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Proper 5 • 2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1 • June 7, 2015

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Christians are faced with the realities of this world. We cannot escape this. Along with the joys that come from life, we also face the trials and tribulations that come with living in a broken world. These present realities can wear down a Christian's faith. And some people might abandon the faith altogether because of the present realities they experience. And yet, God's word reminds us of another reality and realm in which the Christian lives life.

During this time in the church calendar, the church focuses on the work of the Holy Spirit. He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. Today's epistle focuses on the Spirit as he works in the life of the believer to keep the Christian in the faith by giving a new set of glasses through which to live out life in dual realities.

Textual Notes

Verse 4:13: Paul cites Psalm 116:10 (115:1 LXX) as he identifies himself with the psalmist's situation. Scholars debate whether "having ($\pi\mu$ π) the same Spirit/spirit of faith" refers to having the same "attitude" or "dis- position" of the psalmist, or whether it is a reference to the same Spirit of God that they share. Gordon Fee points out that this section in 2 Corinthians is a continuation of what has been in process since 2:14. Paul's concern is to point out that the psalmist, under the old covenant, and Paul himself along with all Christians, under the new covenant, share the same Spirit who creates and sustains faith in God.¹

Verse 4:14: Paul grounds his Christian hope in two promises of God. The first promise is in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul knows and believes that the one who

raised Jesus by his power will also raise Paul and fellow Christians by that very same power. The second promise is that he will bring Paul and all Christians into his presence. These two future realities are brought into the life of the Christian as a present reality through faith in Christ and the power of his Spirit. It is the “now-not yet” tension in the believer’s life with God.

Verse 4:16: μ “so we do not lose heart.” gives the reason for Paul’s never-say-die spirit. Verse 16a picks up 4:1 in regard to the ministry of the mercy of God under the new covenant. The Christian lives in two realities. One reality is that we live in and with the consequences of sin. This can come in many forms: sickness, illness, and death; persecution of Christian brothers and sisters who are being crucified and murdered simply because they are Christian; struggling or broken relationships; and financial struggles to name a few (Gn 3). Christians are not exempt from this reality. Even though these are real, nevertheless they truly are transient. The other reality is God’s future reality for his people brought to us in the present by means of the Spirit, namely the resurrection hope. God delivers this through his word and sacraments. “To renew” (νακαινώ) does not appear often in Paul’s epistles. It is used as a verb here and in Colossians 3:10, and as a noun in Romans 12:2 and Titus 3:5. This “renewing” and “renewal” is the work of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life.

Verse 4:18: Paul exhorts the Christians to take a look at what they are “taking a look at.” In other words, through what lenses does the Christian “see” and therefore live out life? With what lenses does the Christian examine and discern current reality? Shall the Christian focus on the temporal transient realities of this world alone? No, since this is what the “god of this world” uses to blind and veil the unbeliever’s focus (4:4). Or shall the Christian view life by gazing into God’s eternal promises? Paul distinguishes between “seeing” and “looking” using βλέπω “to see” and σκοπός “to pay attention to; to watch closely” with a sense of “regard as your aim.” Paul moves from the world’s present reality, which is seen with eyes, to the unseen world of God’s rule and reign, which is seen through faith in Christ. Christians are to “watch closely” and “regard as your aim” God’s present and future rule and reign in their lives. As Christians, we must live our earthly lives in this fallen world. Paul did not trivialize this, and neither should we. We face our realities as resurrection Christians who experience God’s mercy and grace. That is why Paul can say with a never-say-die conviction, “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed” (4:8–9).

What could be a possible sermon from this text? The preacher can address these two realities in which Christians live. Help fit the hearer with God’s glasses in order to live through life’s present realities governed by God’s eternal reality, even now in the present.

Michael J. Redeker

¹ Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 323.