pray and ask if the Lord would open our eyes and equip us this morning.

Father, we come desperately in need of You. We need courage. We need boldness. We need confidence, Lord, confidence that honors You. So Lord, help us. Work in each heart today. Give us strength and may we not leave unchanged by Your word. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Bless you.

You know, I'm just so thankful for the writings of Paul. God was so wise in how he put his Scripture together and that he gives us this insight through the eyes of this man who loved Christ with all of his heart. You know, Paul, he lays his heart open so freely and you just really feel like you know the man when you study his writings. In his passionate love for Christ and the zeal for his name, it's something that we should all imitate, we should all strive to be; we should imitate him as he imitated Christ. And his courage is amazing to me. He says here in verse 6, "being always of good courage." Paul is saying that, "being always of good courage." His courage was legendary. When you think of Paul, to me he's like the King David of the New Testament. You see David going before Goliath, fearless, just running out into the battle and that's Paul charging a Roman Empire full of pagans and all kinds of wicked violent opposition and he charges straight into it and, man, he needed courage.

He was once a violent persecutor of the church, known as Saul of Tarsus, and then on the road to Damascus, he was confronted by the risen Jesus and this left him blind, and then the Lord sent Ananias to heal him and this is what God told Ananias, okay? You could kind of say this is Paul's orientation meeting for his new job. It says, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel, for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." That's not usually how employers recruit someone to their cause. God says, "I've chosen him and he's going to bear My name around the Mediterranean world and I'm going to show him how much he must suffer for My name." From that time on, Paul's life would be filled with hardship for the sake of the Gospel.

Listen to his own record of this hardship in 2 Corinthians 11:24 and following. This is what he experienced, okay, and he wasn't just randomly experiencing this, this was because he was obeying the Lord, was following him. He says, "Five times I received

from the Jews thirty-nine lashes." Five different times. Anyone here received 39 lashes ever? If you have, I'm sorry. That will leave a permanent mark. Some of you may have endured abuse and suffering, so did Paul. "Three times I was beaten with rods," he says in verse 25, "once I was stoned," with rocks, "three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep." It means floating in the ocean. "I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches."

Paul suffered and yet he did not lose heart, he did not quit. He says, "We are always of good courage." I mean, I understand life is hard for everyone but very few have experienced hardship to that degree on a repeated and constant level, and yet Paul was able to persevere, to endure, to keep courage until Nero beheaded him. How is that possible? Can you imagine facing, can you imagine that? Can you imagine how you would feel? Can you imagine the fear that you would have to face knowing that every time you go into a city, that there's trials, that there's troubles awaiting you, and in fact, God had promised you that? He faced betrayal, desertion, not to mention just the danger of traveling, and yet he did not lose courage.

Well, thankfully Paul gives us a window into his soul. We get a glimpse into what empowered this man and I just want to say this: if you are here this morning and your life is hard and you've endured pain and struggle and trial and you are overcome with fear and anxiety, there is hope for you. There is hope for you. There is power for you. There is comfort for you. There is encouragement for you. It is possible for you to maintain this hope and to not lose heart, to never give up and to face whatever you fear with courage. That is possible. Let's watch how Paul did it, okay?

So five keys to courage. This theme of courage and confidence and boldness is very prominent in the book of 2 Corinthians and Paul goes to great lengths to explain why he is so confident, why he is so bold, why he's so courageous. You see, Paul was accused of being bold in his letters, even though he was personally unimpressive. Okay, he was this little guy and, you know, going through trials like that you're not going to be very attractive. You're going to get beat up. You've probably got a limp. You've probably got a broken nose, right? He is not going to be your poster child, right, for public speaking. He's not going to be the one that everyone wants to imitate. He's not going to set the fashion trends, okay? He was personally unimpressive and there were men in Corinth who fancied themselves as sort of super apostles. They were eloquent and had a powerful presence about them.

Furthermore, they questioned Paul's motives for everything he was doing, and I think something that really caused them to stir things up was that Paul was collecting money for the saints in Jerusalem who were these impoverished saints in Jerusalem and he was going around to the churches collecting money and the Corinthians had promised a

certain sum of money while people are coming along behind Paul questioning his motives on this. They questioned whether he was in it for his own personal gain, and then they belittled him for his weakness and all this was in an attempt to discredit his ministry and the message of the Gospel so that these super apostles could draw followers after themselves. So Paul, in order to defend the Gospel, for the sake of the Corinthians' faith and so that they would actually fulfill the promise that they had made to the saints in Jerusalem that aid was coming, Paul goes about telling them why he feels so confident, why he has the authority to say what he says, why he's courageous and sincere, and we get to listen and we get to learn from it.

So before we get into the keys, there are a couple of prerequisites to this kind of courage, okay? I'm not going to give you courage. This isn't for everybody, this kind of courage. This is for those who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. So this is not an inspirational message for you to go conquer your fears, whatever they are, for you to go, you know, start whatever business. That's not what this is. This is the key to a godly courage to please the Lord no matter what, and so you need to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. You need to see his glory. You need to see him as worth the loss of all things, as the Lord of all things. You need to understand that you are called as we imitate Paul, as an ambassador of Christ. When you're saved, you have been conscripted into this role as a representative of Jesus Christ no matter where you go, and that, to do that is going to require this kind of courage.

So the first question for you: is Jesus Christ valuable to you? Do you love him? Is he worth suffering for? If something is not valuable, it's not worth suffering for. If something is easy, it doesn't require courage. But following Christ is extremely valuable and it's not easy. You will endure suffering because of it and so it's going to require this courage that we're talking about today.

So the first key to this kind of courage that Paul is talking about we'll find in 2 Corinthians 1:3-10, okay, and we'll circle back and we'll end up in chapter 5 to see how it all comes together there, but 2 Corinthians 1, starting in verse 3. The first key to courage is comfort in God's promises. Comfort in God's promises. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort." And this is what I want to focus on, verse 8, "For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life." Whatever they were going through, some sort of extreme suffering caused them to question whether or not they would even survive.

Do you know that passage in 1 Corinthians 10 where it says God will not allow you to endure more than you are able? That's referring to temptation, okay? You will not experience any temptation that you will not be able to endure, but there are trials that are beyond our personal strength and that's just true. There is incredible suffering that people have gone through in this world, isn't there, and many of you have experienced that kind of suffering where you weren't sure you were going to survive, you were not sure you even wanted to survive. It was beyond your strength.

But look at what he says in verse 9. It says, "indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that," and this is the purpose, "so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us." If you want to be confident, if you want to have the courage and the consolation and the exhortation that comes that you need to walk faithfully with God, you need to take comfort in his promises, the promise to raise you from the dead; that no matter what you face here, no matter what you endure here, God will raise you from the dead. You will be with him some day. There will be an end to this trial. It is God who comforts the afflicted. It's in these trials that you become more and more aware of the great hope that you have in him. It's in these trials that shape you and fit you and train you to hold on until that day.

So the first key to the confidence and the courage that you need is hope in the promise of God. Think of the opposite of this. If your hope is in surviving this life, you will make compromises in order to do so. If your hope is in having a comfortable life here, if your hope is in some kind of a kingdom here, some kind of a fancy house, some kind of financial stability, if that's where your hope is, you will make compromises in order to reach that and you will not have courage where you need it. If this country really starts to take a turn downward and we are squeezed financially as a people because of our faith, if your hope is in heaven, you will stand with the Lord through that persecution. If your hope is set on having a nice Christian family with your white picket fence and your dog and your green grass and your nice, you know, master suite, then you will fold. You will lack the courage that you need when the time comes. So the first key to this courage is comfort, hope, encouragement in God's promises.

I want to take you now to verse 12 of chapter 1. Listen to what he says here. This will be the second key to this courage. Verse 12, it says, "For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you." The second key to courage is a clear conscience. The word there for "sincerity, godly sincerity" simply means pure motives. Your motives aren't mixed. You're motivated by what is right, by what is pure, and it's straightforward. What is a pure motive? It's a motive that is aimed at pleasing Christ and it's a motive that is aimed for the good of others, not for selfish gain. You're not sneaky about it.

So a clear conscience is necessary. If you wonder why you lack courage, could it be that your conscience is bothering you? Could it be that you have compromised in some way? Could it be that you are serving some end outwardly with hypocrisy but inside you do not

truly love the Lord? Or in your private room you are doing things that dishonor him? Or behind closed doors you are slandering people, you are gossiping, you are manipulating in order to get what you want? And if you don't have a clear conscience, you will not throw yourself into the battle where it's needed. You will not speak the truth in love. You will run away from conflict. You will fail to deal with things that are needed.

Paul says here that, "We conducted ourselves in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom." He wasn't trying to control them. Look down at verse 24, he says, "Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm." Paul was not trying to control them, he's not trying to manipulate them. He's not trying to just feed them the right information so that they'll do what he wants them to do. His purpose in everything that he was doing was for their joy. His purpose was for their good. Making a collection for the saints, the preaching that he did among them, the way that he served them, the way that he preached the word and went house to house ministering to them, the way that he provided for his own needs by tent-making, it was all for their joy. And even though he is commanding them to do things that honor Christ, even though he is exercising authority as an apostle of Christ, it's not for his own good, it's not because he wants to control them, it's for their benefit. That is the testimony of his clear conscience.

Look at chapter 2, verse 17. Paul says this, "For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God." So Paul is not preaching the word of God because it's a great opportunity to earn some extra money, right? He's preaching this before God, from godly sincerity for the benefit of others, for God's glory and the benefit of others, and he's not trying to benefit himself in this.

Is your conscience clear? Have you dealt with the things that are eating at your conscience? Are you convicted of sin that you have not dealt with? Do you come to church in an effort to earn some kind of standing for yourself? Do you manipulate relationships for your own good? Do you withhold information so that it will not cast you in a bad light so that you can get people to act the way you want them to? If so, repent and clear your conscience. Confess your sin to the Lord. Make it right with the people who you have wronged and begin acting sincerely. That is the second key to courage.

So the first key, comfort in God's promises. 2. A clear conscience. 3. Confidence in God's power. Look at chapter 3, verse 4. Paul says, again he brings up this issue of confidence, he says, "Such confidence we have through Christ toward God." He keeps bringing this up. In chapter 3, verse 12, he says, "Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech." Then in chapter 4, verse 1, "Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart." Confidence. Boldness. Courage. Not losing heart. Endurance.

Why? What makes him so confident? Let's start in chapter 3, verse 1. I want you to read this and, again, I certainly am not the model of expository preaching and this is not the way that you should always do it, but I'm going to read you a lot of Scripture this

morning because this all feeds into chapter 5 and enriches that meaning. Chapter 3, verse 1, "Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?" So Paul is basically, you know, he's trying to convince them of why they should listen to him; why is he so confident; why does he feel that he has the authority to say the things he does. So now he says, "Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Are we puffing ourselves up?" He says, "do we need these letters of commendation?" These other guys would come with letters from, you know, authority figures. It would be like me coming in here with a letter, you know, with my diploma and a signed letter from John MacArthur and John Street, right? You should trust me because these guys say so, right? And Paul is saying, "Do we need those kind of letters? Do the apostles need these kinds of letters?"

Verse 2, he says this, "You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such confidence we have through Christ toward God." What is his confidence from? What is his letter of commendation? It's the impact of his ministry on their heart, the ministry of the new covenant, the ministry that actually transforms sinners into saints, that actually gives salvation and grants the forgiveness of sins, and the true love that is shared between believers when they share that fellowship in Christ. That is his letter of commendation. He says, "I don't need these other authorities to write a letter of commendation. I shouldn't even have to remind you and puff myself up in your presence so that you'll listen to me. Think back to our relationship and what has happened. I preached the Gospel to you, you got saved, you were transformed," and this church, this church was filled with people from all kinds of terrible backgrounds, people steeped in homosexual practice and immorality and enmity and strife and violence and all of these things, and we could go on and on. I don't have time to give you all the background but he says such were some of you and yet you were washed and cleansed and sanctified. You were the worst of sinners and God saved you and transformed you and brought you into his kingdom and that was done through the ministry of Paul, the preaching of the Gospel. That is the letter of commendation.

So why was Paul confident? It was because he was confident in God's power through the Gospel. Look at verse 5, "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." He's speaking of the old covenant, the law. The law could never give life. It was only the Spirit of God that gives life and God has made little old Paul adequate as a servant of this new covenant.

Verse 7, "But if the ministry of death," the old covenant, "in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?" Okay, I'm not going to explain all of the background of this, I would definitely recommend you study it, but the ministry of the old covenant which could do nothing but condemn you, engraved on stones, it came with glory from God on

Mount Sinai and it came with glory, such glory that Moses when he went up on the mountain, his face like absorbed this glory and when he came down off the mountain it was glowing with light. It's like a glow-in-the-dark, you know, toy. I mean, it just radiated this light from the Lord. So it came with this glory and it was so glorious that it hurt the Israelites' eyes to look at it. Well, if that old covenant came with glory, how much more this new covenant by the Spirit through Jesus Christ? How much more glory will this new one have?

Verse 9, "For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that surpasses it." What he's saying, that old covenant had glory, the new covenant so far surpasses it that you can't even see it. It's like the stars at night, you see them, you see their glory, but when the sun comes out, you don't see the stars anymore because of the glory of the sun. The glory of the new covenant so far outshines the old covenant that it's like that glory fades away.

"For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory." So the new covenant will remain in place forever and it continues to have glory. It will not fade away.

Verse 12, "Therefore having such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech." Paul, the representative of the new covenant, an ambassador of Christ, knowing that he was not adequate in himself, is proclaiming the message that can transform lives and souls forever and it has no fading glory. Its glory so far outshines anything else out there and that is why he is bold and confident because of the message of the Gospel and the power of God that is tied to it.

Verse 13, we "are not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not look intently at the end of what was fading away." Basically he's not criticizing Moses, he's using this as sort of an illustration, right? Moses had this glory radiating off his face so he put a veil over it almost to hide it. This is kind of the opposite of the boldness that Paul is proclaiming. Paul, instead of hiding the glory, is shining it out to everyone. We're not like Moses.

Verse 14, "their minds were hardened," the people who saw Moses and didn't want to look at the glory, "for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ." They don't see the glory of the new covenant because only that glory is revealed when Christ comes in and reveals it. That veil is lifted by Christ.

So verse 15, "But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a person turns to the Lord," the Lord Jesus, "the veil is taken away." Verse 17, "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." There is freedom. Now verse 18, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit." We all. All believers behold the glory of the Lord and are

transformed by it. That applied to the Corinthians, that applied to Paul, it applies to you and me. When you see the glory of God in the face of Christ in the new covenant and you believe in him, that veil is lifted and now you are transformed and are beginning to take on his likeness.

Why is Paul confident? He's confident in God's power, not his own. He continues in chapter 4, verse 1, "Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart." We have the ministry of the Gospel. We have the ministry of the new covenant. You and I have this same ministry. We have this same powerful message. So therefore he says we do not lose heart. We do not get discouraged. We do not lose our motivation.

Verse 2, "but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Okay? So when you trust in God's power, you don't have to get sneaky and crafty. You don't have to try to sell it. You don't have to try to trick people into buying it. You don't have to do a bait-and-switch. When you know that it's the Gospel that transforms by the power of the Spirit and it's not you, then you can be straightforward, sincere, and honest. The plain statement of the truth, he says here. The straightforward statement of the truth.

When was the last time that you saw someone saved because you took the time to sincerely, without shame and without sneakiness, just give them the Gospel of this new covenant? How many of you think that you have to get people to think you're a really awesome person before that they will buy this message from you? How many of you try to hide the things that are a little bit more offensive, thinking that you'll bring them along later and just kind of get their foot in the door? We don't do that. Paul didn't do that because he was courageous. Why was he courageous? Because his hope was in heaven. He wasn't afraid of how they were going to treat him. Because his conscience was clear, that his motivation was for their good, and because he trusted in the power of God, not his own power. So he was fully 100% confident and courageous wherever he went in these things. I'm not saying he didn't struggle but as a characteristic, he was confident and courageous.

Verse 3 he says, "even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." So what he's saying there is if people don't believe, it's not because you weren't sneaky enough or crafty enough or clever enough to pin them down and twist their arm and manipulate them into the kingdom, it's because they've been blinded by Satan. They're blinded and the veil needs to be lifted and the only way it's lifted is the preaching of the Gospel and Christ removing it. It's not you. You can't remove the veil.

So verse 5, "we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake." Okay? So we're not the Lord, we're not setting ourselves up as gurus, we're not the sole source of truth and I have to copyright my material so that

I can take the most advantage of it financially. No, the open statement of the truth out of sincerity, trusting in his power, we preach Christ as Lord, not ourselves, we are your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. This is the Apostle Paul, the one who has the authority of the apostle, seeing himself as a slave to the Corinthians for Jesus' sake.

"For God," verse 6, "who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." Is Christ glorious to you? Do you love him?

Just as a side note, the Gospel, when you come to believe in him, you see Christ as glorious, as the one from God, the Savior, and everything that we do is centered upon him. This is not about a nice little Christian way of life. This is not about a set of, you know, lifestyle options here. We don't set up our life on Christian principles, you know, Christ is not our servant to make our life better. We come to him. We worship him. This is about him. This is loyalty to him. We make his glory known. When we share the Gospel, it's because we love him and we want him to be seen as that. God has shone in our hearts the glory of Christ, the glory of God in the face of Christ and there's so much more to be said about it. Obviously we could go for years through these passages and I just want to give you the big picture of why you should be courageous and confident.

He says this, verse 7, "But we have this treasure," this treasure of the Gospel, "in earthen vessels." You and I, clay pots, very common, nothing special about them, nothing intrinsically valuable in them, and yet we carry this immense treasure, and the reason that God has designed it this way is "so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves." This reminds me, you know, of 1 Corinthians 2, I think it is, where Paul says, "When I was among you, I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified," basically so that your faith would rest not in man but in the power of God. You're not saved because it's some real special message, because it's real clever and some philosophical beauty. It's because it's true and God wants you to not admire the preacher but the Savior. That's why he chooses people like us.

So in verse 8, "we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body." So because of that, our confidence in God's power, we are willing to lay our own lives down so that that power can bubble up to the surface; so that that power in the Gospel can be made known; so that we don't get in the way of it. Even though we are pressed in, even though we are pressured, we're not crushed. We're perplexed, things are confusing, we don't always know what to do, but not to the point of despair, hopelessness. We know what to do. We know where we're going. We know where our hope lies. So we can persevere with courage. We can do his work with confidence and boldness.

The fourth key to courage after the comfort in God's promises, having a clear conscience, and number 3, confidence in God's power, it's number 4, trust in God's process. Trust in

God's process. Look at 2 Corinthians 4:16. It says, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 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." Again he says, "We do not lose heart." We don't get discouraged and grow weary to the point of quitting. Our outer man is decaying yet our inner man is being renewed. This word for "decaying" simply means "it's wasting away." Anyone here experiencing that? I'm 36 and I've got arthritis in my hip now. Like, what happened? I'm starting to decay, is what's happening, right? Our outer man is decaying. Think of what Paul went through. The outer man is decaying, this is to be expected, this is what's going to happen, and yet God's process is this, is that as the outer man decays, the inner man is being renewed every day.

This reminds me of Colossians 3:10, "Put on the new self who is being renewed with a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created it." It's being rejuvenated. It's being changed. It's being transformed into the image of Christ. It's being strengthened and purified. Some day, it's like the butterfly in the midst of this cocoon, right? You're trapped and it's tight and it's uncomfortable and eventually you're going to break out of that thing and have the freedom of the children of God that we will have in glory, like a butterfly beautifully flying and going wherever it wants to. That's the freedom that we will have in eternity but right now we have this decaying body that we have to deal with.

But look at the other thing about God's process is, yes, your inner man is being renewed but it's done through the midst of affliction. Verse 17, it says, "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." The word for "light" means "insignificant or frivolous." This is coming from Paul, right? This is coming from the guy we just read about, the stuff he went through, so he understands. He understands how hard it is. He understands what you're going through but he's referring to this affliction is light, as insignificant.

How can he say that? It's not because the level of pain is light, and he's not saying it's easy, but what makes it light is its value by comparison to the glory that is going to be revealed in us. It's light in comparison to what God is working for us in eternity. It's insignificant. We will look back, when we are with him in heaven, we will look back on the sufferings that we experienced as insignificant and I, in no way, want to diminish what you've gone through because it's hard and, I mean, some of you are going through some real trials and some of you have experienced horrible things, abuses and neglect and abandonment. That's not insignificant but in comparison to that glory, you will look back and see that as just a memory that God delivered you from.

Paul said in Romans 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Verse 28 of the same chapter, "we know that God causes all [these] things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." This is not to diminish your suffering but to give you perspective on it. Think about this: the moon, when you

see it in the sky it appears to be the same size as the sun. I mean, if you think about that, how crazy that is. I mean, when we look at it from our perspective and ancient people before we studied science and before we figured some of these things out, they probably thought the moon and the sun were of similar size. Why does the moon look so much bigger? It's because it's so much closer to us. Then when you have this solar eclipse, you know, the moon, just the way that it's arranged, it fits perfectly over the top of the sun and it blocks it out and everything goes dark and cold. In ancient cultures before they knew what was happening, would freak out. They thought the world was ending. They thought it was over. Panic set in. I mean, that's true. Do you know that the moon would fit inside the sun 41 million times, if my iPhone is correct? Forty-one million times, and yet it seems so big and that eclipse, if you don't know what's happening is so terrifying, and yet in comparison to the glory of the sun, the moon is light. It's gigantic to us right now because it's close to us, but in comparison to the sun, it's light. Then when that eclipse happens, it seems like the world is ending but it's momentary and it will pass.

The suffering that we go through is cold and dark and it seems huge but it's all a part of God's process to produce an eternal weight of glory. This suffering will end and then you'll be brought into his kingdom and by comparison what you've gone through will seem insignificant. This reminds me of Hebrews 12:2 where Jesus "who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame." The word for "despising" could be taken to mean "thinking of it as little importance, little value." That the shame, what he was about to endure on the cross in comparison to the reward was small. Now he faced it, he felt it, he was afraid of it, but he did not avoid it and he went through it for the joy set before him.

So we need comfort in God's promises, a clear conscience, confidence in God's power, not our own, trust in God's process, trust him with what he's got you going through right now. That's his process, trust the process. Lastly, be controlled by Christ's love. 2 Corinthians 5:14 through 15 he says this, "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf." The love of Christ, the way that Christ loved us, leaves us with no other choice. He died for us. He gave himself up for us to purchase us for his own possession so that we would be zealous for good works, Titus says, so that we would no longer live for ourselves but for him. That's what he did when he saved you. He didn't just give you a free pass to heaven, he took you into his glorious plan to redeem a people for himself.

So because of that, we are to be controlled and constrained just in the same way that the apostles were, constrained and controlled by the love of Christ. The love of Christ is our boundary and the love of Christ is our direction, the love of Christ is our frontier. That is what should guide everything that we do. The love of Christ, the way he loved us, we imitate that. We love because he loved us and we love the same way he loved us. If you're controlled by that rather than by fear, then you will be courageous. If your aim as it said as we read earlier is to be pleasing to the Lord, then you will set aside your own desires. You will run into the battle with confidence and courage. If you have hope in heaven, the promises he's made to raise you from the dead, then you won't be trying to

save your life here. If your conscience is clear, then you will willingly go and expose yourself to all kinds of opposition. If you trust in his power, then you won't tamper with the message, you will show it forth boldly.

I pray that the Lord would strengthen our hearts to be courageous, to have the courage to do what he has called us to do, to confront sin where it's needed, to stand for righteousness, to confess our sin, to proclaim his message to a dying world, and to do all that we do out of love for him, not to please ourselves.

Let's pray.

Lord, we desperately need You and You are glorious, You are mighty, You are worth everything. I pray You would help us to trust Your process of what You're putting us through, Lord. And help these dear people, help me, to be courageous in everything that You have called us to, that thanksgiving would abound to the glory of God as it spreads to more and more people. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.