

Fact Sheet for “Jars of Clay” 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

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This book is a defense of Paul's ministry to the Corinthians, who were listening to voices that were criticizing Paul for their own benefit. This book is more than an account of history however. It provides encouragement for all of us whenever we get made fun of or ridiculed because of our Christianity. For those who are persecuted, or even killed, because of their Christianity this passage speaks volumes. There are multiple passages in this book that are well known and well loved. Today we will be taking a closer look at one of those passages.

Paul spoke about affliction and comfort in chapter 1. In chapter 2 he wrote about the fragrance of Christ (2:14-16a). In chapter 3 he wrote of Moses' veiled face and the image of Christ (3:18). Now we come to chapter 4.

⁷ ¶ But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸ ¶ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

There is even a singing group called “Jars of Clay”. Paul uses the phrase “death of Jesus” to describe being afflicted, persecuted, perplexed, and persecuted. On the other hand the “life of Jesus” is a reference to the great treasure of our life in Christ.

Take a moment to consider what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:3-5.

¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Paul wrote earlier about his experiences with persecution (1:8-10). Even Jesus experienced the same thing.

ESV 2 Corinthians 13:4 For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.

Look at two other related passages now.

ESV 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

ESV 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 ¶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you.

¹³ ¶ Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," (*Psalms 116:10a*) we also believe, and so we also speak, ¹⁴ knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵ For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

¹⁶ ¶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ 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.

"light momentary" – Not only immediate, but also in his life.

ESV Romans 8:18 ¶ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

At this point being a Christian in America has not meant a death sentence. Most Christians in this country have not been subject to beatings or imprisonments for their faith. In other countries merely being a Christian does bring the threat of death and imprisonment, but not now in our country.

There have however been other effects. If you hold to creation instead of evolution it's pretty tough to get a professorship at a state university. Some in our Oregon schools wish that "Release Time" would just go away. If you have a biblical view of marriage you will be mocked for not embracing gay marriage. Theologically conservative churches all across America are now talking about how to protect themselves from our government over this issue. We are viewed by many as being closed minded for saying that faith in Christ is the only way to eternal life . Jesus Himself said...

ESV John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

We are often viewed as being close-minded for believing that the Bible is true and that it is the only written Word of God.

The difficulties associated with being a Christian in America are increasing. In ten years I expect it will be more difficult than today. Persecution? Yes, but not like Paul. At least not now. But what Paul had to say in 2 Corinthians can encourage us as we experience these things in America.

⁷ ¶ But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

Every time I see an arrangement of flowers in a vase I think of where my attention is drawn... to the vase or to the flowers. Paul said that when we share the gospel people's attention should be drawn to God, not to us.