

God's Glory in God's Word

2 Corinthians Part 2 – When I am weak, then I am strong

Here I was, about to begin a full-time traveling ministry which meant sleeping in a different bed every week, changing food and climate, always get-ting adjusted and never getting adjusted — and utterly exhausted before I started! Any adviser would have called it sheerest folly. I felt more like quitting instead of undertaking a most demanding work which many strong men have tried and been unable to continue. If ever there was a chance to prove that God's strength is made perfect in weakness and that when we are weak we are strong, this was it. The Lord had the strength and I had the weakness so we teamed up! It is an unbeatable combination. Vance Havner as quoted in: Hughes, R. Kent. 2 Corinthians . Crossway. Kindle Edition.

Last week, we considered Paul's struggles in the ministry – particularly as it relates to the church at Corinth. Painful visits were supplemented by letters that grieved the church. Enemies of Paul undermined his efforts to build up the church – remember what he said of them:

And what I do I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. (2Co 11:12-15)

As we discussed, Paul defends his ministry, but in doing so, he is actually defending the church – and trying to protect believers at Corinth:

Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved. For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish--that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced. (2Co 12:19-21)

But from the beginning of Paul's letter, his boasting is in the Lord. He is not pointing to the things he has suffered to lift himself up. On the contrary, he is pointing to Christ as the only means by which he could endure those things and still continue. The Corinthians should not be thankful for Paul's perseverance – they should be thankful for God enabling him to persevere.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2Co 1:3-4)

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. (2Co 1:8-10)

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ. (2Co 2:14-17)

*You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, **not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts**. Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, **but our sufficiency is from God**, who has **made us competent** to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter **but of the Spirit**. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory. **Since we have such a hope, we are very bold**, (2Co 3:2-12)*

*I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into paradise--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows-- and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. Though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. **So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations**, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. **For when I am weak, then I am strong**. I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles, **even though I am nothing**. (2Co 12:1-11)*

God is not looking for gifted people or people who are self-sufficient. He is looking for inadequate people who will give their weakness to him and open themselves to the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the transforming grace of the new covenant as it is ministered by Christ Jesus himself. If God is calling you, do not hide behind your weakness. I don't know what he may be calling you to do — it may be a worldwide mission, it may be teaching a Sunday school class, it may be ministering to children, it may be reaching out in your neighborhood, it may be stepping up at work. But if he's calling you, don't hide behind your weakness — your weakness is the ground for his calling. Follow God, and he will use your weakness as an occasion for his power. And if you are feeling terrifying stirrings within your soul as he nudges you outside your comfort zone, where you will be out of your depth (but you know that he is calling you), give your weakness to him and accept his sufficiency. This is the way it was for Moses and for all the prophets and for the apostles and for all who follow in their stead — everyone who serves the Lord. God uses people who are weak because of their unique ability to depend upon him. Hughes, R. Kent. 2 Corinthians . Crossway. Kindle Edition.

Next week: Galatians

