

**WHERE IS GOD WHEN IT HURTS?
GLORY THROUGH SUFFERING
2 Corinthians 4:16 – 5:5**

Please review this week's catechism question.

Did you meet anyone new after last Sunday's worship service?

INTRODUCTION

According to Matthew 13: 17 what danger does suffering pose to faith?

Suffering has the potential of destroying faith and so keeping you from going to heaven. More than one person has forsaken Christ and abandoned faith in God because of suffering or the fear of it.

According to Luke 6:35 what does Jesus command us to do?

Love our enemies, do good to those who harm us, lend to those who are taking advantage of us without expecting to get back what we lend or any other earthly benefit from our kindness.

What makes it difficult to do good to our enemies (or those who are acting like our enemies)?

We naturally want our enemies to suffer for the harm they do to us. Doing good to our enemies only opens us up for more harm. Loving others without expecting anything in return is exactly the opposite of why we normally love others. It is the experience of suffering and the fear of it that keeps us from loving people.

In 2 Corinthians 4:16 Paul restates what he said in 4:1, he does not get discouraged or lose heart in trusting Jesus and loving people. These verses give us at least three reasons for why Paul does not give up. Let's pray that God would enable us to see what Paul sees and so live as he lives.

STUDY

1. What does the word "therefore" refer to? What is the reason from vv. 14-15 that he does not lose heart?

He knows that he is going to be raised from the dead to be with Jesus forever and to join in the great chorus of praise to Jesus. He is absolutely confident that Jesus was raised from the dead and that he will be raised along with all who love Jesus. He will be a part of that great company that "shouts with joy" to God forever and ever. See Revelation 4 & 5.

2. Instead of losing heart what are the two things that are taking place in Paul's life?

His "outer man" is wasting away and "his inner man" is being renewed.

3. What is Paul referring to when he says "outer man"? (See 4:7-12)

Paul is not just talking about his physical body. He is describing his entire experience of living in this world of sin and trouble and sorrow.

4. What does Paul mean by the phrase "wasting away"? (See 4: 7-12 and Luke 12:33—same word describing what moth's do to cloth)

The word, "wasting away" is the same word Jesus uses to describe what moths do to clothe. This is life here. His physical body is subject to illness and full of the aches and pains that are the result of the beatings and the hunger and the sleeplessness he has experienced through the years. His heart is wounded by the betrayals and misunderstandings that have occurred in his relationships. He is referring to all the times he has had to redo and repeat things because things and people keep falling apart. He is talking about the burden of caring about others and being grieved at the enormous amount of suffering that others in the world are enduring.

5. What does Paul mean by the term "inner man"? (See Romans 7:22, Gal. 2:20, Eph. 3:16, 4:24, Col. 3:3 & 10)

Just as "outer man" does not simply refer to his physical body, so "inner man" does not simply refer to Paul's inner life, his soul or inner

psyche. This refers to Paul's new life in Christ. It is the eternal life, the very life of Jesus that is living within him and for which he lives. It is the new life that he is living. He is living for Christ and in Christ and with Christ.

6. What does Paul mean by the inner man “is being renewed day by day” (See 3:18, 4:7, 10-11, Col. 3:1-2 &10, and dozens of other passages)?

This renewal simply means that he is daily growing in his participation in the life of Jesus. His behavior, emotions, thinking, relationships, work, everything about him is revealing the life of Jesus more and more and causing him to experience the life of Jesus more and more. Paul is daily growing to know Jesus and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings (Phil. 3:10-11). He is daily growing to delight in Jesus' love for him and growing to love Jesus more and hope in his salvation more and more.

7. In what ways can you relate to both of Paul's experiences of life in this world? What are some ways you see your “outer man wasting away”? What are some ways you see your “inner man being renewed day by day”?

Christians gladly endure suffering because their inner man is being renewed.

8. Verse 17 begins with the word “for”. What does this tell us about the relationship between v. 17 and v. 16?

Verse 17 gives us the reason that Paul's inner man is being renewed day by day.

9. Notice that the verb, “are achieving”, is present tense while the glory that is being produced is “eternal”. This means that there is both a present reality and a future reality that causes Paul's inner man to be renewed day by day. How are the momentary and light troubles producing glory in Paul's present experience?

God is the one who is, through the troubles, making us experience more of his glory in the present. God uses the trouble to make us more like Jesus right now and to give us more of Jesus right now. You cannot be like him or know him more now without the trouble that God sends. If your desire is to be more like Jesus and if your desire is to know more of Jesus, then you will welcome the trouble that God sends to accomplish this in your life. How does the trouble, in God's hands, achieve glory for us in the present? First, it shatters our trust and hope in the pleasures of this life. Second, he also uses the trouble to increase our faith in Christ and our hope in his salvation.

10. Has trouble ever shattered your hope of finding happiness in this life? Has it ever caused you to put your hope in Christ and his eternal salvation?

11. Review the list of Paul's troubles in 2 Corinthians 11: 23-29. What does Paul mean by calling these troubles “momentary and light”?

He means these troubles don't last very long and they are not very great or heavy to bear.

12. How can he say such a thing?

He can say this because the glory that the troubles produce is eternal and heavy or great. There is a direct, cause/effect relationship between the suffering of this life and the weight of glory in the next. The more suffering endured in Christ and with Christ, the more glorious heaven will be. The eternal happiness that will belong to all who endure suffering for the sake of Jesus will be infinitely greater than all the trouble endured to get there. Please do not miss what Paul is saying. There will be no one in heaven that did not experience suffering. It is the suffering that is producing the glory. No suffering, no glory, it's that simple. Suffering cannot harm us; it works to make heaven a better place for us.

13. Have you ever had to work hard, maybe even suffer, in order to obtain some goal? When you obtained the goal, did you regret the suffering? Did the joy of achieving the goal make the suffering “worth it”? Did the suffering in fact make the goal that much sweeter?

14. According to v. 18, for who are the troubles achieving an eternal glory that far outweighs them all?

The people for whom the sufferings are producing glory are those whose attention is not riveted on the suffering but on the glory. Paul is not saying that he does not notice the sufferings of his life. He doesn't live in denial. However, he doesn't fill his mind and heart with the suffering but with the glory. His mind isn't fixed on the fleeting pleasures of this world. His attention isn't set on the suffering. The verb translated "fix our eyes" is a very strong word. It is the word used to describe how people pay attention to their own needs. It describes how watchmen keep watch for the enemy. It's the word that describes how a novice pays attention to his instructor/mentor in order to learn some kind of skill.

15. Describe the logic that Paul is using here. How does he compare his wasting away life on planet earth with a life lived with Jesus forever?

Paul is after maximum pleasure. He's no fool. He has weighed the options. He realizes that he could have 70-80 years of a good life on planet earth enjoying prestige and bodily comfort and all the pleasures of earth if he would deny Christ and go back to his life of being a religious professional. But he also knows that along with that life is a life of eternal suffering in hell. So he has chosen to endure, with Jesus and for the sake of Jesus, 70-80 years of suffering in order to obtain an eternity of joy and happiness with Christ. He views everything in light of eternity. He is living for heaven and the joys of heaven, not earth and the joys of earth. His mind thinks much of Christ. He meditates on the joy that will be his, not on the suffering that he is now enduring.

16. What is your mind and heart fixed upon? How do you compare the sufferings of this life, especially the suffering that comes to you as you seek to love God and others, with the glory of heaven?

Christians gladly endure suffering because their troubles are insignificant compared to the glory that is coming.

17. 2 Cor. 5:1 begins with the word "for" (not "now" as the NIV has it). What is the relationship between 4:17-18 and 5:1?

Paul is giving a second reason for fixing our eyes on the unseen Jesus and his coming kingdom rather than this visible world and its pleasures and sufferings.

18. According to v. 1, why does he fix his eyes on the unseen world and not the seen world?

The only way you can have the eternal house in heaven that God is building for you is if your old house, the tent you now occupy on planet earth is torn down.

19. In vv. 2-4 how does Paul describe our experience of living in this "earthly tent"?

It is a life characterized by the groaning of longing and the groaning of bearing a burden. We yearn to live in our resurrected bodies with Jesus forever. This life is lived in an eager anticipation of what is coming, not in trying to fix up our tent so we can live more comfortably here. We feel living here on planet earth as a burden and something we are looking forward to escaping. We do not believe that true happiness can be found here.

20. What are some ways that children express their "groaning in anticipation" of a coming big event?

That's all they talk about. They are continually asking how long until the event arrives. They don't pay much attention to what is happening in the present, as they are so eager for the future.

21. In verse 4, how does Paul describe what will happen at the resurrection when Jesus returns?

We will be clothed with our heavenly dwelling. What is mortal will be swallowed up by life.

22. How does this picture impact you emotionally?

23. What does Paul say in v. 5 that is meant to give us confidence in these future realities?

The reason that God made us, both as humans and then as Christians, is so that we will experience the resurrection, so that our mortal existence will be transformed into life. We know that this is a certainty both because God's purpose in creating humanity will not be fully realized until the resurrection and because he has made a down payment on our inheritance by giving us the Holy Spirit. A down payment is both the first installment of the full payment and a guarantee that the full payment will be made.

24. Are you looking forward to your “earthly tent” being torn down and thus receiving your eternal home in heaven? What are some ways that you experience the groaning of anticipation and of burden?

Christians gladly endure suffering because their old house must be torn down before they can get a new one.