

Paul's Favorite Question - Part 1

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Based on word count, Paul wrote approximately twenty-four percent of the New Testament. Acts records some of his sermons and public defenses. In both his writing and speaking, Paul employed questions. Questions are sentences that are formed to gain information or to test knowledge. Effective teachers will use questions to increase the engagement of students and keep attention. When teaching a Bible class, I will use questions in an effort to get my students to closely examine the text. A question that Paul asked is found in three letters (Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians) and is found a total of fifteen times. It is phrased as “*Know ye not*” in the KJV. In this and subsequent articles, let’s consider Paul’s usage of that question.

Romans 6:3 reads, “*Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death?*” In the preceding chapter Paul discussed the entrance of sin into the world through one man’s sin and the horrific consequences that followed because all have sinned (Rom. 5:12-17). In the same context he also reminded the Romans that what was lost in Adam is more than regained through Christ. Many have been made righteous by the obedient death of one perfect man, Jesus (Rom. 5:19). In that text we learn that God’s grace and the death of Jesus are the means by which man is saved from sin. As you turn the page to Romans 6, Paul preemptively answers a question that some might have asked - Should we sin more so that we can get more grace from God? Paul’s answer was emphatic: “*May that never be said*” (Rom. 6:2)! The Greek phrase is *μη γένοιτο* and it expresses an absolute denial. Paul uses that expression ten times in Romans alone and four other times in his writings. His point in Romans 6:3 is that one who has been baptized into Christ (*for the remission of sins - Acts 2:38*) cannot keep on sinning. He has made a choice to die to sin, be buried in the waters of baptism, and to be raised to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). Sin is a choice and the child of God does not willfully engage in it.

In the same chapter we find the second occurrence of Paul’s favorite question: “*Know ye not, That to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom you obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness*” (Rom. 6:16)? Again, sin is a choice. The wages of sin is death and each individual must decide if that is the route he wants to take (Rom. 6:23). The good news is that righteousness is also a choice. Righteousness is not transferred from person to person anymore that sin can be transferred from one person to another. One’s compliance with the revealed will of God is what leads to righteousness. Jesus taught that in the sermon on the mount (Matt. 5:20). John tells us that “*he that doeth righteousness is righteous*” (1 Jn. 3:7). God recognizes us as righteous when we do what He commands because “*all Thy commandments are righteousness*” (Ps. 119:172).

The third instance of Paul’s favorite question is “*Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth*” (Rom. 7:1)? He was making a point about the law (*of Moses*) by using an illustration regarding any law. He specifically used the example of God’s law on marriage (Rom. 7:2-3). His question and the illustration used made clear to the Romans that they were no longer under the dominion of the Law of Moses. We know that Paul was speaking specifically of that law because of the successive verses. He wrote, “*the law has said, Thou shalt not covet*” (Rom. 7:7). Those who had died to sin, been buried in baptism, and raised to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:3-4) were not under the jurisdiction of the Law of Moses. Rather, they were under the “*law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*” (Rom. 8:1-2). This is the good news! “*For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh*” (Rom. 8:3). The Law of Moses could not justify man before God (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16). This issue was **THE** main problem in the first century church. There was a “conference” held in Jerusalem about this very subject (Acts 15). Nearly the entire book of Galatians deals with the same issue. Paul’s favorite question in Romans 7:1 leads to the answer that man is freed from the law of sin and death by what God has done through Jesus Christ, and that is good news!

“Sin is a choice and the child of God does not willfully engage in it.”

To Be Continued...

The blame for terrible diseases like cancer can be laid directly at the feet of Satan. Satan saw a very young couple starting their life in a garden, and they were loved by a beneficent Creator. Satan thought it would be good to go mess with that. That's why you have cancer. That's why you have disease. That's why you have death and decay, wars and fightings, earthquakes and tornadoes, monsoons, tidal waves, straight-line winds that destroy everything in their path, floods, and droughts. We have that, and that can be laid directly at the feet of Satan, because man cannot be a god.

That was the proposition on the table. That is what Satan tempted man with. Every time you teach the gospel and someone obeys the gospel, you have fired your weapon in the war against Satan. There are three souls who are, as far as I know, in paradise, who would not have been in paradise unless God used me, and whatever small amount of influence I had in their life, to teach them the gospel. I am proud of that with a godly pride, and I revel in it. I'm going to let God handle Satan, but I hope Satan knows that I played some small part in his loss of those souls. I hope it rubs him raw, puts a burr under his saddle, and leaves him with a sore spot. I hope he can't stand it, and God will protect me from his ire. The proposition in this article is simple and heavy: sin's consequences spread outward into everything, grief exposes how small a man feels in that fallout, and Scripture gives a long view that steadies the soul and arms the saint.

Sin Did Not Stay Small. Sin never stays contained. Eden was not a private mistake that only affected two people; it was the opening breach that let death and corruption flood the world. God said it plainly when He addressed Adam after the transgression. *"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"* (Gen. 3:19). A man can watch a body fail in a hospital bed and feel the weight of Genesis 3:19 without needing a lecture. Dust is not poetry when a man is standing beside a casket. Dust is the hard end of a story that started with a serpent. Wars and fightings fit inside the same frame. The Holy Spirit ties conflict to lust, envy, and the inward disorder that sin produces, and James does it in words a man can understand. *"From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts"* (Jam. 4:1-3). A man sees that in living color when money, pride, and resentment turn a family gathering into a feud, when a spouse keeps a secret bank account, when a brother refuses to speak, or when a nation decides it will take what it wants. A man does not have to guess at motives when the behavior is right on the surface.

"A terrible disease like cancer makes a man feel insignificant and powerless beside a force he cannot stop."

Creation Groans Under the Load. When grief hits, the first temptation is to shrink the horizon down to the pain in front of you and treat the pain as the whole truth. Scripture widens the horizon again. Paul says the creation itself is in bondage to corruption, and creation groans under that burden. *"For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now"* (Rom. 8:22). That groaning shows up in bodies that decay, cells that mutate, and lungs that fail. That groaning shows up in earth that shakes, water that rises, and wind that tears a roof off a home in ten seconds. The flood sits in the middle of the biblical storyline as a moment when judgment and cataclysm met. Moses records the violence of it in a single verse that reads like a wound opened in the fabric of the world. *"In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened"* (Gen. 7:11). A man can see why the world feels unsettled after a judgment like that. A man can believe that an earth torn open and drowned would carry scars for as long as the world stands, because Genesis 7:11 describes a world coming apart under the hand of God.

When Grief Reorients a Man. A terrible disease like cancer makes a man feel insignificant and powerless beside a force he cannot stop. Grief does the same thing when a loved one is gone and the house stays quiet in all the places where laughter used to land. A friend of mine recently lost his wife. I only met her on two occasions within the span of a few days, and that is all I have to know about her to know the world is not quite as good a place without her in it. Going forward, my friend won't be quite so good of a person. There will be something missing for the rest of his life, because a man does not bury his best companion and walk away unchanged. Satan robbed him of that. When grief presses down, Satan is right there trying to make the loss feel final, trying to make the pain feel like the last word, trying to make a man stare at the hole in his life until he forgets the

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Sin's Shockwave - Why Grief, Ruin, and Hope All Trace Back to Eden

promises of God.

Psalm 73 and the Long View. Psalm 73 shows what happens when a man's orientation slips and then gets corrected. The psalmist describes the mental grind of trying to reconcile righteousness with what he sees in the world, and he admits the turning point. *"When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end"* (Ps. 73:16-17). That is orientation. The sanctuary mattered because it pulled his eyes back to God and back to the end of the story. A man who refuses that reorientation gets swallowed by the moment, and the moment is never merciful. A man who takes that reorientation seriously can mourn and still walk forward. A man can grieve and still keep his footing, because God's judgment, God's reward, and God's promises are larger than the present fog.

More Than Conquerors, With God Present. God does not promise His people a life without cancer, storms, or funerals. God promises presence, endurance, and final victory, and Paul says it straight. *"Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us"* (Rom. 8:37). The phrase *"in all these things"* matters when a man is sitting in a waiting room with a paper bracelet on his wrist, waiting for news that could change the rest of his life. *"More than conquerors"* does not mean a man never cries. *"More than conquerors"* means grief does not get to own him. When a man is down in the doldrums and depths, traveling through the doldrums of grief and the depths of despair, the trudge still counts. Putting one foot in front of the other still counts. Faithfulness still counts. Satan is fighting a losing battle. God sits above it all with the end already settled, and Scripture gives a picture of the Lord's contempt for rebellion that thinks it can win. *"He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision"* (Ps. 2:4). A man can hold onto Psalm 2:4 without pretending pain is small. A man can bury his wife, bury his friend, or bury his child and still know Satan does not get the last word.

Conclusion - The opening claim stands: Satan's temptation in Eden opened the door to death, decay, and every ugly consequence that rides in sin's wake. Cancer, war, and the groaning of creation fit inside the same story, and Scripture refuses to let a man pretend the damage is shallow. Grief makes a man feel small because the forces unleashed by sin are bigger than his hands can handle alone. Psalm 73 puts a man back in the right place by reorienting him toward God and toward the end of the story, and Romans 8 gives the steady promise that a faithful man can be more than a conqueror in the middle of suffering. So I will let God handle Satan, and I will keep firing my weapon in the war by teaching the gospel. I still hope Satan knows he lost souls he wanted, and I still hope it rubs him raw.

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