

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF PAUL'S SECOND LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS - PART FOUR

After setting the scene for this letter of Christ's comfort in our affliction, whether external or internal, Paul had illustrated, first from his own heartache over the chaos in the Corinthian church and one man's mistakes in particular. He then began a series of pictures to give colour to his message. The first two had been by way of a contrast. Those experiencing and sharing Christ's strength are compared to the mouth watering aroma of sacrifice at a Roman victory parade. We are not on the other hand to be door to door salesmen with a well rehearsed sales pitch about a pre-packaged gospel. He now continued with more vivid images drawn from life and the Old Testament.

It appears that the practice was arising of expecting Christians moving from one city to another to present a letter of recommendation from their former church to their new one. Living as they were under constant threat of death from a dictatorship, the need for certainty about who really belonged was understandable. Paul pointed out that if the principle of comfort in affliction was really working there would be a much simpler way to identify the genuine Christian brother. He compared us to a letter written on a stone tablet, except that the letter was written by Jesus Christ upon our hearts, and readable in our every action and attitude. We are meant to be a love letter to the world!(3:1-3)

But not one word of this letter can be written by us. The new covenant, the new relationship with God through Jesus, provides that absolutely every detail of the Christian life is God's work alone, in us and through us.(3:4-6)

Paul now amplified the picture of the letter with a dramatic example from the Old Testament. When Moses came down Mt.Sinai from being in the presence of God, he not only carried the written word of God on two tablets of stone, but the glory of God radiated from his whole appearance.(Exod.34:29) Hard as this may seem to believe, God intends this glory to be even greater in our lives because while Moses was with God and came away, the same Spirit of God actually dwells inside us for ever. The light in the face of Moses which was too hard to look at initially faded with time. The light of the character of Jesus in us never needs to fade. Moses temporary glow condemned others because they could not have it. What people should see every day in us gives hope because all are invited to share in the miracle of His transforming life within.(3:7-11)

When Moses came down the mountain or out of the tabernacle, his shining face was too much for the leaders to look and they were afraid as they listened to what God had said to him. After he had finished talking each time he would cover his face with a veil.(Exod.34:29-35) Paul explained that the real reason for the veil was to hide the fading of the glow of the presence of God. He compared the veil over Moses' face to the hardness of the minds of Moses' hearers then and Paul's hearers now. As they listened to the Law of God in the Old Testament they saw only regulations and were blind to the beautiful message of grace and comfort for the afflicted. When we turn to Christ, He lifts the veil which obscured our vision of Him. His Spirit sets us free from our hard hearts and spiritual blindness. Now we can look at Him throughout His word which will act

like a mirror. The more we look into His mirror the more our own appearance will change to become like Christ. His life will appear in our daily behaviour as a quiet ongoing process of transformation which does not need to fade as Moses' glow did. Moses met God intermittently; we are far more privileged because He is there all the time and for ever!(3:12-18)

In chapter four, Paul continued to illustrate the principle of Christ' life transforming us, however tough the afflictions we face.

4:1,2 Q.1 To be transformed, what important choice do we have to make? What has God done for us that should give us the courage to choose rightly? What do we have to leave behind for this to happen? What effect can our witness have on others?

4:3,4 Q.2 Why do some people not seem to understand our message even when we explain the gospel very clearly? What is their spiritual condition and what will be their fate? What exactly have the spiritually blind missed when they read the Bible without understanding? Who is 'the god of this world'?(Jn.12:31; Eph.2:2; I Jn.4:4; 5:19)

4:5,6 Q.3 What on the other hand does God do in those whose hearts are open when they hear the gospel explained? What should we always be looking for when we study God's word? What warning is there here about where the focus of our preaching must be?

4:7-12 Q.4 What new illustration did Paul now use? How does this help us to understand the nature of the Christian life? How does this develop the same picture in the Old Testament?(Isa.29:16; 45:9; 64:8; Jer.18:2-6) How did Paul use a similar picture in Rom.9:19-23 to explain predestination and freewill? What damage may we suffer as Christians under pressure? What difference will the treasure inside the pot make at such times? How does this result in us sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus?

4:13-15 Q.5 What is the responsibility of us, the pots containing the treasure, if we are to experience all Paul promised here? How does this allow us to experience the risen Christ? What consequence can this lead to for those around us? How in turn will they respond if they have open hearts?

4:16-18 Q.6 How did Paul next express this principle of transformation under pressure? How do his words help to keep our troubles in proper perspective? How have you found this to work in real life? If you have struggled in hard times what new insight have you gained from this study for next time?