

Title: **ALL SUFFICIENT GRACE**

Text: 2 Corinthians 12:8-10

Subject: *God' All-sufficient Grace*

Date: Sunday Evening — June 20, 2010

Tape # Z-89b

Readings: *Bob Duff and James Jordan*
Psalm 57:1-11

Introduction:

In the kingdom of God everything is exactly opposite to the way the world thinks. All spiritual things are exactly opposite to carnal reason. This really ought not surprise us. Our Lord told us plainly that the world which did not know him would not know us. The Apostle John wrote, “*The world knoweth us not because it knew him not.*” **In spiritual matters nothing, absolutely nothing, is the way men think it is, ought to be and must be.**

- In the world, the way up is up. In the kingdom of God, the way up is down.
- In the world, the man with the greatest knowledge is the one who knows the most about the most. In the Church of Christ, the person who knows the most is the one who knows nothing.
- In the material things, the person who has the most is the richest. In spiritual things, the person who has the least is the richest.
- In natural things, he who has the most strength is the strongest. In spiritual things, he who is weakest is strongest.

This is clearly the doctrine of my text. — **2 Corinthians 12:8-10.** **Paul had been translated to paradise,** caught up to the third heaven, and returned to the earth. Many talk of such an experience; but the Holy Spirit tells us plainly that no man ever experienced this except the Apostle to the Gentiles. There he saw and heard things that no earthly tongue could ever describe. In this matter of revealed knowledge, knowledge experienced by grace, Paul stood head and shoulders above all the other Apostles.

However, lest he become exalted above measure, the Lord God sent a very painful, troublesome affliction upon him. We are not told what the affliction was; but Paul describes it as a thorn in his flesh and a messenger *of* Satan to constantly beat him down. For this Paul prayed three times, asking God to relieve him of this great trial, take this thorn in the flesh from him, and put an end to Satan’s constant buffetings. Let’s read verses eight through ten together.

2 Corinthians 12:8-10 “For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. (9) And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (10) Therefore I take

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pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

Divisions: I trust that God the Holy Spirit will give me your attention and enable me to show you four things in this message.

1. None of us knows what is best for the glory of God, the good of our own souls, or the accomplishment of God's purpose of grace in Christ (v. 8).
2. God's grace in Christ is sufficient to be our every need (v. 9).
3. Christ's strength is made perfect in our weakness (v. 9).
4. "*When I am weak, then am I strong*" (v. 10).

WHAT'S BEST

I. We never know what's best. — None of us knows what is best for the glory of God, the good of our own souls, or the accomplishment of God's purpose of grace in Christ (v. 8).

2 Corinthians 12:8 "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me."

Because we do not know what is best, we do not know how to pray for anything as we ought. It is written, — "**We know not what we should pray for as we ought**" (Romans 8:26).

Prayer is not for the gratification of our carnal lusts. It is not the means by which we obtain what we want from the Lord. Prayer, true prayer, involves submission to the will of God. It is the cry of the believer's heart to his heavenly Father to do what is right and best. If I am God's child, if truly I know him and trust him, I want what he has purposed. I bow to him, surrendering my will to his will, my desires to his purpose, my pleasure to his glory, knowing that his will is best. Therefore, when we pray (in our ignorance) the Holy Spirit cleans up our prayers and presents to the Father the true groanings of our hearts (Rom. 8:26).

Romans 8:26 "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

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In this passage Paul tells us plainly that though the Lord graciously refused give him what he asked for, he graciously granted him what he really wanted and needed.

John Gill wrote, “The Lord always hears and answers his people sooner or later, in one form or another, though not always in the way and manner they desire; but yet in such a way as is most for his glory and their good. The apostle had not his request granted, that Satan might immediately depart from him, only he is assured of a sufficiency of grace to support him under the exercise, so long as it should last.”

Our Lord Jesus taught us ever to surrender our will to the Father’s will. When the will of God appears to contradict that which might appear to be most pleasing to our flesh, we ought always to follow our Master’s example, saying, “*Not my will, thy will be done.*” (See John 12:27-28.)

John 12:27-28 “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. (28) Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, *saying*, I have both glorified *it*, and will glorify *it* again.”

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II. God’s grace in Christ is sufficient to meet our every need (v. 9).

2 Corinthians 12:9 “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

Here God’s elect are assured of his grace in Christ and the absolute sufficiency of it always and in all things. One of the names of our great God is **El-Shaddai**, which means **God All Sufficient!** The grace of God in Christ and that alone is our sufficiency.

It is sufficient grace because it is effectual grace. Today there is much talk about grace; but those who talk about it talk about a grace that lacks efficacy. That is not the grace of our God. God’s grace is effectual grace. It is always sufficient because it is always effectual.

“Nothing short of the grace of Christ is sufficient grace; and this is sufficient for all the elect of God, Jews and Gentiles, Old and New Testament saints, the family

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in heaven and in earth, the people of God that are already called, and are (yet) to be called, and (even) for the worst and vilest of sinners” **John Gill**

Let us ever remember that God’s grace in Christ is sufficient for us for everything and at all times.

- Sufficient to Accomplish All His Saving Purposes!
- Sufficient to Pardon, Justify, Regenerate, Sanctify, and Preserve Us!
- Sufficient in Every Time of Need!
- Sufficient in Health and Sufficient in Sickness!
- Sufficient Life and Sufficient in Death!
- Sufficient in Judgment!
- Sufficient to Present Us Faultless Before the Presence of His Glory Forever!

STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS

III. Look at verse nine again. In the second part of the verse Our Savior declares that his strength is made perfect in our weakness.

2 Corinthians 12:9 “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

Obviously, our weakness contributes nothing to the perfection of Christ’s strength. He is the omnipotent God! The obvious meaning of this statement is that the strength of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ appears to be or is manifestly perfect through the weakness of those sinners who are saved by his grace. Paul writes in another place, — “**When we were yet without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly.**”

- I have no strength to atone for my sin. — Christ is my Atonement.
- I have no strength to obey God’s law. — Christ obeyed for me.
- I have no strength to give myself life. — Christ is my Life.
- I have no strength to resist temptation. — Christ is my Preservation.
- I have no strength to draw near to God. — Christ is my way of access to the Father.
- I have no strength to make myself holy. — Christ is my Holiness.
- I have no strength to resist the devil. — Christ has bound the dragon of hell for me.

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Read the last sentence of verse nine one more time. — “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” — It is only when we are brought to acknowledge our weakness, infirmity, frailty, nothingness, and insufficiency that the power of Christ and his all sufficient grace rests upon us. The moment we flex our muscles, straighten our backs, lift our chins and say, “I can do this,” we are in trouble.

WHEN I AM WEAK

Now, I want to deal with Paul’s statement in verse ten. — “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

IV. “When I am weak, then am I strong.”

Here, writing by inspiration, Paul obeys the admonition given in Joel 3:10, where it is written, “Let the weak say, I am strong.” He that is weak and sees himself to be so is strong in Christ, and has the blessed experience of renewed strength from him day by day.

Clearly there are some things to which this statement does not apply. — I have frequently heard men and women quote this statement by the Apostle as an apparent excuse for sin and disobedience. Paul did not use it that way; and we ought never be so brazenly irreverent and hypocritical as to use the Word of God as a cloak for our sin. Let me show you what I mean.

- Weakness in THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST can never make me strong. It is by the study of the Word of God that I grow in faith, in knowledge, in grace, and in assurance.
- Weakness in PRAYER AND DEVOTION cannot make me strong. I say with Samuel of old, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you, for his church and kingdom, and for the knowledge of his will and the grace to walk in it for his glory.
- Weakness in KNOWN DUTY will not make me strong. I hope I do what I do from something far higher than a sense of duty. Yet, nothing is more dishonorable than willful disobedience to our known duty before God and men. If we forsake the

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assembling of ourselves together for the worship of God, neglect ministering to one another, do not exhort, strengthen, encourage, comfort, and help one another, we promote our own weakness and destruction.

- Weakness in **CHARACTER, CONDUCT, AND ATTITUDE** cannot make me strong. Such sinful weakness only weakens my witness, testimony, and influence among men.

We may very properly conclude from our text that **WHEN I AM STRONG, THEN AM I WEAK.** I read a very good sermon on this text by Spurgeon in which he said, “Perhaps I can expound the text best if I turn it the other way up and use it as a warning (and say) *When I am strong, then am I weak.*” Indeed, there are many who fancy themselves very strong who are utterly weak.

Most presume that they can, perhaps with a little assistance from God, do all that is necessary for the saving of their souls.

- A few are foolish enough to think they can actually earn God’s approval and salvation by their works.
- Most who would denounce such a proud notion as utter blasphemy are themselves guilty of blasphemous pride. Though they would never claim to be righteous enough to save themselves, most do think that they can, by their own free will obtain God’s salvation. — Can a dead man give himself life? — Can a dead man muster repentance from his own bosom? — Can a dead man make himself a new creature? — Can a dead man give himself faith? — Nonsense! **“Salvation is of the Lord!”**

Many there are who imagine themselves wonderfully strong in knowledge. They seem to know everything about everything. They were, they say, born again this morning; and before dusk they have mastered the Word of God and are ready to become instructors of others. They do not hesitate to disagree and dispute with anyone. You do not have to ask for their opinion. They will give to you, if you just pause to breathe in their presence. They are sure of everything.

Spurgeon said, “I have noticed these fine gentlemen are the first to deny the faith, and to fall into all manner of heresies... Those who are so very sure are always the most uncertain.”

Whenever we feel ourselves superior to others in any spiritual matter, we have reason to be suspicious of ourselves. Beware of self-confidence. Self-confidence is nothing but a pretty word for self-righteousness. You can mark it down as a matter of

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unfailing certainty — **When I am strong, then am I weak!** Now let me show you the meaning of this statement. — **“WHEN I AM WEAK THEN AM I STRONG.”**

1. When I am weak **BEFORE THE GLORIOUS MAJESTY AND HOLINESS OF GOD**, then I am strong because my weakness forces me to look to Christ alone for mercy and grace. This is exactly what Isaiah experienced (Isa. 6:1-7).

Isaiah 6:1-7 “In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. (2) Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. (3) And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, *is* the LORD of hosts: the whole earth *is* full of his glory. (4) And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. (5) Then said I, Woe *is* me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. (6) Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, *which* he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: (7) And he laid *it* upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.”

2. When I am weak **BEFORE THE HOLY LAW OF GOD**, when I see what it requires, when I realize that my very best righteousness is nothing but filthy rags before the holy Lord God, then am I strong, because my weakness compels me to look to Christ alone as my Savior.
 - My Righteous Representative.
 - My Satisfying Substitute.
 - My All-prevailing Advocate.
3. When I am weak **BEFORE MY TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS IN THIS WORLD**, then I am strong, because my weakness forces me to look to Christ alone to uphold, sustain, and strengthen me. My enemies sometimes overwhelm me. The world, the flesh, and the devil are too much for me. I am no match for them. Like Paul, I cry out to God to take away the thorn in my flesh. Sometimes, he takes away the thorn; but usually he responds by saying, **“My grace is sufficient for thee,”** and graciously causes me to know that it is.
4. When I am weak **BEFORE MY CARES IN THIS WORLD**, then I am strong. I am no different from other men. I have the same cares and concerns as you men. I am a father. As such, I am often fearful for my daughter’s soul and for the souls of her

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children. Am a husband. As such, I am fearful for my wife's provision and welfare when I am gone. I am a pastor. As such, I am fearful for your souls. Yet, in my weakness, Christ is my strength. I say with David, "*What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee*" (Ps. 56:3).

5. When I am weak **BEFORE MY RESPONSIBILITIES AS GOD'S MESSENGER TO YOU**, then I am strong, because my weakness makes me seek God's strength and grace in Christ. — Knowing the burden of the Word of the Lord and the power of the gospel, I constantly cry, "**Who is sufficient for these things?**" — When I do, I hear the voice of every true prophet, every true apostle, every true preacher of the past, and every true preacher today echoing the words of Paul — "**Our sufficiency is of God**" (2 Corinthians 2:16; 3:5).
6. When I am weak **IN SPIRITUAL WATCHFULNESS**, then am I strong because Christ, my Shepherd, is watching over me. Like the disciples sleeping in Gethsemane, I often find that though my spirit is willing, the flesh is weak.
7. I will probably be weak **IN DEATH**; but even then I will be strong, because I will have no hope for my soul but Christ who I the Resurrection and the Life.

I hear a good many young, inexperienced believers, almost mockingly, speaking of the fears some of God's saints have in death. But I wonder if those "dormitory bravehearts" will be so strong when they face leaving this world. Should you visit me on my deathbed and sense that I am experiencing some apprehensions, or fears, do not be surprised. (If Peter could sink in the water, so can I!) I hope it shall not be so. But if it is, do not be surprised. I am a sinner now; and I will be a sinner then. I was born a sinner; and I will die a sinner, a sinner saved by free grace alone. **If I am too weak to brave Jordan's chilly waters, God my Savior, my good Shepherd, will yet carry his weak sheep upon his shoulders to the other side.**

All these weaknesses cause me, like the scared little rabbit described in Proverbs 30:26, to **RUN TO THE ROCK**, my hiding place, who is my strength.

Proverbs 30:26 "The conies *are but* a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks;"

APPLICATION: Christ is my Rock, the Rock of my salvation. Like a weak, scared rabbit, I make my house in him.

1. This is my prayer, Lord God, make me weak before you, and keep me weak.

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- Consciously Weak.
- Growingly Weak.
- Painfully Weak.
- Contritely Weak.

I pray that God will graciously do the same thing for you.

2. This is God's promise to weak, needy, helpless sinners (Isaiah 66:1-2).

Isaiah 66:1-2 “Thus saith the LORD, The heaven *is* my throne, and the earth *is* my footstool: where *is* the house that ye build unto me? and where *is* the place of my rest? (2) For all those *things* hath mine hand made, and all those *things* have been, saith the LORD: but to this *man* will I look, *even* to *him that is* poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.”

AMEN.