



Winter/Spring 2005

# Around the FIRE

The Newsletter of Fellowship of Independent Reformed Evangelicals

## “R” is for Reformed

by Pastor Steve Krogh

Men and women dancing down the aisle. Exuberant clapping in rhythm to beating drums. A procession of worshippers winding outside the church, taking twenty minutes just to present their offerings. A platform covered with “the works of their hands,” a gift to God consisting of carrots, potatoes, sugar cane, wood and even a live chicken in a reed cage!

A description of what your FIRE church or ours experienced this past Lord’s day? Probably not. But this is what a group from our church experienced as we worshipped while laboring among our brothers and sisters in Cameroon, Africa for the past two weeks.

This article addresses the “R” of FIRE, asking, “what does it mean when we say that we are the Fellowship of Independent Reformed Evangelicals?” Our recent experience in Africa reminds me that though there may be cultural and localized expressions of our “reformed-ness”, the essence of what it means to be “reformed” must transcend all cultures and locales.

For example, a FIRE church in the Deep South of Laurel, Mississippi will likely look and act somewhat different than a FIRE church among the Dutch here in West Michigan. The FIRE church among the ethnically diverse neighborhoods of Oxnard, California will be different from the FIRE church nestled in the rugged mountains of Rutland, Vermont. Yet, when these churches join FIRE, each is saying, “though our outward expressions of faith and life may vary, there is a common core we all share.”

When it comes to being “reformed”, what is that common core? I direct our attention to two things. First, a Scripture passage and, second, a reformation slogan.

Paul tells Pastor Titus, “this is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order” (Titus 1:5). The phrase “put what remained into order” is variously translated: “amend what was defective” (RSV), “set in order what remains” (NASB), “straighten out what was left unfinished” (NIV). A form of the Greek verb “put in order, amend, set in order, straighten out” is translated “reform” (Acts 24:2) and “reformation” (Hebrews 9:10).



The idea is that there is “unfinished business” among the churches in Crete. There are crooked things that need to be straightened out. There are things out of joint that need to be put back in their proper place.

Such is the work of re-formation. Among the churches of FIRE, there is re-formation work to be done. There are things “out of joint” in our churches which need to be set right. There is unfinished business to attend to on this side of glory. There are rough places which need to be made smooth and crooked paths made straight.

What exactly needs to be re-formed? We tend to link “reformed” with doctrine, as in “reformed theology.” The two words just seem to go together, don’t they? Certainly there is a need for doctrinal reformation. There is a need to summon ourselves, our churches and the church at large to the centrality of God in all things. It is a glorious thing when an individual or a church goes through the Copernican revolution of the soul to rediscover that God is at the center of our salvation and thus say, with Jonah, “salvation belongs to the Lord!” (Jonah 2:9). Sweet is the discovery that God’s grace underlies our election, our calling, our foreknowing, our regeneration, our faith and even our persevering! Sweet is the church that together acknowledges that not just the foundation of its salvation is of

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grace, but also the final top stone of its completed sanctification, shouting “grace, grace to it!” (Zechariah 4:7).

Surely in these days of man-centeredness, the churches of FIRE should herald the joys of a God-centered theology which is wonderfully freeing, stabilizing, invigorating and awe inspiring. Certainly we should bring about doctrinal reformation by teaching clearly the glorious truths of the doctrines of grace.

But, the work of re-formation extends beyond doctrine to practice. The apostle Paul’s admonishes Titus “but as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1). However, what follows is not an outline of systematic theology. Rather, it is practical theology. What “accords with sound doctrine” is instruction regarding how older men, older women, younger women and younger men are to behave in their homes, their churches, the world. There is instruction for slaves.

If you were to ask the apostle, “Paul, when you told Titus to amend or re-form what was lacking in the churches of Crete, what exactly did you have in mind?”, I am convinced he would respond with two words: “good works.” The phrase “good works” or “good deeds” is found more often than any other in Titus, seven times in the final thirty-one verses.

Is your FIRE church about the work of re-formation, not only in teaching the doctrines of grace, but in the practical living out of those doctrines? What needs to be re-formed in your church? What unfinished business needs to be attended to? What is out of joint and needs to be set right? How are you being a catalyst for needed re-formation? When there is something out of joint in the ministry among youth or in worship or in your small groups, are you helping your church move beyond mere description of the problem to prescription of the solution?

Second, a reformation slogan. “Post tenebras, lux.” After the darkness, light. When FIRE churches describe themselves as reformed, they are saying that our heritage is with those who saw the light of God’s Word following a time of darkness. Our heritage is with men like Martin Luther and John Calvin, who found that the “unfolding of Your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple” (Psalm 119:130).

Those who belong to FIRE are reformed in the sense that we not only appreciate those who saw the light of the Word amidst dark days in former centuries, but today we continue to call people to that light today. We continue to carry the Scriptures with us to worship. We expect our pastors to read and preach the Scriptures. We expect our congregations to have attentive ears to the Word (Nehemiah 8:3) and we expect our elders to circulate

among the people to help them understand the Word (Nehemiah 8:7). We expect to find counsel in it for all areas of life.

So, whether you dance to the drumbeat while bringing your caged chicken as an offering to the Lord or you dance to a different drum in the deep South, the deep-freeze of the Midwest, the barrios of the West or the Green Mountains of New England — what does it mean to belong to the Fellowship of Independent *Reformed* Evangelicals?

It means two things. First, we realize we have unfinished business. Our churches haven’t yet arrived. There is work to be done. There are things that need attention. We are not offended or surprised when others point out our shortcomings and wrinkles. We are quick to ask for prayer and are quick to pray for others. We hold to our doctrinal convictions, but realize that the Bible must be bound in shoe leather. It must be lived out. To be reformed is to realize our need.

Second, to be reformed is to have hope. Post tenebras, lux. God has shone the light in the past and will continue to do so in the future.

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**Pastor Krogh** has been involved in pastoral ministry for twenty years, having served in California for fourteen years and in Michigan for the last six years. A graduate of Biola University and Dallas Theological Seminary (Th.M, Old Testament, 1985), he has done post-graduate studies at Westminster Theological Seminary in California. He has taught New Testament Greek for many years and currently serves on the Executive Committee for the Fellowship of Independent Reformed Evangelicals (F.I.R.E.). He and his wife Lois have six children.



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# Introducing: Christian Communicators Worldwide

Jim Elliff is president of *Christian Communicators Worldwide* with offices in a quaint portion of Kansas City, Missouri named Parkville, one of the early riverboat towns along the Missouri.

The ministry began nearly twenty years ago in Little Rock, Arkansas, where Jim was a teaching elder at Cornerstone Bible Fellowship. During a time when Jim received numerous invitations to speak, the elders of the church allowed him to explore the possibility of a new ministry. Soon CCW was born as an integral agency of the church. Although CCW is now a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, it has always had close ties to a local church.

At first the emphasis of the ministry had to do almost exclusively with conference speaking, both overseas and in the states. But soon, at his wife's insistence, Jim began writing, producing a series of booklets for free distribution. Almost immediately the booklets were being used all across the country and overseas. As the orders steadily increased, Jim brought an assistant alongside in the work.

The most unique aspect of the work has to do with Jim's financial policy. The ministry has never solicited for funds, nor gone into debt. When he was in college he was dramatically affected by the life of George Muller and had longed to live by those principles found in his work with orphans. Every aspect of CCW is designed to be a means of glorifying God by faith. Jim has often seen that the *method* is as important as the *message* in changing lives.

Personally, Jim receives only what is sent to CCW specifically designated for him and does not draw a salary. Thankfully, Jim can say, after 19 years of living like this, that *God has supplied all he has needed by the time it has actually been required*. Though Jim is an elder in a church, he receives no compensation from the church. Though he speaks in many conferences and churches, he pre-arranges that there be no honoraria or love offerings given to him. And though he has no private wealth or single

patron who privately supports him, *God supplies all that is needed to take care of his family and all that is needed to supply the ministry only through prayer*.

The CCW publications are also a matter of faith. Hundreds of thousands of booklets have been sent free of charge through the ministry over the years. Though Jim has often written for other publishers, CCW has also published two books of its own: *Pursuing God—A Seeker's Guide* and *A Brief Account of the Life and Labors of George Muller* (just released). Each book has been underwritten by unsolicited gifts. Any funds after expenses for the books are used to purchase additional copies, fund overseas printing, or to give books away for promotion or ministry. Jim is hopeful that CCW can publish two or three more books this year as God supplies.

Through CCW Jim has addressed audiences in almost every state and in numerous foreign countries—from a Communist meeting hall to a witch doctor's hut. He was also instrumental in the start of a new church, Christ Fellowship of Kansas City, along with a former LA County cop who was mentored by Jim, Daryl Wingerd. Christ Fellowship, a church of home congregations, is an

active part of FIRE, where Jim currently serves as a board member.

Among the other aspects of the work, CCW supports three useful websites. The main site is [www.CCWonline.org](http://www.CCWonline.org). Tools for ministry and stimulating articles can be found there. Free weekly inserts and handouts can be downloaded at [www.BulletinInserts.org](http://www.BulletinInserts.org). And an evangelistic site is maintained where Jim receives questions from inquirers at [www.WaytoGod.org](http://www.WaytoGod.org).

Daryl Wingerd, editorial assistant, and Susan Verstraete, administrative assistant, work alongside Jim at CCW. Please pray for CCW and the staff that this year will be its most effective.

*“Every aspect of CCW is designed to be a means of glorifying God by faith. Jim has often seen that the method is as important as the message in changing lives.”*



# FIRE Conference 2005: An Invitation

Dear Brother in Christ,

I am excited to have the opportunity to invite you to our annual FIRE National Conference. This year, we will be fellowshiping together in Estes Park, Colorado, during April 25-27, where we'll be meeting in a beautiful retreat setting. Three of our wonderful FIRE churches are working together to provide what we need for this year's conference, and it should prove to be our best ever! We give our sincere thanks to these dear believers for their hard work and servant spirits.

I sincerely believe that there are some unique aspects of our national conferences which make them very compelling and for which you and any of your ministry colleagues ought to consider joining with us. One of those is the feature of taking time to listen to each and every FIRE church's report on what the Lord is currently doing in their midst. We then immediately pray specifically for that church and its leaders. Likewise, when missionary reports are given, we are all able to have a better grasp of what God is doing through us in the worldwide ministry of

spreading the gospel. In addition, instead of inviting a whole host of recognized, outside speakers, we are able to hear from a majority of our own *FIREmen*, who will impart crucial biblical truth to our hearts. Their names may not be familiar to hardly any of you, but their message is something you will never forget.



For these reasons and much more, I affectionately call our national meeting, "the un-conference!" It is this way because our mutual time together is so much *unlike* any other pastor's and/or church leader's conference I know, offering such an intimate, hands-on time for prayer, interaction, idea and ministry networking, as well as the highlight of being taught the biblical principles of how to practically function within your own pastoral or ministry context.

Please strongly consider joining us for our 2005 National *UnConference!* Watch out if you do though, because your ministry may never be the same!

Lance Quinn  
Moderator of FIRE

## 2005 Annual FIRE Conference @ a Glance

### Location

Estes Park, Colorado

### Date

April 25-27, 2005

### Topic

The Balanced Minister

### Speakers

Michael Philips  
John Sale  
Rick Anderson  
Greg Withrow  
Richard Belcher

### For More Information

[www.firefellowship.org](http://www.firefellowship.org)  
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# Down But Not Out

by Dr. Wayne Mack

Excerpted from *Rekindling the Flame*, Chapter 6 (“What to Do When You’re Knocked Down with Burn Out”)  
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In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul raises the issue of losing heart or what we’re calling spiritual burnout. As we’ve looked at the context of this and other passages in Scripture, we have been confronted with the fact that spiritual burnout is a serious problem that brings with it many unfortunate consequences. Thankfully, however, Paul and the rest of the Bible writers don’t merely describe the problem from a negative point of view. Thankfully, the Bible is replete with good news about preventing and overcoming spiritual burnout. The bad news is that we can experience spiritual burnout; the good news is that it can be both prevented and overcome

The good news about this problem is highlighted by Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:1 and 16 where he says, “...we do not lose heart.” (2 Corinthians 4:1 & 16) In other words, we avoided spiritual burnout. And, of course, the message Paul would want us to understand is that if he didn’t lose heart, if he avoided spiritual burnout, we can too. And my friends, that’s good news!

But there’s more. The good news even gets better. The good news of the Bible not only includes a positive statement that spiritual burnout can be avoided; it includes information about how we can both avoid and overcome the downer experience of burnout. Thus far, we’ve seen that it’s a very common and serious problem. Now we want to carefully what Paul and other Bible writers have to say about how to actually prevent and overcome spiritual burnout.

However, before we actually explore this good news information about how to avoid and overcome spiritual burnout, I want to set the context for this information by reminding you of several things. First, please note that the man who spoke about not losing heart was not a new Christian. When Paul wrote II Corinthians, he had been a Christian for at least twenty years. He had already completed two extensive missionary journeys, ministering to churches all over the region. His third and final mis-

sionary journey included many of the places that he had been to on his lengthy second trip. II Corinthians was written while in Macedonia on this third trip.

Often, new Christians are (rightly) excited about their new life in Christ. They find it easy to rejoice in all things. They are hungry for teaching, they eagerly accept new truths and they are quick to tell others what they have learned. It is usually “older” Christians, people who have been believers for a period of time, who experience burnout as the trials and difficulties of life sap that initial excitement and zeal for the Lord. It is significant, then, that despite his many years in the faith—and innumerable trials and difficulties—Paul was still excited about the things of God and able to say, “We do not lose heart.”



Second, the statement “we do not lose heart” was very significant in light of the fact that Paul had experienced a considerable amount of persecution during the time of his ministry. Four times in this epistle, Paul wrote about the difficulties he faced in his ministry. He first mentions them in chapter 1: “For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of

life” (1:8). In chapter 4, he refers to the extensive afflictions, mistreatment, the stalking, the rejections, the continual danger and threats they experienced (4:7-17.) In chapter six, he again writes of experiencing “afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights”. And, in the same chapter, he goes on to tell us that he has been dishonored, slandered, treated as an imposter and punished.

Finally, in chapter 11, Paul lists in some detail information about his various trials: imprisonments, beatings, stonings, lashings, shipwrecks, robberies, and on and on. While it is relatively easy for a believer who has never experienced difficulties to not lose heart because his faith has never been challenged, it is quite another for someone

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whose entire Christian life has been one of persecution and trial. Such was the life of the apostle Paul and yet he was able to say—twenty years into his Christian life — “we do not lose heart.”

Third, we must remember that Paul was not superhuman, nor was he devoid of feeling. On the contrary, this man experienced great physical weakness at times and was very sensitive emotionally. Now I have known a few people who have had an unusually steady emotional keel. They never seem to be down about anything. Nothing seems to cool their enthusiasm. In fact, I’ve known people who often find it difficult to identify with people whose emotions tend to fluctuate. They can’t understand why anyone would ever be tempted to experience burnout. Well, lest we think of Paul as one of these people, consider II Corinthians 1:23-2:4.

In verse 23, Paul wrote, “But I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I did not come again to Corinth.” He went on to explain the reason that he did not come: “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you” (2:4). Paul was so overcome with sorrow for these believers, that he decided not to visit them so that he would not burden them with his anguish.

Paul had good reason to be anguished by the Corinthians; they had been criticizing him, calling him untrustworthy, fickle, weak, ugly, and a poor speaker. Not only were they criticizing him, but they were sinning as well, and Paul knew that he had to deal with their sin. This too caused him sorrow, and so he told them, “But I determined this for my own sake, that I would not come to you in sorrow again.” Paul was a man of very deep feeling, and yet he could say: “we do not lose heart.”

Fourth, as we consider this exhortation to not lose heart, we must keep in mind that what Paul did say and didn’t say in these two verses (2 Corinthians 4:1 & 16). He did not merely say, “I do not lose heart”, but “we do not lose heart.” Paul wants us to know that he was not the only one who didn’t lose heart. The “we” at least included Timothy as 2 Corinthians 1:1 indicates. The fact that Timothy didn’t lose heart is extremely significant in that 1 Corinthians 16:10,11 and several statements in the two letters (I and II Timothy) Paul sent to him seem to indicate that he was a rather timid, sensitive person who by natural

disposition could be susceptible to burnout. Beyond that, the “we” probably also included others such as Dr. Luke and the rest of the missionary team who usually traveled with Paul. Acts 20:4 records that Paul had several companions on his missionary journey: Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, Trophimus, and Luke (the author of Acts). Since all of these men were with Paul when he wrote II Corinthians and all of them to some extent experienced many of the things Paul experienced, the statement, “we do not lose heart.” Is tremendously significant. Though each of these men was unique in his personality, weaknesses, and strengths, in spite of what hardships they had experienced, they had not suffered spiritual burnout.

These four points are important to keep in mind when considering Paul’s statement about not losing heart. We are being instructed and encouraged by a man who was experienced in the faith, who knew difficulty, whose personality was deeply emotional, and who was accompanied by at least eight other believers who shared his zeal for the Lord. What was Paul’s “secret”?

How were he and his companions able to not lose heart under such circumstances and pressures?

The answer begins to unfold for us in Paul’s words in II Corinthians 4:16. “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet *our inner man is being renewed day by day.*” Paul revealed that the secret to not losing heart was that they were experiencing constant spiritual renewal. This renewal occurs in the inner man in two ways.

First, in order to not lose heart, we need the *renewal that comes at the time of salvation* . This

initial renewing is described in Titus 3:5. “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, *by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.*” When we are saved, God gives us a new heart, a new mind, and new goals for our life. II Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is a new creature*; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

The inner man renewal of salvation is the necessary foundation for all other spiritual work in us. Unless we come to faith in Christ, repenting of our sins and believing on Christ as Savior and Lord, we can never

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hope to prevent or overcome spiritual burnout.. “[We] have put on the *new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge* according to the image of the One who created him” (Colossians 3:10). The first step towards overcoming burnout is salvation. However, this initial renewal—though absolutely necessary—is not enough.

I Kings 19:8 records an unusual event in the life of the prophet Elijah. “So he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty night to Horeb, the mountain of God.” As we know, God does not usually allow our bodies to be sustained for so long by one meal. Generally, we get no further than a few hours on one meal; Exodus 18 shows God’s usual way of sustaining us. It describes how God provided the Israelites with manna every day and day to day, in order to teach them to depend on Him for their every need.

In the same way that we require a constant supply of physical food in order to sustain our outer man, we also need a constant supply of spiritual food to sustain our inner man. In other words, the renewal of salvation is just the beginning of a lifetime of living on the Word of God. “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). As believers, we need the sustenance of constant physical food as well as constant spiritual food. Failing to eat continuously of spiritual food leads to burnout.

In Colossians 2:6-7, Paul stated this principle of initial renewal through salvation that is followed by continuing renewal. “Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, *having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him* and established in your faith...” (Colossians 2:6-7). We have been firmly rooted (past tense) at salvation but then we must continue to walk (present tense) in Him and be built up (future tense) in Him.

It is interesting to note that many of the verbs used to describe the Christian life in the New Testament are in the present tense. For example, Romans 12:2 says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...” Hebrews 12:1 says, “...let us run with endurance...” And Luke 9:23 says, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must...take up his cross daily and follow Me.” Not being conformed, being transformed, running, and taking up our cross daily are all things that we must do every day.

Returning to the passage in II Corinthians 4, notice that Paul said, “Therefore we do not lose heart...our inner man is being renewed day by day” (4:16). Day by day indicates that renewal (keeping the flame burning brightly) is a continuing process, and therefore, it requires continuing effort. Just as daily training is needed to keep the outer man in good physical shape, so also daily training is

needed to keep the inner man in good spiritual shape. An athlete who takes time off from their training will begin to lose physical conditioning in a matter of only a few days. That is why true athletes commit themselves to exercise on a daily basis. True believers must have the same commitment to spiritual exercise.

Keeping the inner man in shape is also like maintaining a good marriage relationship. I have counseled couples who did not understand why, after ten years together, they could not stand each other anymore. They were at a loss to identify what happened, but the simple answer was that they stopped working on their relationship. A good marriage simply cannot be maintained unless it is worked on day by day, month by month and year by year. The inner man requires constant work in the same way.

At this point, we need to define what the “inner man” is. We have considered the fact that in order to not lose heart, we must be renewed day by day in our inner man, but what exactly is the “inner man”? The inner man comprises our thoughts, attitudes, emotions, feelings, desires, motives, goals, imagination, will, purposes, perspectives and conscience. These are often summed up in Scripture by the word “mind,” as in Romans 12:2. “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the *renewing of your mind...*” Every day we must seek to renew our mind.

Every day we need to “*let this mind be in [us]*, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5, KJV). Daily, we must “*set [our] mind* on the things above, not on the things that are on earth (Colossians 3:2). Day by day, we must “*[determine] to know* nothing...except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (I Corinthians 2:2). We must continually follow the instruction of Colossians 3:16-17.

Let the word of Christ *richly dwell within you*, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

Every day we must “lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and ... run with endurance the race that is set before us, *fixing our eyes on Jesus...so that [we] will not grow weary and lose heart*” (Hebrews 12:1-3). If we are serious about avoiding the problem of spiritual burnout, we must be committed to daily renewal of our inner man.

Returning to II Corinthians 4, Paul made several points in this passage that speak specifically to this matter of daily renewal of the mind. Consider the following verses:

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But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, 'I believed, therefore I spoke,' we also believe, therefore we also speak, *knowing* that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. (II Corinthians 4:13-14)

For we *know* that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (5:1)

Therefore, being always of good courage, and *knowing* that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage... (5:6-8)

Three times in these verses, Paul uses the word "know." He says, Because we know something, we do not lose heart. In other words, learning to think rightly is a means by which our minds are renewed.

Notice the present tense used in II Corinthians 10:5, "...we are *taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*..." Paul meant that every day, every hour, every minute there needed to be a conscious effort towards thinking biblically. This is very similar to what I Peter 1:13 says. "Therefore, *prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*"

Paul was teaching us to think—to not lose heart because we also can know something that he knew—but what was it that Paul knew? First, Paul knew that *he had a very important ministry to perform for God*. In II Corinthians 4:1, he said, "Therefore, *since we have this ministry*...we do not lose heart." Paul described something of this ministry in chapter 3. He called it a ministry "of the Spirit" and of "righteousness" (3:8-9). Paul knew that he had a job to do that was of eternal significance.

In I Timothy 1:12-14, Paul marveled at what a privilege it was to have been put into this ministry by God. "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, *putting me into service*, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and violent aggressor. *Yet I was shown mercy* because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant..." Paul knew that God had ordained his ministry and he also realized that he had done nothing to deserve such a high calling.

If we want to avoid losing heart, we must likewise know how important our ministries are and how dependent on God's grace we are for them. That alone is reason for excitement! It does not matter whether we see fantastic results or not. Paul acknowledged in his letters many times that the gospel that he preached was not always eagerly received. "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (II Corinthians 4:3-4).

Any ministry of God is a great privilege because it is for Him and because we are unworthy ministers. Paul knew that he was on a divine mission and so are we. Jesus called us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world; he called us to go into all the world and preach the gospel. Husbands have been called to help their wives to grow in Christ. Parents have been called to disciple their children. Pastors and teachers in the church have been called to equip the saints.

**"We, the saints, each have a high calling in Christ. Individually, God has given to each of us spiritual gifts and He has commanded us to use these gifts for the edification of the church."**

We, the saints, each have a high calling in Christ. Individually, God has given to each of us spiritual gifts and He has commanded us to use these gifts for the edification of the church. "Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly..." (Romans 12:6). We have been called to be living epistles in the world. We have been called to build up, encourage, and exhort fellow believers. Truly, as far as the church of God is concerned, there are no unimportant or insignificant people. Every child of God has an important ministry to fulfill in the body of faith.

Paul knew that he had an important ministry, and second, Paul knew that *he "received mercy"* (II Corinthians 4:1). Paul recognized that he was like the publican in Luke 18:13, who stood in the temple, beat his chest, and said, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" Instead of giving Paul what he deserved—eternal damnation, God granted Paul mercy. God has granted us this same mercy and we will not lose heart if we truly understand this mercy that we have received—undeserved, free, abundant, complete, bringing salvation and eternal glory.

How often do we lose heart because we are thinking about the fact that we are not getting what we think that we deserve? Whether it is fewer problems, less criticism, more success in our ministry, or more appreciation, we often allow our minds to dwell on things that we feel

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entitled to but that we are not receiving. When deprived of our perceived “rights,” we become discouraged and lose heart because we are not thinking rightly.

Paul called us to *right thinking*. In contrast to our usual way of thinking, how often do our minds dwell on the fact that anything short of hell is far more than we deserve? The only thing that we deserve from God is eternal punishment for our sins. Any measure of grace and mercy from Him is far more than we deserve, and yet He has given to us *abundant* grace and mercy. Further, how often do we encourage our hearts by thinking about God rightly? Our God is a God of holiness, righteousness, mercy, and grace. If we want to avoid losing heart, we need to have a right view of ourselves and a right view of God.

Though God’s mercy is just one aspect of His being, it was apparently the one that Paul thought about in particular so as not to lose heart. This was for good reason as the Bible has much to say about the wonder of God’s mercy. For example, in the twenty-six verses of Psalm 136, the psalmist makes this statement *twenty-six* times: “For His mercy endureth forever” (KJV). This man was excited about the mercy of God: “O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good: for His mercy endureth forever” (Psalm 136:1; KJV). How often do we spend time thinking about God’s mercy?

Lamentations 3:22-23 says, “Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.” God’s great mercy can be a constant source of encouragement for us if we train ourselves to think about it regularly. In fact, in Romans 12:1, Paul mentioned God’s mercy in an appeal to us to live sacrificially: “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.”

If we want to avoid losing heart, then we must learn to think as Paul did. We have a divine ministry that we have received from God; that ought to encourage us greatly! God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, has chosen us to be his ministers. Not only that, but also this God is a God of great mercy. He has shown us mercy both in giving us salvation and in calling us to be his ministers.

Third, Paul did not lose heart because *he thought about God’s present purposes for his outer man problems*. “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves” (II Corinthians 4:7). “This treasure” is named in the previous verse. It is “the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” God could have used glorious vessels of silver or gold to house this great treasure, but instead he chose earthen vessels, or clay pots. We are those clay pots.

Why did God choose to put the great treasure of Jesus Christ into clay pots? Verse seven says that He did it to show that all things are by His power, not by our power. A clay pot is a somewhat useful, but not very durable container. It is easily chipped, cracked, even broken. So also, II Corinthians 4:16 says that “our outer man is decaying.” As each of us already knows, our bodies experience all kinds of problems as we age and our physical strength diminishes.

I realize this more and more as I am now in the latter years of my life. For example, when my wife and I were in Maine with our oldest son and his family, one of my granddaughters, who was ten, asked me to go down to the lake and watch the sunrise with her in the morning. At 5:15 the next morning, she was at my bedside to wake me. Though I had not slept well or long, I got up and went with her to the edge of the lake. I thought we were going to stand at the edge of the lake and wait for the sun to rise. But that’s not what Ashley had in mind. When we got to the edge of the lake, she ran out into the lake on the narrow walkway about thirty or forty feet and then plopped down on a very narrow dock. Since I knew that I am not nearly as steady on my feet as I used to be I came to the edge of the lake and just stood there surveying the scene and wondering if I should risk doing what Ashley had just done with great ease. As I stood there she turned to me and said, “Come on Granddad. Come on out on the dock with me.”

Well, what was I going to do? My sinful pride kept me from admitting to Ashley that I was a bit concerned that I might fall into the lake or that if I made it out to the dock without a mishap I might not be able to sit down on the dock or get up from the swaying dock after I got down.

I was too proud to admit my frailty to Ashley. Instead of telling her that granddad is not as agile as he used to be and therefore will stand at the edge of the lake and watch the sunrise with you. I didn’t want to disappoint her, so I carefully proceeded out the walkway which was rocking back and forth. Praying all the while that God would help me not to fall in the water and make an absolute fool of myself in the presence of my granddaughter. I made it out to the dock and then just stood there for forty five minutes while we watched the glorious spectacle together. I wanted so much to sit down as my feet were hurting me, but I didn’t dare to do it because getting up without something to grab on to or without being able to turn over on my knees is a rather difficult task. I knew, as I stood there, that I could have easily sat down and gotten up just a few years before. I also knew then that I could no longer get down and get up as I once had because my outer man is decaying.

My body and the body of every other believer is and has always been just a clay pot. It’s just that as we grow older,

we become more and more aware of how frail these clay pots really are. But praise God, He has put the great treasure of Jesus Christ in our earthen vessels, in us who are fallible, frail, corruptible, and decaying human being, He could have planned to use the holy, undefiled, incorruptible, glorious angels as the means to display the treasure. Instead, He chose to display and proclaim the glory of Christ through clay pots. And why did He choose to do it this way? He has done it this way for one purpose. "God," says Paul, "has put this treasure in us clay pots, ...so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves" (4:7). God has deliberately chosen to use us earthen vessels so that whenever something is accomplished for the kingdom, people will see that we are not anything special and realize that it was done only by God's power. He has chosen to do it this way so that He would get the glory. He has chosen to do it this way so that His strength might be displayed through our weakness.

This is why Paul repeatedly rejoiced in his own weakness. Consider Paul's words in II Corinthians 12:9-10.

And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. *Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Paul did not become burned out during difficult times because he knew that his weakness was a means of displaying Christ's strength.

If we want to avoid losing heart in the midst of difficulties as Paul did; if we want to maintain and rekindle the flame of devotion and enthusiasm for Christ, we must learn to think as Paul did. We need to renew our inner man daily by training our minds to think rightly about the things we've studied in this chapter. In the next chapter, we will consider one more thing that Paul thought about—his future prospects—and how focusing on this helped him to not lose heart. But for now, let's reflect and meditate on great truths we've learned from Paul in this chapter. Paul and his companions were kept from spiritual burnout by continuously reflecting and meditating on the importance of the ministry God had given to them, the greatness of God's mercy towards them, the great treasure that they had inside their decaying bodies and the great privilege of displaying Christ's glory and power through their weakness and frailty. Reflecting on these truths was what helped Paul and his associates to be continuously renewed and refreshed in the inner man. In similar fashion, reflecting and meditating on these same great truths will also help us to avoid spiritual burnout.

#### Study, Discussion, Application Questions:

1. What is the good news about spiritual burnout found in 2 Corinthians 4:1 and 16?
2. As we consider the good news about spiritual burnout mentioned by Paul, what four things about Paul should we keep in mind?
3. What was Paul's "secret" for not being knocked down by spiritual burnout? How were he and his companions able to not lose heart under the circumstances and pressures they faced?
4. What is the necessary foundation, the first step towards avoiding spiritual burnout? What relevance does Titus 3:5,6 and Colossians 3:10 have to avoiding spiritual burnout?
5. What is the significance of the fact that many of the verbs used to describe the Christian life in the New Testament are in the present tense?
6. How is keeping the flame of faith and devotion to Christ burning brightly like what an athlete must do or like maintaining a good marriage relationship?
7. When Paul speaks of renewing the inner man, to what is he referring by the inner man? What is he saying needs to be renewed?
8. What does this fact about renewing the inner man indicate we must do if we are to avoid spiritual burnout? What is Paul calling us to?
9. What does Paul indicate that he and his associates continuously thought about that prevented them from experiencing spiritual burnout?
10. Why is our weakness a thing to rejoice about?
11. Write out 2 Corinthians 4:16 and work on memorizing it.
12. Do you regularly reflect on the truths presented in this chapter?
13. As you think about the fact that God has been merciful to you, that God has an important ministry for you, that God has given you a priceless treasure in Jesus Christ and that your weakness is a cause for rejoicing in that it provides for you the wonderful opportunity for bringing glory to God, what effect does this have on you?
14. How can the information presented in this chapter about preventing spiritual burnout be of practical help in your own life and in your ministry to others?

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