

**EXEGESIS OF 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18**  
**SENIOR ADULT RALLY**  
**SOUTHLAND BAPTIST CHURCH**  
**MARCH 11, 2016**  
**LORIN L. CRANFORD**

**N-A28 GNT.** 16 Διὸ οὐκ ἐγκακοῦμεν, ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ ὁ ἔξω ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος διαφθείρεται, ἀλλ' ὁ ἔσω ἡμῶν ἀνακαινοῦται ἡμέρα καὶ ἡμέρα. 17 τὸ γὰρ παραυτίκα ἐλαφρὸν τῆς θλίψεως ἡμῶν καθ' ὑπερβολὴν εἰς ὑπερβολὴν αἰώνιον βάρος δόξης κατεργάζεται ἡμῖν, 18 μὴ σκοποῦντων ἡμῶν τὰ βλεπόμενα ἀλλὰ τὰ μὴ βλεπόμενα· τὰ γὰρ βλεπόμενα πρόσκαιρα, τὰ δὲ μὴ βλεπόμενα αἰώνια.

**NRSV.** 16 So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. 17 For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, 18 because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

4.16	Διὸ	
78	οὐκ ἐγκακοῦμεν, ἀλλ'	
		εἰ καὶ ὁ ἔξω ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος διαφθείρεται, ἀλλ'
79	ὁ ἔσω ἡμῶν ἀνακαινοῦται ἡμέρα καὶ ἡμέρα.	
4.17	γὰρ	
80	τὸ παραυτίκα ἐλαφρὸν . . . αἰώνιον βάρος δόξης κατεργάζεται ἡμῖν, τῆς θλίψεως ἡμῶν	 καθ' ὑπερβολὴν εἰς ὑπερβολὴν μὴ σκοποῦντων ἡμῶν τὰ βλεπόμενα ἀλλὰ (σκοποῦντων ἡμῶν) τὰ μὴ βλεπόμενα·
4.18		
	γὰρ	
81	τὰ βλεπόμενα πρόσκαιρα, δὲ	
82	τὰ μὴ βλεπόμενα αἰώνια.	

**EXEGESIS**

**What's the best way to understand a scripture text?** Although at some levels the answer is complex, at the heart of the answer is for you and I, the modern readers of the text, to put ourselves in the sandals of the first intended readers of the scripture text.<sup>1</sup> Once we have a sense of what the human writer of the text was trying to say to the people he wrote to, then we are in a better position to know what God is seeking to say to us in our world through this text. Out of that process comes an understanding of God's message from the Bible. In order to slip into the shoes of the original writers and hearers of the letter, we must learn everything possible about the historical and literary situation standing behind the passage of scripture text. The Swiss theologian Karl Barth once illustrated this in depicting a sermon as the preacher standing in the pulpit with the Bible in one hand and the morning newspa-

per in the other. The preacher's task in the sermon is to build a bridge between the Bible and the newspaper so that the congregation can hear God speaking to them through the sermon. That's what each of us preachers hope to accomplish this morning in the theme interpretation.

My particular responsibility this morning is to help you put on those first century Corinthian sandals and hear the apostle Paul as he expresses his heart in this passage. The world of mid first century Corinth was very different from the one that you and I live in here in west Texas. Paul's way of putting ideas together is also very different than the way most preachers today structure their ideas. So let's slip on those sandals and see whether we can grasp the historical meaning of Paul's words in 4:16-18.

**How are Paul's ideas structured?** In the original Koine Greek writing, two sentences were all that the apostle needed here. In the first sentence of v. 16, two key ideas are set forth with expansion elements attached to the second one (#s 78-79 in above diagram). The second sentence (#s 80-82) provides a justifying basis for the two statements in the first sentence. This

<sup>1</sup>I say 'readers' but historically in the first century the hearers were the primary target of the scripture writers. Particularly with the letters of the NT, the intent was for the letter to be read and discussed in each of the house church groups in the targeted community of believers. The reader of the letter ordinarily would be an associate of Paul, for example, who was involved in the composition of the letter initially and had carried the letter to its destination.

is signaled by the causal conjunction γὰρ that introduces two sets of reasons for the preceding declarations. Thus the two sentences are closely connected to one another as a single unit of idea expression.

In the beginning sentence comes first οὐκ ἐγκακοῦμεν, *we do not loose heart* (# 78). The present tense verb stresses an ongoing posture of Paul and his associates, the ‘we’ of the first person plural verb. The verb from ἐγκακέω is a Pauline word in the NT with 5 of six uses in the writings of Paul. The meaning stresses the loss of motivation in the face of something feared or dreaded. The use of the negative οὐκ underscores that this does not happen to the apostle or those working closely with him.

This assertion is immediately followed with a claim to continual inner renewal: ἀλλ’ εἰ καὶ ὁ ἔξω ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος<sup>2</sup> διαφθείρεται, ἀλλ’ ὁ ἔσω ἡμῶν<sup>3</sup> ἀνακαινοῦται ἡμέρα καὶ

<sup>2</sup>This is but one of many expressions in the Greek NT referencing the physical existence of an individual:

“**8.1 σῶμα<sup>a</sup>**, **τος n**: the physical body of persons, animals, or plants,<sup>2</sup> either dead or alive; **8.2 σωματικός, ἡ, ὄν; σωματικῶς<sup>c</sup>**: (derivatives of σῶμα ‘body,’ 8.1) pertaining to a physical body—‘bodily, physical, bodily form’; **8.3 ὁ ἔξω ἄνθρωπος**: (an idiom, literally ‘the outside person’) the physical nature or aspect of a person—‘body, physical form’; **8.4 σάρξ<sup>b</sup>**, **σαρκός f**: a living body—‘body, physical body.’<sup>3</sup>; **8.5 σκῆνος, ους n; σκηνωμας, τος n**: (figurative extensions of meaning of σκῆνος ‘tent,’ not occurring in the NT, and σκηνωμα<sup>a</sup> ‘temporary dwelling,’ 7.8) temporary habitation in the human body—‘body’; **8.6 σκεῦος<sup>e</sup>**, **ους n**: (a figurative extension of meaning of σκεῦος<sup>a</sup> ‘object, thing, instrument,’ 6.1, or of σκεῦος<sup>b</sup> ‘vessel,’ 6.118) the human body—‘body’; **8.7 πτώμα, τος n**: a dead body, whether of an animal or a human being—‘dead body, corpse’; **8.8 κῶλον, ου n**: the dead body of a person, especially one which is still unburied<sup>4</sup>—‘dead body, corpse.’” [Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 92-93.]

<sup>3</sup>Likewise, ὁ ἔσω ἡμῶν is but one of many ways in the NT of referencing the interior or psychological aspect of human existence:

“**26.1 ὁ ἔσω (ἄνθρωπος); ὁ ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ (ἄνθρωπος)**: (idioms, literally ‘the inner person’ and ‘the hidden person’) the psychological faculty, including intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects, in contrast with the purely physical aspects of human existence—‘the inner being, the inmost being, inwardly’; **26.2 ἔσωθεν<sup>c</sup>**: (a figurative extension of meaning of ἔσωθεν<sup>a</sup> ‘from inside,’ 84.14) the inner being of a person as the source or agent of thought or behavior—‘a person’s inner self, the inner being, within oneself’; **26.3 καρδιά<sup>a</sup>**, **ας f**: (a figurative extension of meaning of καρδιά ‘heart,’ not occurring in the NT in its literal sense) the causative source of a person’s psychological life in its various aspects, but with special emphasis upon thoughts—‘heart, inner self, mind.’<sup>1</sup>; **26.4 ψυχή<sup>a</sup>**, **ἡς f**: the essence of life in terms of thinking, willing, and feeling—‘inner self, mind, thoughts, feelings, heart, being’; **26.5 ἰσόψυχος, ον**: pertaining to being of the same mind or attitude—‘having the same mind, similarly minded, of the same attitude’; **26.6 σύμψυχος, ον**: pertaining to similarity of attitude and spirit—‘harmonious, united in spirit, being one in spirit’; **26.7 σάρξ, σαρκός f**: the psychological aspect of human nature which contrasts with the spiritual nature; in other words, that aspect of human nature which is characterized by or reflects typical human reasoning and desires in contrast with those aspects of human thought and behavior which relate to God and the spiritual life—‘human nature, human aspects, natural, human’; **26.8 σαρκικός<sup>a</sup>**, **ἡ, ὄν; σάρκινος<sup>b</sup>**, **η, ον**: pertaining to what is human or characteristic of human nature—‘human, natural’; **26.9 πνεῦμα<sup>a</sup>**, **τος n**: the non-material, psychological fac-

ἡμέρα, *instead, even since our outward person continually wastes away, our inner self is continually being renewed day after day* (# 79). The Greek expression is unusual and has a somewhat classical Greek tone rather than typical Koine Greek qualities. The intensely contrastive conjunction ἀλλά, repeated twice, both puts the core statement (#80) in strong contrast to the beginning statement (# 78) and doubles the contrast also with the outer / inner contrast of the concessive dependent clause,<sup>4</sup> εἰ καὶ ὁ ἔξω ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος διαφθείρεται, affirming the steady deterioration of one’s physical existence and the continual renewal of one’s inner self. The two verbs, διαφθείρεται, *is wasting away*, and ἀνακαινοῦται, *is being renewed*, highlight opposite dynamics as well.

Additionally, the contrastive ὁ ἔξω ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος, *our outer person*, and ὁ ἔσω<sup>5</sup> ἡμῶν, *our inner one*, height-

uly which is potentially sensitive and responsive to God (πνεῦμα<sup>e</sup> contrasts with σάρξ<sup>f</sup>, 26.7, as an expression of the divine in contrast with the purely human)—‘spirit, spiritual, spiritual nature, inner being’; **26.10 πνευματικός<sup>b</sup>**, **ἡ, ὄν; πνευματικῶς<sup>b</sup>**: pertaining to the spiritual nature or being of a person—‘spiritual, of the spirit, on a spiritual basis, in a spiritual manner’; **26.11 σπλάγχνα<sup>b</sup>**, **ων η; κοιλίας, ας f; νεφρός, οὔ m**: (figurative extensions of meaning of σπλάγχνα<sup>a</sup> ‘intestines,’ 8.58; κοιλία<sup>a</sup> ‘belly,’ 8.67; and νεφρός ‘kidney,’ not occurring in its literal meaning in the NT) the psychological faculty of desire, intent, and feeling—‘heart, feelings, desires’<sup>2</sup>; **26.12 ὄρμη, ἡς f**: (a figurative extension of meaning of ὄρμη ‘rushing motion,’ not occurring in the NT) the psychological faculty of will and impulse—‘will, impulse, desire’; **26.13 συνείδησις<sup>b</sup>**, **εως f**: (contrast συνείδησις<sup>a</sup> ‘knowledge about something,’ 28.4) the psychological faculty which can distinguish between right and wrong—‘moral sensitivity, conscience.’; **26.14 νοῦς<sup>a</sup>**, **νοός, νοί, νοῦν m; νόημα<sup>a</sup>**, **τος n; διάνοια<sup>a</sup>**, **ας f**: the psychological faculty of understanding, reasoning, thinking, and deciding—‘mind’; **26.15 φρήν, φρενός f; φρόνησις<sup>a</sup>**, **εως f; φρόνημα, τος n**: the psychological faculty of thoughtful planning, often with the implication of being wise and provident—‘thoughtful planning, way of thinking, outlook’; **26.16 φρονέω<sup>a</sup>**: (derivative of the base φρον ‘thoughtful planning,’ 26.15) to employ one’s faculty for thoughtful planning, with emphasis upon the underlying disposition or attitude—‘to have an attitude, to think in a particular manner.’” [Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 319-324.]

<sup>4</sup>The specific category of concessive clause usage here, εἰ καὶ, affirms the acknowledgment that our physical life is in an ongoing process of deterioration that is headed for eventual death no matter what. The apostle clearly understood and affirmed the temporality of physical life in this world. This came against the backdrop of some of the groups at Corinth placing primary emphasis upon physical existence and divine blessing centered on that physical existence, as 1 Cor. 1-6 depicts.

<sup>5</sup>“In the context there is no difference in meaning whether we read ἔσω ἡμῶν (the majority of witnesses), ἔσωθεν ἡμῶν (D<sup>2</sup> Ψ 1505 pc), ἔσωθεν (K L 629 1241 pm), or ἔσω (P 323 945 pc), but the first variant is to be preferred on the basis of the superior attestation and the Pauline parallels for ὁ ἔσω (ἄνθρωπος) in Rom. 7:22; Eph. 3:16.” [Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Milton Keynes, UK: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press, 2005), 358.]

ens the distinction as well, by the use of these two very Greek oriented and non Aramaic expressions. Behind this stands the understanding of human existence in a twofold manner. We are made up via divine creation of two fundamental parts: the material aspect that can be seen and the invisible aspect that can't be seen. Both the Greco-Roman and the Jewish cultures retained a twofold understanding of human existence, although the two perspectives contained enormous differences in many ways. But the essential twofold understanding common to both cultures enabled Paul to communicate with the largely Greco-Roman oriented readership at Corinth at a basic level of meaning, such as here in 4:16-18.

Concerning the interior part, ὁ ἔσω ἡμῶν, the apostle affirms an ongoing renewal not just spiritually<sup>6</sup> but throughout the interior of one's existence. Paul clearly understands this renewing process to be the work of the Holy Spirit, and not human effort, as he affirms later in Eph. 3:16, ἵνα δῶ ὑμῖν κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ δυνάμει κραταιωθῆναι διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον, I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit. The close linkage of τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης and τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον sheds light on the nature of this renewal. The divine Presence of God signaled by δόξα is re-intensified by the leadership and presence of the Holy Spirit. It is that divine Presence that gives new energy, clearer thinking, better decision making etc. in our lives. Thus with such renewal taking place inwardly in Paul's life, there is no way that he will loose motivation and drive for doing the will of God in ministry.

**What role do vv. 16-18 play in Second Corinthians?** Critically important to proper understanding of Paul's words here is the role of the intense inferential conjunction Διὸ at the beginning of verse sixteen.<sup>7</sup> The

<sup>6</sup>To limit the renewal to spiritual renewal would have required the use of πνευματικός, ἡ, ὄν. But Paul never speaks of an inner spiritual renewal. Instead, the dynamical work of the Holy Spirit brings renewal to various aspects of both our inner and outward existence. The verb ἀνακαινῶ, only used here and in Col. 3:10 inside the NT, is closely linked to ἀνακαινίζω, used only in Heb. 6:4, means to restore something to a previously positive state or position.

<sup>7</sup>This diagram below charts out how the apostle typically linked ideas together. Seldom, if ever, did he think in a modern western sense of 1, 2, 3, 4 etc. Failure to recognize this has led to countless misinterpretations of Paul's writings. Paul was in no way a modern, western thinker. But he understood well how to link up ideas especially as ancient Jews linked them, and as how ancient Greeks and Romans sometimes connected ideas. His Jewish heritage dominates the way his mind worked in his writings. But he also utilized contemporary ways of thinking in first century Greek and Latin. Recognizing this is crucial to proper understanding of Paul in the NT.

situation in which he could have lost heart is described especially in 4:1-15. Διὸ introduces vv. 16-18 as making explicit something implicit in vv. 1-15. Had the apostle been functioning merely at a human level of religious self-effort -- as evidently were his opponents at Corinth, he would have abandoned ministry long before reaching Corinth at the end of the third missionary journey in early 57 AD.<sup>8</sup> In these fifteen verses, he depicts a hugely difficult Gospel ministry filled with opposition and disappointment. But also he maintains a consistent integrity of commitment through all the ups and downs in serving Christ. Central to that consistency was his experience of God's mercy extended to him in ministry. Thus at the beginning of this larger discussion in 4:1, he asserts οὐκ ἐγκακοῦμεν, we do not loose heart. Therefore the first two statements in v. 16a, (#s 78 & 79) grow out of what Paul has claimed in vv. 1-15. Their specific meaning is defined by this literary context. Statement # 78 repeats 4:1a, and statement # 79 then summarizes the essence of vv. 1-15.

**What was the foundation of Paul's ongoing renewal in ministry?** The second sentence in vv. 17-18 provides the core answer to this question. Also contextually, they lay the foundation for the more detailed explanation in 5:1-10. Thus what Paul claims in vv. 17-18 is amplified in 5:1-10. Viewed the opposite way, 4:17-18 summarizes 5:1-10 as an introduction. The signals of this connection are expressed mainly in the terminology used in both passages, plus 5:1-10 is introduced by the causal γὰρ signaling that it stands as a justification for 4:17-18 in particular.

Now to vv. 17-18, which is a single sentence in the original Greek text. The first independent clause, # 80 in the above diagram, comes in vv. 17-18a; τὸ γὰρ παραυτίκα ἐλαφρὸν τῆς θλίψεως ἡμῶν καθ' ὑπερβολὴν εἰς ὑπερβολὴν αἰώνιον βάρος δόξης κατεργάζεται ἡμῖν, μὴ σκοποῦντων ἡμῶν τὰ βλεπόμενα ἀλλὰ τὰ μὴ βλεπόμενα, for our momentary slight affliction produces intensively a weighty eternal divine presence because we put our focus not on what can be seen but on what can't be seen. First to be noted is how Paul characterizes 4:7-15 especial-

### Paul's Way of Linking Ideas



Major linking tools used by Paul:

- Inferential: οὖν, ὁὖν, then, therefore
- Contrastive: ὅτι, ἀλλὰ, but, instead of
- Copulative: καί, and
- Causal: γὰρ, for

This is but a listing of some of the primary conjunctions used by Paul. A complete listing is much, much longer.

<sup>8</sup>Second Corinthians was written while the apostle was in Macedonia after having left Ephesus in the three plus year ministry in this key city of Asia. For details see my "[Chronology of Paul's Life and Ministry](http://cranfordville.com)," at [cranfordville.com](http://cranfordville.com).

ly. Most believers living in a contemporary pleasure oriented society would seldom characterize beatings, being persecuted daily with the threat of physical harm etc. as τὸ παραυτικά ἐλαφρὸν τῆς θλίψεως ἡμῶν, *our momentary slight affliction*. The apostle doesn't downplay the pain and hurt of what he had experienced at all. He has just depicted them (v. 16b) as ὁ ἕξω ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος διαφθείρεται, *our outer self is being wasted away* (toward death). Later in this letter he will go into much greater details about the specifics in 11:23-29, as he paints a horrific picture of torture and suffering in ministry.<sup>9</sup> Historically this depiction comes before the arrest in Jerusalem and subsequent events after the third missionary journey. Although he did not know it at the time of the composition of Second Corinthians early in 57 AD, far worse things lay ahead for this faithful servant of Christ.

How then could he characterize all these sufferings as τὸ παραυτικά ἐλαφρὸν τῆς θλίψεως ἡμῶν, *our momentary slight affliction*? His answer is simple although very challenging. It comes in the causal participle phrase at the end of the clause: μὴ σκοποῦντων ἡμῶν τὰ βλεπόμενα ἀλλὰ τὰ μὴ βλεπόμενα, *because of our scoping out not the things being seen but those not seen*. That is, he was viewing all his sufferings from God's perspective rather than from a purely human vantage point. Here is where the apostle distanced himself from his Corinthian opponents dramatically. They saw Paul's sufferings as a sign of weakness and thus questioned his claim to apostolic calling from God (cf. 2 Cor 10:12-13). But this was due to their false focus on things visible. He, in contrast, put his focus on the invisible spiritual realities at work in his sufferings. Thus as 5:1-10 elaborates, this gave him confidence and encouragement of his positive standing before God that would come into the open on the day of judgment.

The continuing basis for this focus is set forth in the spiri-

<sup>9</sup>2 Cor. 11:23-29. 23 διάκονοι Χριστοῦ εἰσιν; παραφρονῶν λαῶ, ὑπὲρ ἐγώ· ἐν κόποις περισσοτέρως, ἐν φυλακαῖς περισσοτέρως, ἐν πληγαῖς ὑπερβαλλόντως, ἐν θανάτοις πολλάκις. 24 Ὑπὸ Ἰουδαίων πεντάκις τεσσεράκοντα παρὰ μίαν ἔλαβον, 25 τρίς ἐρραβδίσθην, ἅπαξ ἐλιθάσθην, τρίς ἐναυάγησα, νυχθήμερον ἐν τῷ βυθῷ πεποιήκα· 26 ὁδοπορίαις πολλάκις, κινδύνοις ποταμῶν, κινδύνοις ληστῶν, κινδύνοις ἐκ γένους, κινδύνοις ἐξ ἐθνῶν, κινδύνοις ἐν πόλει, κινδύνοις ἐν ἐρημίᾳ, κινδύνοις ἐν θαλάσῃ, κινδύνοις ἐν ψευδαδέλφοις, 27 κόπῳ καὶ μόχθῳ, ἐν ἀγρυπνίαις πολλάκις, ἐν λιμῷ καὶ δίψει, ἐν νηστείαις πολλάκις, ἐν ψύχει καὶ γυμνότητι· 28 χωρὶς τῶν παρεκτὸς ἢ ἐπίστασίς μοι ἢ καθ' ἡμέραν, ἢ μέριμνα πασῶν τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν. 29 τίς ἀσθενεῖ καὶ οὐκ ἀσθενῶ; τίς σκανδαλίζεται καὶ οὐκ ἐγὼ πυροῦμαι;

23 Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman — I am a better one: with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. 24 Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. 28 And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not indignant?

tual axiom stated in v. 18b: τὰ γὰρ βλεπόμενα πρόσκαιρα, τὰ δὲ μὴ βλεπόμενα αἰώνια, *for the things being seen are fading away, but the things not seen are eternal*. His opponents built their entire religious orientation on visible things that are temporary at best and deceptive at worst. But he put his focus on the eternal spiritual realities that would transcend death and reach into eternity. In his first letter, he had warned the Corinthians about building a Christian life out of ξύλα, χόρτον, καλάμην, *wood, hay, straw* rather than out of χρυσόν, ἄργυρον, λίθους τιμίους, *gold, silver, precious stones* (1 Cor. 3:12). The day of judgment for believers would bring about the embarrassing destruction of such a life in the presence of Almighty God. The valuable qualities that survive this judgment (3:13) Paul now labels the invisible things with an eternal existence. In 2 Cor. 5:10, whether we have lived and served by these qualities or not is defined as τὰ διὰ τοῦ σώματος πρὸς ἃ ἔπραξεν, *the things done through the body*, that is, during our physical life on earth. Thus for Paul the foundational goal for the believer must always be εὐάρεστοι αὐτῷ εἶναι, *to be pleasing to Him* (5:9). This meant an unconditional faith commitment in conversion that launched a life of consistent obedience to Christ and daily following the leadership of His Spirit. Ministry emerging out of this kind of commitment would be authentic and would survive the test of time and eternity.

At this point it is appropriate to ask: **What lasting spiritual truths emerge from Paul's words in 4:16-18?** I will merely list what comes to my mind, and those making the application of this theme will develop the ideas further.

**1. Serving God is never going to be simple and easy.** To be sure, most of us will never experience the difficulties faced by the apostle Paul and his associates. But to think that Christian service is going to be a 'piece of cake' is to set oneself up for huge disappointment and frustration.

**2. Temptations to throw in the towel in service are not signs of weakness or failure.** Paul acknowledge here in developing the earlier declaration in 1:8-9 that he had felt such temptation.<sup>10</sup> Not experiencing temptation, but how we handle it is the key to success or failure. Coping for Paul meant zeroing on the spiritual side of his existence rather than on the physical. In so doing he found the renewing presence of God invigorating him to keep on serving.

**3. Critical to faithfulness in service is our primary focus in life.** Paul's entire life was centered on Christ

<sup>10</sup>2 Cor. 1:8-9. 8 Οὐ γὰρ θέλομεν ὑμᾶς ἀγνωεῖν, ἀδελφοί, ὑπὲρ τῆς θλίψεως ἡμῶν τῆς γενομένης ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ, ὅτι καθ' ὑπερβολὴν ὑπὲρ δύναμιν ἐβαρῆθημεν ὥστε ἐξαπορηθῆναι ἡμᾶς καὶ τοῦ ζῆν· 9 ἀλλ' αὐτοὶ ἐν ἑαυτοῖς τὸ ἀπόκριμα τοῦ θανάτου ἐσχῆκαμεν, ἵνα μὴ πεποιθότες ὦμεν ἐφ' ἑαυτοῖς ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ τῷ ἐγειροντι τοὺς νεκρούς·

8 We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

and being pleasing to Him. Out of this came consistent and authentic ministry to Christ. This focus enabled him to rise above every difficulty that came at him. A focus on his humanness and the physical challenges would have destroyed his ministry and plunged him into failure. He knew well not to serve out of his own limited resources.

**4. The renewing presence of God brings God's resources to bear on all of our existence.** The Holy Spirit is the renewing Presence of God whose work touches all of our life. It starts inwardly with mind, will, attitude etc. but works itself out to mold and shape words and actions as well. The consequence is authentic ministry to others through the Gospel.

Does Paul have something to say to us in the modern world? I certainly think so. His words sparked an acceptance of him by even more of the Corinthians as he made his way from Macedonia to Corinth after Titus carried this letter to Corinth and read it to the house church groups in the city (cf. 8:5-6 et als). Not every one responded positively but a majority of the church did and this enabled the apostle to continue his journey to the city (cf. Acts 20:1-3).

To us today my prayer is that these words of the apostle will spark an even greater determination to 'finish strong' in faithful service to Christ no matter what the obstacles may be. If we follow Paul's example, such will be our experience. We can then look forward to standing before our Christ in final judgment confident of our service to Him in this life.