**The Gospel in Earthen Vessels**

*2 Corinthians 4:7*

**Introduction**

1. **2 Corinthians 4:7** – this statement by Paul is profound and has within it several imperative truths we would do well to realize.
2. What blueprint has God revealed concerning the saving of men by the gospel?
3. How important is the gospel message? Or is it secondary to something more real?
4. How should our estimation of the gospel cause us to act?
5. Do we have any responsibility concerning the gospel?
6. How has God’s plan ensured that all glory goes to Him? How are we to act so as to not hinder that plan?
7. We Have This Treasure
8. The Gospel is a Treasure
   1. What is the treasure to which Paul refers? – **2 Corinthians 4:6**
      1. Holy Spirit? Miraculous power? Monetary wealth? Gifted speech? Good health?
   2. Context concerning the apostolic ministry:
      1. **2 Corinthians 3:14** – fragrance of knowledge of Christ.
      2. **2 Corinthians 3:17** – word of God
      3. **2 Corinthians 3:3** – ministry by ***“the Spirit of the living God”***
         1. **2 Corinthians 3:12** – spoken with boldness.
         2. **2 Corinthians 3:17-18** – liberating/transforming.
      4. **2 Corinthians 4:1** – ***“this ministry”***:
         1. **(v. 2)** – word of God, truth.
         2. **(vv. 3-6)** – gospel, light of the gospel, glory of Christ, knowledge of glory of God in face of Christ.
      5. **2 Corinthians 4:7** – this treasure is THE GOSPEL.
   3. It is not a treasure to many:
      1. **2 Corinthians 2:15-16** – aroma of death.
      2. **1 Corinthians 1:23** – stumbling block, foolishness.
9. Do We Value It as Such?
   1. **Psalm 19:10** – of infinitesimal value – based on its power and efficacy **(vv. 7-9**).
   2. Paul – **2 Corinthians 4:7-15** – his actions show how he values the gospel – undergoes severe hardship for the sake of this treasure, and for Christ’s sake.
      1. He is confident that it is working life in him and others **(vv. 10-12).**
      2. So he is willing to risk everything to speak it (**v. 13).**
   3. **Matthew 13:44-46** – willingness to sacrifice, give up, sell, and part with all for the treasure and pearl.
      1. Religious affiliation, tradition, place, family, money, fame, time, comfort, etc.
10. In Earthen Vessels
11. Earthen vessel?
    1. Vessel – container
    2. Earthen – of the earth – temporal, corruptible, weak, inglorious
    3. Of the body – **1 Peter 3:7; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4** – weaker vessel, abstain from sexual imm., possessing vessel.
    4. Paul – **Acts 9:10-16** – Ananias told to go to Paul, for Paul is a ***“chosen vessel of Mine to BEAR MY NAME”***
    5. God’s plan is for His glorious message to be carried in the earthen vessel of man.
12. By God’s Choice
    1. That this treasure of eternal value has been placed by God in earthen vessels is impressive.
       1. Such manifests its own efficacy – the gospel is in need of no supplement.
       2. **2 Timothy 3:16-17** – it alone thoroughly equips man.
    2. NOT: miraculous intervention, direct revelation to each man.
    3. BUT: **1 Corinthians 1:21** – messaged preached – **Romans 10:13-15**
       1. **Acts 9:6; 22:16** – not Jesus Himself, but Ananias.
       2. **Acts 8:26, 35** – not an angel of the Lord, but Philip.
       3. **Acts 10:3-6** – not an angel, but Peter.
13. Entrusted with a Stewardship
    1. God’s communication before – **Hebrews 1:1**
    2. God’s communication now – **Hebrews 1:2**
       1. Jesus was light in the world – **John 9:5; 12:35-36** (end of public ministry) – walk while you have the light.
       2. Not in the flesh any longer – **2 Corinthians 5:16**
       3. Light shines forth in proclaiming gospel by earthen vessels – **2 Corinthians 4:6**
       4. We are the light of the world – **Matthew 5:14; 28:18-20** (treasure in earthen vessels)
14. ***“that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us”***
    1. The efficacy of the God-authored gospel in the hands of weak/fallible man can only bring glory to God:
       1. **Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12** – way not in man, end is death.
       2. **1 Corinthians 2:9; Romans 11:33-35** – unknowable by man, unsearchable.
       3. **Matthew 19:26** – impossible with man.
       4. Brought by earthen vessel ensures glory goes to God – **1 Corinthians 1:17; 2:1-5**
          1. That no flesh should glory – **1 Corinthians 1:27-29**
    2. Must not be forgotten but carrying such treasure should be done in a worthy manner. (**cf. Philippians 1:27** – conduct worthy of gospel; **cf. 1 Corinthians 10:31** – do to the glory of God.)
    3. Demonstrated:
       1. ***“renounced the hidden things of shame”*** – contrast with his opponents – ad hominem arguments, self-commendation/comparison, self-glory, boast in the flesh, etc.
       2. Not by craftiness or handling word with deceit **(v. 2)**
          1. ***“We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word” (ESV)***
          2. ***“not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God” (NASB)***
          3. Glory cannot be of God if we change His message.
          4. **1 Thessalonians 2:4; Galatians 1:10** – not pleasing men, but God.
          5. **2 Timothy 4:3-4** – men-pleasers, tickling ears, turned to fables.
          6. **Jude 4; Romans 6:1** – turning grace into lewdness, inclusive of sin, no need to change (come as you are and stay that way)
          7. **Preach/teach w/ boldness** – i.e. not bellowing loudly, but confidently asserting the truth.
          8. **It’s not our job to make the gospel more inclusive, or to try to bring more in but to give the pure message, regardless of who would accept it.**
       3. Not preaching self, but Christ **(v. 5)**
          1. Glory cannot be of God if we present ourselves instead of Christ.
          2. **Galatians 6:12-13** – make good showing in flesh, to boast.
             1. Paul – **Galatians 5:11** – message inherently brought hardship upon him – didn’t preach to lessen the pressure.
          3. **2 Corinthians 2:17** – not peddling the word.
             1. Maybe not for money, but pride, popularity, reputation, appear wise, etc.
             2. **Philippians 1:15-16** – envy, strife, selfish ambition (**cf. James 3:14-15** – earthly, sensual, demonic wisdom)
          4. **1 Thessalonians 2:5-6** – not words to curry favor, or receive glory from men.
          5. Hide behind the cross of Christ – **Galatians 2:20** – apparent especially in teaching.
          6. **Preaching/teaching others is not for our vanity, but for God’s glory.**
       4. Manifestation of the truth **(v. 2).**
          1. In contrast to ***“tamper[ing] with God’s word” (ESV)*** – fully manifesting the truth unapologetically.
          2. **Romans 1:16-17** – not ashamed of the gospel – even though others are, knows it alone is the power.
          3. **2 Timothy 1:8** – not ashamed, but sharing.
             1. By holding fast pattern – **2 Timothy 1:13**
          4. **2 Timothy 4:1-2, 5** – rather than cater to the people, preach the word, convince (bring to consciousness of guilt), rebuke (reprimand the guilty), exhort (encouraged to faithfulness).
          5. **2 Corinthians 10:3-6** – capture for Christ by spiritual weapons, discipline those in need by authority of God.
          6. **God is glorified when the earthen vessel gets out of the truth’s way.**
       5. Shining the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ **(vv. 4, 6).**
          1. Truly preaching Jesus – **cf. Acts 8:35** – as Philip, but what did that include? Baptism – other things as well.
          2. **John 1:1, 14** – the word.
          3. **Colossians 2:9-10** – fulness of godhead bodily.
             1. **Colossians 2:6-7** – as taught in the faith.
          4. To transform into same glory – **2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:11, 16**
          5. Christ formed in others through word – **Galatians 4:16, 19** – telling truth to form Christ in them.
          6. God is glorified when His Son is proclaimed, and others are transformed into His image.
             1. Not image of other men…
             2. EX: denominationalism, preacheritus, etc.

**Conclusion**

1. **2 Corinthians 4:7** – God’s design was and is to bring His saving message to the world through weak, earthly vessels, that He might receive all glory.
2. We must appreciate the tremendous blessing of the gospel treasure we have received and benefitted from.
3. We must understand where the power lies and rely upon it to accomplish the task God has given us.
4. We must understand the enormous responsibility we have as the keepers/possessors of this eternal message, and make sure we handle it in a way which brings all glory to God and creates more of His disciples.