

I. Read II Corinthians 4:16-17

A. The Apostle Paul experienced great trials and tribulation in his lifetime. Read II Corinthians 11:23-28 and list the difficulties he faced.

1. Great labors
2. Multiple imprisonments
3. Beatings
4. Life-threatening circumstances
5. Five scourgings
6. Three beatings with rods or sticks
7. A stoning
8. Three shipwrecks
9. A *near death* experience
10. Long and difficult journeys
11. Dangerous river crossing
12. Danger from robbers
13. Danger from Jewish zealots
14. Danger from pagans
15. Danger in the city and wilderness
16. Dangerous voyages
17. Danger of betrayal
18. Sleep deprivation
19. Hunger and thirst
20. Danger of hypothermia
21. Anxiety over the condition of the church and individual believers

In spite of these great challenges, he says in II Corinthians 4:16 that he and his associates did “not lose heart.” Why not?

The Apostle Paul understood that man must give himself to something bigger than himself, something that truly matters, in order to find true meaning of life. His sense of purpose gave him the wherewithal to keep up his struggle in spite of overwhelming problems. He had learned to rely on the Word of God rather than circumstances or emotions. He had learned to trust in Jesus in the midst of all sorts of tough times. His secret was not *positive thinking*, nor was it a *stoic disassociation from pain*, nor was it *mind over matter*, but rather in keeping his eyes on the finish line in the race God had set before him. Another way to express it would be that he kept his eyes on Jesus and redemption rather than on circumstances, people, or things.

Read Philippians 4:11-13 and describe how Paul was able to *rise above* the circumstances of life.

It wasn't that he *rose above* the circumstances of life, but rather that he realized that circumstances were not the main thing in life. Paul would certainly have preferred comfort over hardship if given a choice between the two. But what is unique about Paul is that he preferred doing God's will over personal comfort and convenience. In other words, if given a choice between obedience and compromise, Paul would obey. Further, he would expect (in faith) that Christ would provide the strength he needed to fulfill his commitment, as indeed He did. (v 13)

B. The late, great Francis Schaeffer explained that in our day, Christians have opted for *personal peace* and *affluence* over the pursuit of the high calling of God. What did he mean by *personal peace* and *affluence*?

Personal peace is being left alone to do your own thing; being allowed the *space* to do whatever you want, or nothing at all if that is your preference. *Affluence* is the acquisition and possession of a lot of stuff, along with the comfort, excitement, and convenience which goes with it.

How might *personal peace* and *affluence* get in the way of living for God?

If they represent the focus or primary objective of our lives, we will compromise in order to get and keep them. Understand that affluence per se is not inherently evil, but the *desire to become affluent* leads to overwhelming temptations. (see I Tim. 6:9-10)

How does Luke 8:14 serve as a warning to those who would consider the points above unimportant?

When faced with the difficult choice of following God or pursuing wealth and comfort, the wrong choice may indicate an unregenerate state.

- C. When Paul speaks of the “outer man” as “decaying” (NAS), to what is he referring? (V16)
The “outer man” is *the flesh*. While this certainly entails man’s physical body which is indeed “decaying” or dying, his primary point is the presence of the old sin nature of man. The old sin nature is often referred to as *the flesh* in Scripture.

What is the “inner man” which is being “renewed day by day”?

This is the spiritual man or the spiritual life which is imparted at regeneration.

How is the “inner man” renewed day by day?

God renews the “inner man” through His indwelling Holy Spirit. He also provides the various *means of grace* which support this ongoing work of spiritual renewal. It is our responsibility to avail ourselves of the *means of grace* (bible study, fellowship, the sacraments, prayer), yet God ultimately will sustain and make the continuing work of renewal effectual!

- D. What do the contrasting descriptive phrases “light affliction” and “weight of glory” (NAS) explain to us? (v17)

They convey the distinction between trials and tribulations in this life (“light affliction”) and rewards gained for all eternity in heaven (“weight of glory”). Though the troubles of this life may be great and difficult to endure, this will be a small price to pay when compared with the rewards enjoyed eternally.

- E. In verse 18, Paul draws an important distinction between the temporal and the eternal. While it must not be inferred that he is denigrating this life or the physical world in which we live, he is certainly pointing to the proper priorities of life. When given a choice, where should our priorities be?

On things that have eternal value. People have eternal value certainly, therefore, they should be a priority. It should be understood that Paul was not making a Platonic or pietistic distinction between the physical world and the spiritual world as the pseudo-spiritual fundamentalists of our day do so often. Work, art, study in the various academic disciplines, etc., all have eternal value when done as unto the Lord. (see Col. 3:22-24) He is making it clear that life is full of choices (options, if you prefer). He is encouraging us to make choices in life which will yield an eternal return—to prioritize and examine our approach to life.

A timely illustration concerns the way so many young couples sell out their families, especially their children, for hunks of metal and plastic and the selfish use of their time. What a tragedy that young women have been deceived into believing that staying home

and nurturing their children is less important than success in a career. What a shame that so many young men see success in life as the acquisition of *stuff*. What a sad thing that so many parents would rather *do their own thing* than spend time with their children.