

THE BOOK OF 2 CORINTHIANS

"What's New About the New Year?"

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Introduction

1. We are in the early hours and days of the New Year. Past failures and successes are evaluated in the expectation of new beginnings.

2. Taking the comments of Solomon, there is really nothing new around us (Ecclesiastes 1:9). From his experience and observation, "all is vanity" i.e. everything is a vapor. Life is like chasing wind. All is a bubble.

3. In view of progressive revelation, that is, the provision of truth unfolded by the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul records (4:1) we have received mercy (ἡλεήθημεν elethemen, aorist passive), hence we do not faint (present tense, continuous action). And this, mind you, in spite of incredible sufferings (cf. 4:9-10; 6:4-10; 11:23-30).

4. The five illustrations (vv. 8-10) listed about the treasure (the knowledge of the glory of God, 4:6) and the vessel (messenger of the message, 4:7) do not detract from the secrets Paul enumerates to indicate there is something new which is possible in the new year.

5. Paul's secrets are:

a. Resignation of Self vv. 11-15

Death for self, but life for others. For Paul dying of self meant Christ living in Him. He believed that mediocrity could be exchanged for Christ's might and power.

b. Real Faith v. 13

Paul believed, therefore he spoke with sincerity (cf. Ps. 116:10). He had conviction of heart, therefore his words were not empty platitudes and meaningless phrases.

c. Resurrection Hope v. 14

The inspiration of the resurrection accounted for the tremendous power of Paul's life. Death was not something which frustrated his labor of life. Rather, the Apostle saw beyond this life to another.

d. Remembrance of Others v. 15a

The Apostle's sufferings were viewed as being beneficial and helpful to others. No wonder he wrote: "All things are for your sake." Thus, his misfortunes were a profit to others. He lived a larger life.

4. Realization of God's Glory v. 15b

As Paul endured for other's sake, this very fact called forth thanksgiving by many. This thanksgiving redounded to the glory of God. Blessed ultimate goal!

6. With this marvelous context, what conclusions are there? Steadfast hope is here in Scripture. Three specific aspects of hope are discernable:

a. Personal Hope v. 16

Note: The "for" (KJV) is better translated "wherefore" (Διὸ dio). Looking back at the five secrets of Paul, it is possible to say "wherefore we faint not . . ." The present tense verb points to the retention of courage. There is no loss of heart (cf. v. 1).

1) About Destruction

The phrase "outward man" is only found here in the N.T. The onslaught of nature brings about the "perishing" of the natural physical life. The present tense points to the continued activity of perishing, as a garment ruined by moths (Lk 11:33).

2) About Restoration

While the bodily organism decays, there is the growth in grace of one's person. Hence the "inward man" is renewed (present tense). This process of renewal is as constant as the outward decay.

3) About Progression

The construction "day by day" is a Hebraism. It indicates a progressive renewal advancing as the days pass. What a journal of mercy is being written with each passing day. Surely this is what is new for every new year.

b. Practical Hope v. 17

1) About light affliction

Affliction has two components. It is viewed as momentary, hence of brief duration (παράυτιστα parautika), but more importantly, it is only for the now. Moreover, it is light weight. What a remarkable observation.

2. About weight of glory

The now of affliction is contrasted with what is eternal. With no idea of compensation, the light now affliction brings to completion (works out, κατεργάζομαι katergazomai) or achieves an eternal weight of glory. This is what is new for every new year. It is the hope of the change from the light affliction now for the eternal heavy weight of glory.

c. Permanent Hope v. 18

a) About Looking

What is stated in the two previous verses is true "while" (since) we continually (present tense) "look not" (σκοπέω skopeo). This verb means to scrutinize, to fix one's eye on, direct one's attention to. Mark the negative "not."

b) About Seeing

Four times the verb to see or have sight is used (βλέπω blepo). The thought is that the visible is not what is "looked" (σκοπέω skopeo) at, but rather what is invisible. It is important to acknowledge that certain things cannot be seen, but believers can see them! They just do not look at them!

c) About Viewing

What is visible is by very nature to last only for a season. It is temporary and transient (πρόσκαιρα proskaira). So the things of this world are only for a time. They make a kind of show, but not one of them has any stability. On the contrary, that which is invisible, but substantive, is eternal (αἰώνια aionia) i.e. for the ages (cf. Heb. 11:1).

Conclusion So what has been studied? To the natural mind, all is the same, a vapor, and a bubble. There's nothing new. But, like Paul, believers have received mercy (v. 1). Despite immeasurable suffering (vv. 8-10) there are secrets which defy fainting or giving up heart (vv. 11-15). With these sound secrets, there can be something new in the new year. It is "hope." There is personal hope with the inner man (v. 16). There is practical hope with affliction (v. 17) and there is permanent hope with what is seen in the Word by faith (v. 18). In summary, it all depends on how you look at the Bible if there is something new with the new year. God help us all to enter the new year with hope. Amen.