

## Confidence in Ministry

2 Corinthians 4: 8-9

Paul has spoken of the great necessity for Christ-centered ministry. He knew apart from a Christ-centered focus, the church would lack power and see little, if any, gain. He was also aware of the adversity that accompanies a Christ-centered focus. Society was not opposed to religious gatherings and formalities. They had no problem with people being committed to worship of particular deities, but the enemy ensured opposition to Christ-centered ministry. The churches that focused on the Lord saw profitable results, while gaining the attention of the opposition.

As our society continues to change, we can relate more to the experiences of Paul and the early church. Our modern society doesn't mind religion, but it is increasingly intolerant of Christ-centered ministries. As long as we are tolerant of every action and lifestyle, being inclusive, we see little opposition. However, those who stand firmly on the Bible and present Christ alone as the means of salvation can expect opposition.

It is easy to focus primarily on the difficulties we face. In fact, many look at this passage and only see the struggles revealed. While Paul does reveal the great difficulties that abounded, they were not his focus. In the midst of great adversity, Paul enjoyed absolute confidence. He refused to allow the difficulties of life to dictate his existence and ministry. Let's take a few moments to consider the [assurances](#) of Paul as we think on: [Confidence in Ministry](#).

**I. The Existence of Difficulty** (8a) – [We are troubled on every side](#). Paul admits the existence of difficulty within his life and ministry. Although he sought to magnify Christ, presenting and promoting Him at every opportunity, he continued to face trouble. Being placed within the body of Christ had not removed difficulty. In fact, his commitment to Christ had increased Paul's difficulty. I'm sure he would have admitted that life was much easier socially prior to his conversion.

- As children of God, those saved by grace, we might as well expect trouble. This has the idea of "*being pressed upon and afflicted*." For generations America has enjoyed a relative calm in regard to Christian opposition. We have enjoyed great religious liberty. I fear that may be coming to an end in the near future. We might as well expect the opposition and trouble to increase. Those who are committed to Christ, earnestly serving Him, will face trouble. Even in areas where Christianity is embraced and accepted, the enemy will see to it that we are met with difficulty. [2 Timothy 3:12 – Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution](#).
- I do not enjoy trouble, but it can serve as a means of encouragement. Those who are met with opposition are considered a threat by the enemy. Churches and individuals that face no trouble are accomplishing little for the Lord.

**II. The Extent of Difficulty (8a)** – *We are troubled on every side*. Paul doesn't refer to a small skirmish or disagreement here and there. He declares that those who serve the Lord will face trouble on every side. The enemy will see to it that trouble abounds, coming relentlessly from every angle and in various forms. It will arrive from areas and individuals that we hadn't even considered. Those who are determined to live for Christ, seeking to be a consistent Gospel witness can expect trouble from every side.

- The enemy has had thousands of years to perfect his craft; he is a master troublemaker and has many avenues and means to trouble and disrupt those who strive to serve the Lord. He often uses approaches and individuals we least expect. One thing is certain: if you are determined to serve the Lord, you will face a determined adversary. Paul reveals we can expect trouble in every imaginable place, circumstance, and occasion. The enemy uses differences of opinion, strained relationships, financial hardships, and even physical and spiritual attacks. We might as well expect the unexpected when it comes to trouble!

**III. The Expression of Difficulty (8b-9)** – Paul goes on to mention specific troubles he and all who serve Christ will encounter. He reveals:

**A. We are Perplexed (8b)** – This speaks of "*being without resources; to be left wanting; to be embarrassed; to not know which way to turn or what to do; to hesitate or to be in doubt.*"<sup>i</sup> Paul admits there have been times in his life and ministry when he was perplexed. He honestly didn't know what to do or which way to turn. There were times when this giant of the faith was hesitant, facing uncertainty and doubt.

- I think you will agree that we live in perplexing days. One certainty in our modern society is uncertainty. Values and ideals that have stood for generations are crumbling around us. We are facing increased pressure from without and within. Many are questioning how to respond; where do we go from here? We often find ourselves at a crossroads in life and are perplexed as to which path to take. Doubt and fear have crept into the lives of many.

**B. We are Persecuted (9a)** – This speaks of "*being made to run or put to flight; to pursue in a hostile manner; to harass, mistreat, or persecute.*"<sup>ii</sup> Paul faced his share of persecution in regard to his faith in Christ. He had been forced to flee many areas due to his life being threatened or facing an imminent threat. He was often harassed and mistreated simply because he was committed to sharing the Gospel and concerned with the eternal destiny of men's souls. He was often treated in a hostile manner by those around him.

- As of now, the average American Christian knows little of genuine persecution. We have been shielded from harsh harassment or mistreatment, but those days may be coming to an end. We are increasingly viewed in a negative light, considered the problem by many in

mainstream society. Believers within the United States are being ridiculed and harassed for their stand on biblical principles. Laws are being passed contrary to our convictions. Those who choose to stand for the Lord will likely face increased persecution in the days to come.

**C. We are Pressured** (9b) – Paul declares that believers are often [cast down](#). This has the idea of “*being thrown to the ground.*” Many in Paul’s day were familiar with the Greek games in which men wrestled. They were also familiar with the great colosseums where valiant gladiators fought to the death. They well understood the phrase “being cast down.” Paul had personally experienced such events in his life. No doubt he had been cast down many times physically, and yet he also encountered spiritual attacks where he had been thrown to the ground by an unforeseen strike. Paul was admitting that he had been knocked down many times in his life.

- Sadly this is all too familiar in the lives of many believers as well. If you have served the Lord for any length of time, you have been knocked down at some point along the way. I will admit that I have been knocked down on several occasions. Regrettably, these occurrences often came through the actions of those I knew and trusted. Many of us likely bear the spiritual and emotional scars of those encounters. I have never met anyone who enjoyed these moments, but they are unfortunately a reality in many of our lives.

**IV. The Endurance in Difficulty** (8-9) – Although Paul faced trouble on every side, he was never ultimately defeated. His faith was in Christ the Lord, the one who conquered sin, death, and hell. Paul knew that his position in Christ promised victory. He reveals that:

**A. We are not Distressed** (8a) – [We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed](#). Trouble was simply part of life and ministry, but it was not distressing. Distressed has the idea of “*being confined in a narrow, tight place with no way out, crushed, compressed, cramped, distressed or anguish.*”<sup>iii</sup> Paul had faced some tight places in life. There had been seasons where it seemed there would be no way of escape, and yet the Lord delivered him. He had faced intense pressure, but he was never fully crushed by the burden. It may have been more than he alone could bear, but through Christ he prevailed!

- We will find ourselves in some tight, uncomfortable situations, but we must maintain our faith. We will likely face intense pressure at times, but we will never be entirely crushed by the burdens we face. Christ faced the grip of death and overcame. We can overcome in Him!

**B. We are not Despondent** (8b) – [we are perplexed, but not in despair](#). In the midst of those perplexing situations, the believer has no need for despondency. We are never in despair. This has the idea of “*being totally at a loss, without hope, and void of any resources.*” Surely there

were many times when Paul was perplexed, even at his wit's end, but he knew one greater than himself. Paul learned to trust the Lord at all times, especially in moments of weakness. He maybe couldn't see the way clear, lacking the resources or wisdom necessary to overcome, but Christ was always more than able to meet his need.

- There will be times when it appears hope is lost, but in reality that is never the case for the Christian. We are never without hope. Our Lord conquered every enemy, temptation, and trial we would ever endure. He has the resources to enable us to overcome. We must learn to trust Him at all times, especially when we are weak and uncertain!

**C. We are not Deserted** (9a) – [Persecuted, but not forsaken](#). When Paul faced the harassment and ridicule of his peers, even being forsaken by those he trusted, he found a constant Friend and Companion. No matter how difficult the journey or dark the storm, the Lord was always at his side. What should he fear as long as the Lord was near?

- What comfort that brings to our hearts! If you are committed to standing for Christ, you might as well expect being deserted by some you trusted. Commitment to Christ will draw a line in the sand that creates separation. Though all would desert us, we are never forsaken or alone. We have one who will remain closer than any brother. He promised He would never leave us or forsake us!

**D. We are not Destroyed** (9b) – [cast down, but not destroyed](#). Paul had been knocked down many times, but the Lord always provided the strength to stand again. His enemies may have prevailed momentarily, but the Lord preserved him. We know that Paul eventually was beheaded for his faith in Christ, but even in death he was not destroyed. The hands of evil men may have taken his life, but he was eternally secure in Christ the Lord. Paul had grasped this eternal truth long before his departure in death. [Gal.2:20 – I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.](#) [Philip.1:20-21 – According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but \*that\* with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether \*it be\* by life, or by death.](#) <sup>[21]</sup> [For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.](#)

- We have no way of knowing what we will have to face before this life is over. Our struggles will continue as long as we live, but the believer will never be destroyed. Men may take my life, but I am secure in Christ my Lord. I am promised eternal life in Him. That affords great comfort and boldness in the face of opposition. Regardless of what this life may hold, I know who holds my future and where I will spend eternity. There is nothing that can separate me from the loving care of my Savior!

**Conclusion:** I trust you view these verses in light of confidence rather than trouble. We all must face trials and adversity, but they do not define our existence, and shouldn't dictate our lives. There is strength and rest in the Lord. Trouble will remain, but I have Friend who will be there through each trial I face.

Are you troubled today? Are you feeling pressured by the burdens of life? Are you trying to handle your problems alone? I urge you to seek the Lord and draw strength from Him. Your storm may be intense, but there is hope in Christ. If you are unsaved, you don't enjoy the confidence I have spoken of. You face trouble like the rest of us, but you don't have the comfort of Christ. Come to Him by faith and be saved today!

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<sup>i</sup> Mattoon's Treasures - Mattoon's Treasures – Treasures from 2 Corinthians.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid