

Earthen Vessels!

I. Intro:

- A. **Slide#1** Color blindness or *color vision deficiency* is the inability or decreased ability to see color, or perceive color differences, under normal lighting conditions.
1. The picture behind me depicts the **American Flag**, as seen by most people^(center top); as seen by **red-blind persons**^(your right); as seen by **green-blind persons**^(your left); as seen by **violet-blind persons**^(left middle); as seen by **totally color blind people**^(rt midle)
 2. So, if color blindness is **not** being able to **see** a color(s) others **can** see, **then** isn't it true, there's a possibility that one can be "**mentally**" color blind? (i.e.) blind to **truth** that is quite evident to others.
 - a) **Slide#2** This was posed to the famous agnostic *Thomas Huxley* by a very sincere Christian.
 - b) Huxley, admitted that this was possible, and added that if it were, he himself, of course, could not know or recognize it.
 - (1) Paul continues his discussion about *blindness*, being *veiled* to the gospel.
- B. **Slide#3** Title: *Earthen Vessels*
- C. **Slide#4** Outline: A Great **Light** in Gloomy Darkness! - A Great **Treasure** in Jars of Clay!
A Great **Glory** in Light Affliction!

II. **Slide#5 A GREAT LIGHT IN GLOOMY DARKNESS! (1-6)**

- A. Paul looks at 4 people, starting with himself!
- B. **Slide#6 Himself!** (1)
- C. **This ministry** – The ministry it had been talking about in the last chapter(see 6,8)
- D. **We do not lose heart** - Sometimes the size of the task becomes a motivation in itself!
1. **Slide#7 Winston Churchill** inspired England to stand firm against Hitler in WWII. "Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization...The whole fury & might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war...Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, & so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire & its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will say: "This was their finest hour."
 2. This is similar to what Paul is saying in verse 1.
 3. A ministry God intended would never cause us to lose heart.
 - a) It doesn't drag us down; it lifts us up. - It doesn't depress us; it motivates us.
- E. **As we have received Mercy** – Paul reminds himself of the Mercy he's received.
1. **Slide#8** "Mercy cost nothing to **receive**, but it cost everything to **give**."¹

¹ Charles Swindoll, pg.61.

a) It cost Jesus His life!

F. **Slide#9 His Opponents!** (2)

G. 3 charges were leveled against Paul, by his opponents & his slanderers, that he wasn't doing!

1. We see a lot of this going on today in ministry!
2. **Slide#10** "Like **supermarket cereal**, when **Christianity** is brightly packaged & sugarcoated & enticingly offers free prizes on the inside, we fail to see the fine print on the side of the box. And so we never know about all the empty calories we've eaten...or realize how malnourished we've become."²

H. So, Paul says, we are not **hiding** anything in our ministry, nothing is **veiled**.

I. **Slide#11 Those Perishing!** (3,4)

J. Here's a clear explanation why the same truth is **exciting** to one person & **boring** to another!

1. Jn.3:19-21 **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. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.**
2. Like Haman(Esther 7:8) before he was **lost** forever, *his face was covered*.

K. **Slide#12 Jesus!** (5,6)

L. Only God can cause light to shine out of darkness, both in the creation of the world & in the creation of a believer's heart.

1. He gets all the credit! – "We may carry the lamp that shows Christ to others, but the flame is from the Lord!"

M. **In the face of Jesus** - In J.C. we see **what God is like!** *He who has seen Me has seen the Father.*

1. **I see the glory of God when I look into the face of Jesus:**
As a baby born into poverty; **As a 12 year old** sharing His wisdom; **As a Carpenter** serving in His divine leisureliness, performing His menial/humble tasks daily, content to await God's time there; **As a Compassionate man** meeting the needs of the hurting or hungry; **As One in Authority** over Satan in wilderness; **As One showing Mercy** in forgiving sin; **As One on the cross** where He laid down His life...for me; **As One who rose triumphant** over the grave, death, evil; **As the One who ascended** into heaven.

III. **Slide#13 A GREAT TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY! (7-15)**

A. **Slide#14 Power!** (7)

B. This isn't how we'd have displayed our power!

² Charles Swindoll, pg.50.

1. We wouldn't have chosen a "**stable**" but a "**stadium**" to bring the Messiah into the world. **Likewise**, we wouldn't have chosen "earthen Vessels"/"clay pots" to place the precious treasure of the gospel in.
 2. **Slide#15** We would rather be **glazed & polished**, even displayed on some safe shelf somewhere...or maybe in some *saint museum*.
 - a) **Slide#16** God of course wants to take us **off our shelf** & if need be *break us & pour us out*
- C. **The illustration** (6,7a) Paul pictures **our body** as a **jar of clay**, into which God has placed the **treasure** of the gospel.
- D. **The implication** (7b) This is done, so everyone can see that our glorious power is **from God** and is **not our own**.
- E. **Why did God choose to do it this way? Why such a precious treasure in weak & worthless vessels?** (see 7b)
1. **Slide#17** Sometimes we think, "**Since I'm chipped & cracked I can't be used by God.**" **But** the truth is when God places His light inside our vessel, the more cracks, the more light will be able to escape.
 2. God honors **weak, broken**, pottery...& how seldom He uses His *fine China!*
 - a) **How often do you use your fine China?**
- F. **Slide#18,19** Like Mary's expensive **perfume**, no one in the room was blessed with enjoying the fragrance until she **broke** the vessel that was holding it.
1. Often this is God's only way to **pour out the fragrance of Christ**...is to break one of His vessels(**us**).
 2. There isn't anything significant about the vessel – it's what's **inside** that counts.
 - a) Not saying **you** don't count. Your "**you**" counts very much. But the real "**you**" is on the inside (soul/spirit/personality/ego).
- G. **Best things often come from our worst moments!**
1. **Ask Joseph** – sold by his brothers; **then**, saves his brothers from starvation.
 2. **Ask Ruth** – loss of husband, loss of country; **then**, gains the true & living God, & a new country, & a new husband.
 3. **Ask Job** – children's death, lost all; **then**, gained all back.
 4. **Ask Daniel** – lost parents, country, language; **then**, elevated & given visions & dreams.
- H. **Slide#20 Pressed but not Squished!** (8,9)
- I. **Hard pressed** - carries the idea of "**pressure**".
1. They were under pressure like grapes being squeezed by a winepress.

- J. **Perplexed** - means to be at a loss; to be in doubt, despondent. It suggests the idea of being lost & disoriented.
- We are sore pressed at every point **but** not hemmed in.
We are persecuted by men **but** never abandoned by God.
We are at wit's end **but** never at our hope's end.
We are knocked down **but** not knocked out! William Barclay
- K. **Persecuted but not forsaken** - never abandoned by God.
- Slide#21** Joan of Arc said when she was abandoned by those who should have stood by her, "It is better to be **alone w/God**. His friendship will not fail me, nor His counsel, nor His love. In His strength, I will dare & dare & dare until I die."
a) Ps.27:10 **When my father & my mother forsake me, Then the LORD will take care of me.**
 - Paul didn't throw in the towel in the face of the hardships!
- L. **Knocked down but not knocked out** - It's not that a Christian doesn't **fall**, but when he does, *he always rises again!*
- We can lose a **battle**, but we'll never lose **the campaign!**
- M. **Slide#22 Dying but Living!** (10-12)
- N. **There is no abundant life without first an abasing death.**
- When** we die He lives; **when** we lose He wins;
when were weak He's strong; **when** we are dependent He is powerful.
a) This is paradox at its finest!
- O. **Slide#23 Raised up!** (13-15)
- P. (13) **I believed & therefore I spoke** – You must **believe** it or you shouldn't be **teaching** it!
- This is taken from **Ps.116:10**...interesting it's a hymn of thanksgiving for deliverance from death.
 - These words **I believed & therefore I spoke** should be written **over** every **bible student's** desk, **over** every **pastor's** door, **over** every **pulpit**, **over** every **S.S. teachers podium**.
- Q. (14) **Death ends nothing** - It merely closes the door on our **earthly existence** & opens the door of **eternity**.
- He was certain that he could draw on a power which was **sufficient for life & greater than death!**
- R. (15) **For your sakes** – When the Boulder Dam(Hoover) was being built some men lost their lives during its construction. It created Lake Mead which stretches 115 miles long. It irrigates 250,000 acres. By making this dam it brought **fertility to vast areas** which were **once desert**. A tablet was placed into the wall of the dam bearing the names of those who lost their lives for **Slide#24** its construction it read, *These died that the desert might rejoice & blossom as the rose.*
- When a man has the conviction that **what is happening to him** is happening literally for **Christ's sake** he can **face anything!**

S. Do you want to make an impact in your work, neighborhood, school, or family?

1. Then merely **live out** the dying message of the Lord Jesus. **Let it out.**
Don't hide the cracks in the clay. Let people *see through you* & *see the Lord!*

IV. Slide#25 A GREAT GLORY IN LIGHT AFFLICTION! (16-18)

A. (16) Here is the other *book end* of *not losing heart* from vs.1.

1. Slide#26,27 Our **physical** life is slipping away, but our **spiritual** is climbing up the hill that leads to the **Celestial City**, to the presence of God!
2. No need to fear the **years slipping by**, for they bring us nearer, not to death, but to God!
3. We are to focus **not** on the **external**, but the **internal**.

B. (17) *Light affliction?*

1. Wow, after his list in vs.8?

C. (18) We are to focus not on the **temporal** but *the eternal*.

1. *Re:Moses* in Heb.11:27 it says, **for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.**
2. **Saints, rivet your eyes on the unseen**, the things which **last forever!**