

Catch On Study Guide

THE NEW COVENANT Transforming the Marketplace

2 Corinthians 4:1-12 - Treasures in Earthen Jars

Comparative Study

John 12: 25-26 - The Identifying Mark

We have taken the last 3 months to study the New Covenant as revealed in 2 Corinthians 2- 4. As we prepare for our next study, we are going to look to other chapters and verses in the Bible and compare understandings, specifically to living our lives as the Kingdom of God on Earth. Let's begin with where any study of the gospel begins - in the dying and ends in the living.

John 12: 25-26

25 "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.

26 "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.

The Identifying Mark

Here is the great Christian paradox, the unmistakable mark of an authentic gospel: It begins with dying, with a cross. If the gospel that you hear preached on the radio, the television, or wherever, does not begin with a cross, does not begin by telling you that something in you has to die, it is not the true gospel. This is the identifying mark.

How do these words of Jesus compare to philosophy of life today?

- Your life is your own! Live it the way you please!
- Watch out for No. 1!

- Do your own thing!
- Frank Sinatra singing, 'I Did It My Way!'
- Another philosophy of today is _____.

Do you believe that if you live with all the material abundance you could ever wish for, the plaudits of the crowd, recognition by the whole world, you will end up with nothing; your life will be a total waste of time?

"He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." Does this mean I have to hate myself? Then what does it mean¹?

We like to jump ahead to the rest of the gospel - the living in Christ. Yet this passage says that cannot be. The first part of the gospel is the cross. So, what does it mean to bear your cross daily²?

1. If, as a non believer, I say that I have a right to belong to myself, is it
 - a. True because I am not a Christian

-Or-

 - b. An illusion because we were all brought with a price?
2. What does it mean to surrender my claim to myself?
3. If I surrender to the Lordship of Jesus, does it hurt³?
4. What does this mean daily?
5. Do I do this all by myself - by my effort? Can I surrender to the Lordship of Jesus on my own powers?

¹ Surrender to the Lordship of Christ

² It means two things: First, it means a once-for-all decision; and secondly, a continuing series of choices. That is what the cross stands for.

³ Yes, it can! It cancels out my own plans. It confounds my ambitions at times. It feels like death. It is death; it's a form of dying.

6. The Lord uses this symbol of a grain of wheat not only of himself but of everyone who follows him. Explain⁴.
7. Does that sound familiar? Explain⁵.
8. While we are trying to determine that, what happens⁶?

Fruitful -- that is what the end of the gospel is.

If we belong to Jesus, every day will have its cross, every day will have something we ought to do but we don't feel like doing. That is our cross. "He who follows me must take up his cross daily and follow me," Luke 9:23).

Every day has its bit of death in order that it might bring forth _____. Life comes only out of death. "Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

2 Corinthians 4:1-12

Treasures in Jars of Clay

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.

⁴ Have you ever heard a grain of wheat talking to itself? I'm going to stretch your imagination a little and ask you to imagine a grain of wheat looking at itself, admiring itself. So round, so brown, so fully packed, and saying to itself, "This philosophy I hear asks me to fall into that dark, cold ground and lose myself. I don't want to do that. I like myself. I want to stay what I am. I want to hang on to myself, I want to be myself." (Ray Stedman, Authentic Christianity.)

⁵ But supposing the grain of wheat said, "Well, I'm told there is more to come, a lot more than I'm experiencing, and the only way I can have it is to fall into that dark ground and die. So I guess I'll do it." And it does so. It falls into the ground and is covered up. It's dark and unpleasant there. The grain of wheat begins to think, "What a fool I was! Why did I ever listen to that idea? Look what's happened to me! I don't like this at all." But then it begins to feel a tickle on its back. It turns around and sees a white sprout coming out. It says, "What is this that's happening? I didn't anticipate this at all. I've got to hold a committee meeting with myself and decide what to do about this. I'm in charge. I've got to determine whether that thing is going to go sideways, up or down, or whatever." (Stedman)

⁶ it discovers there is a hidden lordship which began to take over the moment it fell into the ground. This lordship directs the process quite apart from what the grain of wheat may feel, directing that a certain part goes down, while another part goes up and soon breaks through into the sunlight. Then the grain begins to say, "Oh, this is better. I'm beginning to enjoy this. It's not as bad as I thought." The sprout comes, then the blade, then the stalk, and finally the head. The grain of wheat says, "I feel fulfilled." (Filled full, is the idea.) Then those grains in the head fall into the ground and they go through the process again and again until at last a great, shimmering field of wheat is growing, beautiful, rippling and golden in the sun. The grain of wheat says, "Ah, this is life as it was intended to be." (Stedman)

2Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

3And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.

4The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

5For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

6For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness,"^a made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

7But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

8We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;

9persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

10We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

11For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.

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

13It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken."^b With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak,

14because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.

15All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

16Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

17For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

18So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

A clay jar is made to hold something. We were made to hold something; and that someone is God himself; the Lord of Lords, the Holy Messiah, the King of Kings! The glory of our humanity is that God designed us to correspond to his deity; and that His deity, with its fullness and wisdom and power should relate to and correspond to and be manifest through our basic humanity.

Take a minute and imagine the significance of this story for us. What would happen if we begin to live the new covenant, acting and living Jesus as Lord in control of everything in our life and the life of the whole world? What do you suppose would happen to all the antagonists of Christianity? They would become disheartened and begin to attack one another. It happens! People see us as ordinary jars of clay - just like them. Even though there is nothing outstanding about us, people see the extraordinary power that is not coming from us; it is coming from God.