

## The Book of 2 Corinthians

### 2 Corinthians 4:13-18

#### Session 41: Pop Quiz

Let me take you back in time: Put your books away and clear your desk, get out a clean sheet of paper and a pencil. Today we are having a pop quiz. Did that ever happen to you when you were in school? What kind of emotions ran through your mind when that happened? Did you panic, and groan with dread because you feared you were unprepared, or did you say, “Yeah, I’m ready for this!”?

Today we are having a “pop quiz” of sorts. Suppose I could put us all in a time machine and we could go back to the time that Paul is writing 2 Corinthians. How far back in time would we go; to what year? We would go 1,970 years back in time to 56 AD.



And, where in the world would we be? We would be somewhere up in Macedonia, as Paul has met Titus and he is on his way to see the Corinthians again; most likely he is in Philippi.

As we meet up with Paul, we hear him and Titus discussing the trials they

are going through. Now, suppose the apostle Paul were to look at us and say, “These sufferings are so great, but they are for the cause of Christ. Tell me, how can I handle them so that they do not discourage me?” What will you say?

Obviously, Paul knows what to say. But suppose you are giving this advice to someone today, or even to yourself. What will you say? Here is the process:

The first thing to do is to identify the particular kind of suffering.

### 1. **Identify the kind of suffering**

We have three choices when it comes to sufferings:

- The Sufferings of Christ (SoC)
- The Sufferings of this Present Time (SoPT)
- Self-Suffering

Just as an aside, these three correspond with the sources of our spiritual troubles:

- The SoC (comes from **Satan** and his realm)
- The SoPT (comes from living in this fallen **world**)
- Self-Suffering (comes from our **flesh**)

Because we are in 2 Corinthians, we will stick with the sufferings of Christ.

The next step is to **Identify the Scripture Remedy**.

In this case, we would refer to **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**.

Actually, there are various kinds of sufferings that fall under the banner of “the sufferings of Christ.” What I mean to say is that those attacks can vary as to how they come against you and also in severity. We are presently in the fifth category of those sufferings, so we will stick to those particular sufferings which are the life-threatening, severe attacks of Satan’s policy of evil (PoE).

Step 3 is to **Outline the Remedy**. What I mean is to organize the remedy into a concise form, so it can be quickly recalled and put into action.

The remedy for the intense SoC has three parts. What are they?

- a. **Have a cause** – What is Paul’s cause? In short, Paul’s cause is the **Glorious of God**. More particularly, to take part in an event – when he is being presented blameless before the Father – to have his (and the entire Body of Christ’s) thanks for God’s abundant grace redound to the glory of God.

I talked about this last week: that this event of being presented blameless to the Father, as we stand before Him having received our new body at the Blessed

Hope, and come through the Judgment Seat of Christ, as we stand there in full recognition of what God, by His abundant grace, has done for us, the natural expression of the thanks of multiplied millions of saints will redound throughout the heavens to the glory of God.

We have to **Ask the Questions:** 1) **Is this cause real?** and 2) **Is it important?** for us to have our thanks for God's abundant grace, redound to the glory of God as we are presented to the Father.

Let me talk about one of the great dangers to being involved in ministry. It is being so involved with the work, so familiar with the terminology, and being so close to others who are doing the work of the ministry that the actual work of edification gets neglected. This happens to preachers all the time. It happens to staff members. Because you are in the middle of it all the time, you do not realize that you cannot just talk about it; you have to do the private things everyone else has to do in order to be conformed to the image of Christ. There is a clever trap that is set for those who have been around the doctrine for years and are familiar with the lingo, and they are close to the people who are a part of it, that they can feel like it is happening to them automatically, without actually taking the time to do the work of edification.

Now, if you say, "Honestly, that event of being presented to the Father and my thanks, being mingled with the rest of the Body of Christ (BoC) redounding to the glory of God, is not that real to me, it really isn't in my mind very much, but I want it to be; how do I do that? How do I start looking at the glory of God the way Paul did? How does God's glory become such a big thing to me that I won't quit?" (Remember what Paul said, "For this cause, we faint not.") We are going to answer that at the end of today's session, so hang on. I'm going to show you how to think about it like Paul.

So, assuming we time traveled back to Macedonia in 56 AD, if the apostle Paul were to turn to you and ask you what to do as the intense sufferings of Christ are taking place, what will keep the saints from quitting; the first part of your answer would be: Have a cause worth living for: the glory of God.

Now we come to the next part of our outline of the remedy:

- b. **Make a Sonship Decision** – Make a sonship decision to **Trade** in your comparatively light and momentary **Affliction**, for a far more exceeding weight of **Eternal Glory**.

This truly is a sonship decision because it is perfectly in-line with the doctrine in God's word. We sometimes make decisions out of our flesh, and call them "sonship decisions," when they are not. Your choice of which flavor of ice cream to eat is not a sonship decision unless you have somehow linked it to God's will for the BoC in this dispensation of Grace. You just chose the flavor your taste buds like. It does not have anything to do with God's table of likes and dislikes.

Look, if you are a teenager (or younger) still living at home, and your parents ask you to do something that you don't necessarily want to do (like observe a certain curfew, or restrict going to certain places) your "sonship decision" will be to obey the scripture and "obey your parents in the Lord." And then you can go to work on the grace to do it, not only without complaint, but to do it "most gladly!" There is a grace project for you.

Now, since I talked to the kids, let me say a word to parents who still have kids at home. This is part of Dr. Mike's Free Advice: It is just a suggestion, but I think it is a good one. At the end of the day, as your kids are going to bed, and I am talking primarily to dads, but moms can do it too, if dad for some reason is not home. Take a few minutes with each one of your kids to ask them about their day. What I am about to suggest will usually take 5-10 minutes or so with each child. That means that if you have three children, this is going to take somewhere between 15-30 minutes, usually.

Before I say this, I should also say that you should pray together as a family just before bedtime. We did this with our kids. And I think it is good to do it with everyone together, and everyone gets a turn to pray, (when they are old enough).

But, after you pray, add this ritual with your kids. Ask them three questions before you tuck them in. The first question should be something like:

- What was the best part of your day today?
- Tell me something that made you laugh today.
- Tell me how you were kind to someone today.
- Tell me how you served someone else today.

Just pick one question and then listen to the answer. What are you doing by asking these kinds of questions? You are looking for something that was a high point for them (which tells you something about them) and you are looking for something for which they are worthy to be praised. Be sure and do that; praise to criticism should be 10 to 1. But you are also after something else in this exercise. This is for the purpose of cultivating a grateful spirit in your children, even when their day was difficult because, even in a bad day, they should learn to identify those things which were good.

Here is the second question:

- What challenged you most today and what did you learn from that?
- Tell me how you overcame a difficulty today and what did you learn from that?
- What did you fail at today and what did you learn from that?

The third question goes something like this:

- What are you most looking forward to tomorrow?

And that should be one of your first questions for them when they walk in the door tomorrow. Here is the point: interested dads are the best kind.

You want them to cultivate the habit of examining themselves and knowing that failure is okay if we use it to do better the next time.

But, let's get back to the point we were on. We are now talking about making a wise sonship decision of trading in our sufferings and getting eternal glory in return.

To do that, we have to value that glory (which we will possess for all eternity) more than our present suffering for Christ.

And finally, we come to the third part of our outline of remedy.

- c. **Do the process** – Paul has given us the mechanics of how all this works; **Do Not Look On: 1) the outer man effects**, and do not focus on **2) the Attacks**. These are the things which are seen.

Instead, **2) Look on: the (inward man) Benefits** of the sufferings. These are the things which are not seen, but they are felt.

Notice that Paul does something here that he often does. He begins his instruction by telling us what NOT to do, and then following with instructions as to what TO do?

We are going to list seven benefits of Suffering with Christ. This is not all of them, but they will get you started as you think about and further your own study.

Stay focused on the inner man; instead of thinking about the attacks, think about how those attacks are working to: **1) Build your inner man, by the doctrine producing a series of benefits, such as:**

1. **Patience** – peace of God
2. **Experience**
  - a. **Knowhow**
  - b. **Confidence (not fear)**
  - c. **Trust (the word works)**
  - d. **Example (inspire others)**
3. **Hope (confident expectation)**
4. **Strengthening to Endure** the sufferings,
5. **Become More than a Conqueror**
6. **Put Grace on Display**
7. **Conformity to Christ**

In order for this doctrine to do its effectual work in us, we will need to read and reread the verses over in chapter 4, understanding what it means to suffer for the cause of Christ. We should get familiar with what Paul says by reading; speak of it by putting it into our conversations, get it into our minds by meditating on the doctrine, and we should pray about it.

While all of these are important, I think the key that is most often missing is to meditate on the doctrine. This is the answer to what to do if you have having trouble seeing things the way Paul does.

Therefore, I want to pause here to talk about how to meditate on these doctrines. When I talk about meditating on the scripture, I am not talking about emptying our mind as is taught in eastern religions (which is spiritually dangerous); but I am talking about filling our mind with the truth from God's word in a way that allows that word to effectually work in our inner man, and transform us by the renewing of our mind.

That being said, there is a difference between reading and meditation. Reading gives us information, which we need, obviously. In fact, we need to read first. Read, and reread. Read carefully, paying attention to the words. But, if the process of effectual working is going to happen efficiently (in the shortest amount of time), we must do more than read.

Reading is not the same as meditation. Meditation builds on our reading and leads to transformation, which is the goal. Reading sets the stage so we can effectively meditate on scripture and get the doctrine in us.

Also, there is a difference between studying and meditation. I am all for studying, in fact we are told to "study to show ourselves approved unto God, ...rightly dividing the word of truth." I am all for studying, and we should do it. But right now, I am talking about meditation, and the proper way to do it.

Meditation means you take a verse and you begin to think about it, to mull it over in your mind, and to carefully consider it. Let me give you several ways to do this. First, look at the verse one word at a time and think about how the verse reads as you emphasize each word and phrase, individually.

Think about John 3:16.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Now, take that verse and emphasize the first word, “For.” “For.” is a word that introduces a purpose or a reason for something.

The second word is “God.” Think about who God is; think about His attributes, think about the Godhead; think about His majesty, His glory, and His wisdom.

The third word is “so.” “So” is an intensifier. It is a synonym for “very.” It means to a high degree. “So” is a word that emphasizes that which is exceeding or extremely to an extent.

The fourth word is “loved.” Putting it together with “so,” we now see that God “so loved.” This is the measure of the greatest of His love. Just stop and ponder that for a minute.

The fifth and sixth words are “the world.” Stop and think about who that includes both in time and place. Do you get the idea? This is one way of thinking/meditating on the scripture, but it is not the only way.

Another way to meditate on the scripture is to ask questions about the verse you are meditating on. Who is this verse for, who is doing the writing, what were the circumstances, what is the point the writer is trying to get across, does this apply to me, if it does in what way does it apply, and what am I supposed to get out of this verse, etc.?

Meditating on the scriptures is something you should do as a part of your fellowship with God. This means that meditating on scripture will naturally lead into prayer, talking to God about the things you are thinking. While prayer is technically something different from meditating on the scripture, it should be a natural by-product of it.

Set yourself up to succeed as you meditate on the word. As you sit down to meditate on the word, do not get in a hurry. Do not rush through, trying to read three chapters and then off you go on to other things. Stop, put away your phone and tablet, turn off the TV and let the verse you are looking at fill your thoughts.

When you meditate on Scripture, do it in small bits of scripture at a time; take one verse (usually) and stick with it until it becomes real, until you see it, until you

believe it, until it changes how you think. When it does that; that's the sweet spot of meditation.

For example, take 2 Corinthians 4:14, about being presented blameless before the Father, and meditate on that verse. You might even connect that to verse 15, where you begin to visualize the Body of Christ thanking God for His abundant grace, and you being a part of that great event. I am tying this right back into the Notetaker, for this was Paul's "cause," the glory of God.

Or, if you are suffering under the SoC, take 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 and meditate on those verses one verse at a time. Think about them and how they impact you. As you read each word of them and think about them and ask yourself questions about them; and talk to God about them, and consider what they are designed to do. Let it sink in that these verses are designed by God to make an impact on the way you think about the things that are going on around you, and to make an impact on your inner man. To bring you comfort in the midst of adversity, to give you courage and resolve when you are afraid or uncertain, and to sustain you when your flesh is not enough.

The more you meditate, the more alive the word becomes, the more insight you gain. It is changing from being information to becoming reality. That is what renews your mind, that is what builds your faith, and that is what transforms you.

Meditation is not a checklist of chapters we are trying to get through; we are trying to get the word in us. We are not racing to the finish. This is you and I saying, "I'm staying until this verse becomes real, until it changes how I think, until it transforms how I see myself, how I see my situation, and how I see God. That is the difference between reading and meditating.

Speak to yourselves (Ephesians 5:19), speak to others (2 Corinthians 4:13), speak to God; and not just once.

We have to stop this quest to keep gathering knowledge, without taking the time to get that working in us. Without taking the time to engage in the edification process, which includes meditating on the word, we are taking the "slow boat" to being conformed to the image of Christ.

Don't worry about seeing how far you can get, collecting all the answers, hearing that new thing, or being the first to know.

Instead, spend time this week engaging in the process whereby we are edified unto godliness, and whereby we are truly transformed. And let it be out of this edification process that our conversations come all through the week, and where our thoughts naturally reside. And then, let this work in our inner man be the subject of our prayers.

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**The Most Important Decision**