



**Read 2 Cor. 4:1-6**

Notice that Paul is still defending his ministry as an apostle. Paul has his ministry “by the mercy of God”, not by his own sufficiency or worthiness. In verse 6, Paul again plays off the experiences of Moses to juxtapose the beauty and power of the New Covenant. Those who have the Spirit of God, behold “the glory of God in the face of Christ.” This text cries out for the reader to remember Moses, and as holy as he was, the failure of the old covenant to transform its members. Richard Hays reminds us of some things we learned in our last study:

In the new covenant according to Paul, true reading both presupposes and produces the transformation of readers. Only readers made competent by the Spirit can throw back the veil and perceive the sense of Scripture; those who have not turned to the Lord who is Spirit are necessarily trapped in the script, with minds hardened and veiled...And, since the character of this gospel is such that it must be written on human hearts rather than in texts, the community of the church becomes the place where the meaning of Israel’s scripture is enfolded.”<sup>1</sup>

Seeing is connected to faith, to surrender, and all this is from the Spirit.

*Jars of Clay*

**Read 2 Cor. 4:7-12**

Again, Paul emphasizes his sufferings as an apostle, although God has set a limit to the reach of those sufferings. Paul “always” carries in his body the death of Jesus (vs 10), which has become part of Christ leading him in triumph.

At the conclusion of this paragraph, Paul makes the somewhat unexpected statement that “death is at work in us, but life in you.” The letter had a similar assertion back in chapter 1: “if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation...”(1:6). Paul’s bold language should rock us out of our easy modern paradigm of “Jesus suffered so we don’t have to”. Paul does not understand his own sufferings as accidental, nor does he view them as an occasion for depression or grumbling. Rather, in his own sufferings, the mystery of Christ’s love-in-suffering are relived.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hays *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*. 148-149

Modern Catholics often think of “ministry” as being something like signing up to be a lector or running some sort of group in a parish; personal suffering as ministry has little in our view to do with “ministry”. St. Paul views things quite differently from us – rather his pains – both small and great – are occasions for the love of God to be manifested *through* him.

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*How does Paul’s understanding of his ministry square with modern notions of ministry?  
Is there room in the modern church for thinking like this – or was it unique?*

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If the question is asked today about how one is to become successful in ministry, I doubt “learning to joyfully suffer” would be among the top responses. Today we have many tools – videos, podcasts, electric guitars and of course men and women trained to be dynamic speakers; yet none of these can substitute for the authentic love of Christ that suffers for others in the individual Christian. The Church’s life and success springs not from technical prowess or the wisdom of men, but from a love that enters into death so that others might have life.

Again, we see how Christianity flips human questions on their head. The world asks: “if God is good why does he allow suffering?” The Christian who has entered the depths says: “how can I become like Christ, pouring myself out completely?” And in this “death” of pouring oneself out, we find life itself.

### **Further Clothed**

#### **Read 2 Cor. 5:1-5**

In the midst of suffering, Paul doesn’t lose heart. His body undergoes great trials, but he keeps the hope of the resurrection; to aid his message, Paul uses two metaphors.

- 1) *From tent to building*: This movement recalls Israel’s history where God dwelt among Israel in the tabernacle during the Exodus. The tabernacle was a series of tents which was proper to the wilderness wanderings of Israel; it eventually gave way to the temple, which was much grander although it shared the same basic design.

Israel’s pilgrimage from Egypt to the Promised Land was necessary but difficult; much like our own. This pilgrimage however had a *purpose*; it was moving somewhere, and the destination was well worth the walk.

It is worth noting that St. John uses this same metaphor in the opening of his Gospel to illuminate the incarnation. “And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, we have beheld his glory.”<sup>2</sup> When John says “dwelt”, the word he uses, *skene*, literally means “he pitched his tent” among us. The Son of God joins us on our pilgrimage

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<sup>2</sup>John 1:14

- 2) *Further clothed*: Here again we are speaking about the body. Greek culture of Paul's time tended to see the body as evil, thus death – being “unclothed” might be seen as a good Thing: finally I can get rid of this body which is broken, weak and prone to sin. Paul however is a good Jew, and he knows that God created the world good, including our bodies – thus the problem isn't that we have bodies, it is that our bodies are corrupt through sin. The resurrection is a *physical* reality – our bodies will not be absent in redemption, rather they enter into a certain fullness.

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*What do people think about our bodies and the “afterlife” in our culture?  
Why is it important that Christians affirm a resurrected body, and not merely a body-less soul  
in heaven?*

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The language used here about clothing and “being found naked” should remind us of another biblical scene: Adam and Eve's fall in Eden.

In Genesis 3:7 we are told that our first parents had their eyes opened (after eating from the forbidden tree) and they knew they were naked. Just three verses later, Adam says this: “I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid.”<sup>3</sup> Current in Paul's time was a reading of the fall which said that Adam and Eve were clothed in the glory of God prior to the first sin.

The resurrected body is thus “further clothed” – and what is more, in the very glory of God. Paul says this is all “from God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.” This verse is very similar to what he said in 1:22. Here Paul again uses the word *arrabon* – which means a down payment. God gives us that life in the spirit as the foretaste, the payment up-front of eternal life in the resurrected body.

### **Read 2 Cor. 5:16-21**

Paul's thoughts have been circling around the splendor of resurrection. Jews expected some sort of future resurrection in “the age to come”, but with the resurrection of Jesus, expectations were thrown into disarray, God's future had broken into the present time. Paul speaks of regarding Christ either according to the flesh or according to the Spirit.

We have seen the Spirit frequently through the first 5 chapters of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians. For Paul, there are really two ways to live your life – to walk in the flesh, or in the Spirit. The flesh is the normal way of being human – it is the fallen nature all of us are born into, and by which all of us live unless we are liberated by the Spirit of God.

The Spirit (as we just saw) is the down payment on eternal life – it means that eternity has broken into time – that we who love, forgive and walk by faith – we live now the life of eternity, the life that belongs to God.

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 3:10

In 5:17 Paul speaks of the new creation; this is resurrection language. Jesus is raised on Sunday – the day which God began creation, but with his resurrection, God re-creates the world. New creation is the work at which God is laboring – but when you and I turn to Christ, when we live by the Spirit, we too become new, we enter into the world not characterized by the flesh, but by the Spirit of God.

### He Became Sin...

In one of Paul's beautiful and yet confusing passages, the glorious exchange whereby Jesus takes our sin, and we share in his righteousness is brought to light. Jesus *becoming* sin is not meant to be taken literally, rather Paul is using the Old Testament language of sacrifice. Check out this passage from Leviticus:

And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the sons of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and send him away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness.<sup>4</sup>

The scapegoat doesn't literally become Israel's sin except in a metaphorical way; rather, he bears the sin of Israel and is thus cast outside the camp. Jesus too dies *outside* Jerusalem, which is no accident, he bears the sin of the world, he is the scapegoat, the one sacrifice which deals definitively with sin.

As we close this bible study, remember that all of this is happening in the context of Paul's defense of his ministry, and his sufferings. The promise of glory and its anticipated life happening now in the Holy Spirit is what drives Paul's ministry and enables him to suffer. The hope of many souls coming to share in the redemption of Christ is what lies in front of Paul's eyes, and thus the petty bickering of status and qualifications is so of course that it bespeaks of seeing reality *according to the flesh*.

### For Next Time

- pray for the Holy Spirit to be given to you in a deeper way
- Spend some time meditating on the life of heaven and the resurrection
- Set your hope on eternal life
- Read 2 Corinthians 6-8

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<sup>4</sup> Leviticus 16:21