

5. Jar of clay

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In light of the exposes about some of TV evangelists by secular media recently, we find ourselves being upset, shamed, and horrified by what these so-called Christian TV evangelists would do for financial gains and for their own kingdoms. In my own opinion, they are nothing more than con artists. There is a great verse for those people.

2Tim 3:5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

One of the worst part is that after this kind of scandal, people still support those con artists. I hate to admit this, but I agree with what Bill Clinton said, "Suckers were born every five minutes."

Contrary to these con artists like Benny Hynn who spends over \$10000 per night in a hotel presidential suite, apostle Paul was treated horribly by the people whom he poured out his love. Yet, he loved them and cared for them. That is a true leader. Even though apostle Paul had the authority to put pressure on the people of Corinth, he'd never taken advantage over them. Let's see what he did and how pleased the Lord.

A. HONESTY IN THE MINISTRY

2 Corinthians 4:1-2 Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. 2 But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

By using apostle Paul's teaching, we must assess the current situation of the church in general in America:

1) Moral purity is challenged.

It is well known that several denominations embrace homosexuality into the leadership of their denominations to be politically correct. This opened a can of nasty worms. I wouldn't be a bit surprised, if we start to see some of the church leaders start to openly having wives, girl friends, and mistresses, even husbands and boyfriends for female leaders.

2) Rarity of biblical instruction in the churches

Many of the churches in America would rather use the books by men than using the Word of God to give heart warming instructions to their congregation. They rather please people than pleasing God. It is no wonder why many Christians are immature and go through a lot of confusions and problems.

3) Overemphasis on emotional persuasion that pervades the body of Christ.

The desire to change hearts often materializes in emotional manipulation, though often planned with the best intentions.

Like a three-ring circuses, some of the churches try to draw people to their churches with fancy video presentations, slick stage set-ups, and water down gospel which is not a Gospel at all. In turn, they offer little substance for their souls .

4) The breakdown of personal integrity among some of Christian leaders.

It's much easier to look good than to be good, as many have discovered. But once you take away the lights, cameras, and microphone, too often you find dishonesty and hypocrisy show their ugly heads.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

We should notice that it is the minds of the unbelieving which have been blinded. Of course, satan also works on the heart and the emotions of the lost, but his main battleground is the mind.

John 3:19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

The title 'god of this age' is not used of satan anywhere else in Scripture. Indeed, there is a significant and real sense in which satan "rules" this world. But not in an ultimate sense, because, the earth is the Lord's. Yet, Jesus did not contest satan's claim to rule over this present age in Luke 4:5-8, because there is a sense in which satan is the "popularly elected" ruler of this age.

Many false teachers today claim to base their doctrine on the Word of God, but false teachers handle God's Word in deceptive ways. You can prove anything by the Bible, provided you twist the Scriptures out of context and reject the witness of your own conscience. The Bible is a book of literature and it must be interpreted according to the fundamental rules of interpretation.

2 Corinthians 4:5-6 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. 6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Any leader, spiritual or otherwise, can easily become a hero in the eyes of those he leads. But the danger begins when he starts believing it himself! Paul continually pointed to Jesus Christ as Lord, never allowing those he taught to view him as anything more than a signpost.

How do we know when we've let pride creep into our ministry? When we talk about ourselves often to elevate our positions. When we expect special treatment from others. When we pursue promotion. When we expect others to follow us blindly and submissively. And when we resist accountability and vulnerability with others.

Paul was certainly a man who practiced genuine humility. He did not trust in himself or commend himself or preach himself. He sought only to lead people to Jesus Christ and to build them up in the faith. It would have been easy for Paul to build a "fan club" for himself and take advantage of weak people who thrive on associating with great men. The Judaizers operated in that way, but Paul rejected that kind of ministry.

B. PRESSURES IN THE MINISTRY

2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

What treasure was he talking about? It's the Gospel, in the form of Jesus Christ. We must focus on the treasure and not on the vessel.

Who is worthy to be a “container” for God’s light and glory? The smartest person isn’t smart enough, the purest person isn’t pure enough, the most spiritual person isn’t spiritual enough, and most talented person isn’t talented enough. We are all just clay pots holding an unspeakably great treasure!

Like Mary’s expensive perfume in John 12:3, the fragrant presence of Christ inside our hearts cannot be experienced by others until it is poured out. And often God pours out that fragrance by breaking the earthen vessel that holds it.

God chose to put His light and glory in the everyday dishes, not in the fine china! We almost always are drawn to the thing that has the best packaging. But the best gifts often have the most unlikely packaging. God did not see a need to “package” Jesus when He came as a man to this earth. Jesus was not embarrassed to live as an earthen vessel. God is not embarrassed to use clay pots like us!

2 Corinthians 4:8-9 We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed--

Sometimes God permits our vessels to be jarred so that some of the treasure will spill out and enrich others. Suffering reveals not only the weakness of man but also the glory of God. Paul presented a series of paradoxes in this paragraph.

A great commentator William Barclay puts this spin on the passage: “We are sore pressed at every point but not hemmed in, persecuted by men but never abandoned by God, at our wit’s end but never at our hope’s end, knocked down but not knocked out.”

Christ is never more visible in us than when others can find no other explanation for our hope and endurance through trials. Let’s not forget that clay pots are made for use – use in representing Christ – and not to be kept on a shelf for display purposes only.

2 Corinthians 4:10-11 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

What on earth did Paul mean when he said we carry about the death of Jesus in our living bodies?

The first part isn’t difficult to explain. In our hearts, we hold the results of Christ’s death on the cross: salvation. And as He transforms us, or sanctifies us, we display Him and His salvation in our lives.

Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

To make sense of the second part of that verse, it helps to understand what Paul meant by the word ‘death’. He didn’t mean a literal death, although that will eventually be part of it if the Lord tarries. He meant the cracking, or even shattering, of our pots.

When we die, He lives. When we lose, He wins. When we're weak, He's strong. When we're dependent, He's powerful. That's the beauty of clay pots. They allow the power of God's message to leak out. When our weakness shows, people realize it isn't the pot that's significant. It's God's power within that counts.

C. THE RIGHT FOCUS IN THE MINISTRY

2 Corinthians 4:12-15 So then death is working in us, but life in you. 13 And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, 14 knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. 15 For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

From his blinding start on the Damascus road to his binding shackles in a Roman dungeon, Paul was faithful to the end. Wouldn't we like to say that about ourselves? That kind of determination doesn't result from a New Year's resolution. But it results from a moment-by-moment commitment to keep the right focus on God.

Finishing the course isn't easy. The lanes are narrow. Heartache, disappointment and discouragement often block our path. And there's a certain amount of self-sacrifice involved.

Until a person is prepared to die, he is not really prepared to live. Paul saw a future reunion of God's people when he wrote, "*and will present us with you.*" Death is the great divider, but in Jesus Christ there is assurance that His people shall be reunited in His presence.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Apostle Paul repeats the same phrase "we do not lose heart" from v1. He wants us to have the right focus in Christ Jesus and the ministry. He was reminding the people of Corinth and us that this life is not the end of our journey. When our lives on the earth are finished, that is when the eternity in Christ just begins.

You may not have noticed, but our "outward man" is decaying! I do noticed that every day. My body is so obedient to the gravity of this earth. Everything on my body is sagging, aching and decaying. When I see our teenagers in our Youth Ministry, I realize that they don't even have one single line on their faces.

Without Christ, the outward man is all we have. But with the Holy Spirit in our lives, we have an "inner man" that is being renewed every day. That inner man never grows old and never dies – and knowing that puts our "momentary, light affliction" into perspective.

If we look only at the things that are seen, we'll be in the dumps before the day is done – guaranteed. The things that are unseen are eternal. Let's keep our focus off where we are and place it on where we're going.

D. APPLICATIONS

- 1) Like it or not, we became a light for others to follow once we became a Christian. How brightly does our lights shine?
- 2) Christ is never more visible in us than when others can find no other explanation for our hope and endurance through trials.
- 3) Let's remember: the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.