

Treasure in Earthen Vessels

2Co 4:7 NASB

- (7) But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;

From the Scriptures we understand that we live in two realities, the physical and the spiritual. Our bodies are limited to physical reality; we interact with the world through our five senses. Our spirits and souls interact with spiritual reality. Our spirit comes from God and is at home and fully functional in the spiritual realm. We interact with the spiritual realm with the senses of our spirits—intuition, communion and conscious. While our souls are non-physical we interact with both the spiritual and physical realities through its three senses—the mind or thinking process, the feelings or emotional process, and the will or decision process.

It is our souls that make us unique and self-aware. It is our souls that Jesus came to save. It is important to understand this. There was a teaching that swept through the Body of Christ a while back that twisted the scriptural teaching concerning body, soul and spirit. This erroneous teaching was based on some Gnostic principles that considered everything spirit as good and everything physical as bad. When this crept into the body, soul and spirit teaching, the emphasis on the spirit increased to the point that these teachers began to say that we are spirits who have a soul and a body. This is incorrect. We are souls who have a spirit and a body. That is why Jesus came to save souls and not spirits.

You may think that this little distinction is of no great importance; however, how you understand this affects the way that you interact with spiritual reality. Believing the concept that we are spirits causes the suppression of soul and body until only spirit remains, creating a false spirituality. It is the Lord's intention that the soul be *sanctified* not *suppressed*. Sanctification is a process and requires time and effort on our part. Because this process requires dying to self, it is easy to interpret this to mean the suppression of the soul rather than its sanctification.

The process of sanctification is outside the parameters of this teaching. Suffice it to say that sanctification sets us apart as vessels to be used by God. The process of dying to self is the process of changing the government of our lives from ourselves to the Lord Jesus.

The Vessel

In examining “the earthen vessel principle” let's begin with the vessel, which is our body. It is what is in the physical reality and it is through it that we interact with physical reality. We have a body for the same reason that the Lord Jesus came with a physical body.

Heb 10:5 NASB

- (5) Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, "SACRIFICE AND OFFERING

YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, BUT A BODY YOU HAVE PREPARED FOR ME;

The Lord's body was prepared for Him by the Father and it was prepared for the purpose of dying on the cross because that was the will of the Father.

Heb 10:7 NASB

- (7) "THEN I SAID, 'BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE SCROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO YOUR WILL, O GOD.'"

(Note: these verses are in all capitals because they are quotes from the Old Testament. That is the way the NASB shows Old Testament references.)

The reason that Jesus had a body was so that His body could be sacrificed according to the will of the Father. We have our bodies for the same reason.

Rom 12:1 NASB

- (1) Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.

Our spiritual service of worship is to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. While this is a choice on our part, it is a spiritual act and not a physical one; however, the spiritual reality is that we no longer own our bodies in the physical, because they have been sacrificed in the spiritual. Our bodies, our vessels, are now available, sanctified, set-apart, for the use of the Lord. He can do whatever He pleases with them.

The Treasure

Now that we know that the earthen vessel is our body which has been set apart, sacrificed for the Lord, what is the treasure?

2Co 4:5-6 NASB

- (5) For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.
- (6) For God, 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.

The next verse says, "But we have this treasure...", so, the treasure is what is described in these two preceding verses—Jesus as Lord shining in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. (In the scriptures, the heart usually means the spirit and the soul together.)

The Lordship of Jesus is the change of government mentioned earlier. In our hearts we have a piece of the Kingdom of God, the government of the King. The Kingdom, Jesus as Lord, is the treasure that we hold in our earthen vessel.

The Treasure in the Vessel

What is important to the purposes of God is not the vessel, neither is it the treasure; it is the treasure in the vessel. God could do anything that He wants without us, but He has chosen to do things through us by the power of Christ in us. God has done something *for us*, salvation, so that He can do something *in us*, sanctification, so that He might do something *through us*, the work of the ministry.

The Lord is not after puppets, dangling from pre-destined strings; but, rather, He is after partners who cooperate with Him to fulfill His purposes. He desires sons and daughters not slaves. Jesus reached a point with the disciples that He said,

Joh 15:15 NASB

(15) "No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.

This verse speaks of understanding what the Master is doing and cooperating or partnering with Him to do what the Master wants. In the previous verse, Jesus said, "You are My friends if you do what I command you." We are obedient but with understanding of the goal and purpose.

There are some who teach that we have no role but must make ourselves nothing so that people only see the treasure. However, God is glorified by the fact that the treasure is in the vessel. I know of ministries that are based solely on the statement of John the Baptist that "He must increase and I must decrease." This is taken out of context. John was the one who was to prepare the way of the Lord. Naturally, as the Lord's time came, John's ministry was to decrease and the ministry of the Lord was to increase.

What is intended by this is that we must die to self, but, the way that it is taught leads to error and even uselessness in the Kingdom of God. It sounds very spiritual to say that there needs to be less of me and more of the Lord. But, that is not correct. We already have Christ in us, all of Him. What we need is to be conformed to His image.

Rom 12:2 NASB

(2) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Rom 8:29 NASB

(29) For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

Our mind, the thinking process, must be renewed because it is conformed, shaped, like the world. It is renewed, not destroyed. The more our minds are renewed, the more we prove what the will

of God is and the more we participate in His purposes. In other words, the renewal of the mind allows us to prove, test, approve the will of God. This is us learning and choosing to be obedient to the Lord.

Our souls are changed as we yield and become obedient to His word. It is like putting a spoon of chocolate into a glass of milk. The milk is changed as the chocolate is mixed in. There is still milk and there is still chocolate but it is now expressed as “chocolate milk”. It is the same with us. As we undergo the sanctifying process, we take on the characteristics of Jesus. What is expressed through us has both the flavor of the Lord and of us, the sanctified us. By this the Lord is glorified—unity expressed through diversity.

The next lesson continues this idea and is called “Conduct in Weakness”