

How Paul Handled Suffering

I Cor. 4:9-13

Introduction

- In this text we see that Paul endured hardship and suffering. (cf. II Cor. 4:8-12; 11:23-29; 12:1-10)
- Suffering is common to all – no one is or will be untouched by it. Takes various forms.
- Suffering brings about different responses:
 - Some go through trials, lose their faith and leave the Lord. (Lk. 8:13)
 - Experience adversity, are strengthened and draw closer to the Lord. (Job. 42:3-6)
 - How did Paul cope with suffering in his own life?

Introduction

- Suffering is a perplexing problem...why?
 - Some suffer as a result of their own actions.
 - The “why” comes when good people suffer...
 - “Why did God let that happen?”
 - “Why doesn’t God heal?”
 - The Atheist – “if there is a God...
- In II Cor. 12:7-10, we see a particular problem addressed by Paul.
- He saw some things that we need to see today; provides some lessons that will give us a better and needed perspective. Look at his words in verse 10.
- What gets Paul to that point?

Introduction

- II Cor. 12:10 → 12:10 Therefore I am content with weaknesses, with insults, with troubles, with persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong. (NET)

The Nature of Paul's Thorn In The Flesh

- Paul's ordeal was not a merely unpleasant or inconvenient.
- "Thorn" – not as mere briar prick but a sharpened stake.
 - "The figure is that of an impaling stake" (Vincent)
 - In the flesh → a persisting malady.
 - Buffeted him. To strike with the fist. (Matt. 26:67; I Pet. 2:20)
- We are not told what it was...

Paul Recognized The Ultimate Source of Suffering...

- Question to consider: Where did Paul lay the blame for this thorn?
 - Paul points the finger of blame on the devil → “a messenger of Satan” (v-7) Not the most common answer people give today...
- Often the finger of blame is pointed at God.
- It is the devil, not God that is our adversary:
 - Gen. 3:17-18,22 → this world changed because of sin.
 - I Pet. 5:8 → your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion walks about seeking whom he may devour. (Rev. 12:17)
 - It is God who loves us, provides for us, and the devil who is our adversary. (Js. 1:12,16-18; Rom. 8:32)

Paul Prayed To God For Removal of That Which Brought On His Suffering.

- Paul prayed fervently, entreated God to remove the thorn – three times.
 - He sees God as the source of help, deliverance in the time of adversity.
 - Paul practiced what he preached. (Phil. 4:6)
 - “Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God.”

Paul Prayed To God For Removal of That Which Brought On His Suffering.

- God's response to Paul's prayer.
 - God heard Paul's prayer. (I Pet. 3:8-12)
 - God answers Paul's prayer.
 - How God answers prayer: 1) Yes, 2) No, 3) Wait a while...
 - God said no – you are keeping the thorn.
 - What God did for Paul by leaving the thorn was better for him than if he removed it.

Paul Prayed To God For Removal of That Which Brought On His Suffering.

- This text helps us to understand the nature of prayer.
 - Not the presentation of a list to an heavenly errand boy to be filled if we speak the right words, and have “faith”. (cf. the Word-Faith, “Positive Confession” Movement)
 - God does not always say “yes”. Sometimes he leaves the thorns and let’s us suffer for our good. (Heb. 12)
 - Prayer is not a systematic method of getting what we want and think is best, but communicating and putting our trust in God, as we take our requests to Him, knowing that He loves us and will do what is best for us according to His will. (Prov. 3:5-7)

Paul Accepted God's Answer and Saw The Benefits Of His Suffering

- Why did God leave the thorn?
 - Because Paul went to heaven where he received wonderful revelations, came back, and God did not want him to become arrogant about it. It was for Paul's good.
 - To keep Paul from exalting himself.
 - Look at the event. (vv. 1-5)
 - Not the false presentation of a “to heaven and back event”
 - God was able to use that which Satan had intended for harm for Paul's ultimate good. Paul remained humble and dependent on God. He recognized the source of power and strength. (II Cor. 12:9-10; Phil. 4:13)

Paul Accepted God's Answer and Saw The Benefits Of His Suffering

- God left the thorn because He loved Paul, and knew what was best.
- So Paul was able to say, “I take pleasure in infirmities...for when I am weak, then am I strong.
- Paul was not content because he liked the pain and suffering, but the good that God made of it: Strength, dependence on God. (Js. 1:2-4)