

Strength in Weakness

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Introduction

The kingdom of God is full of apparent contradictions. It's as if it were upside-down, at least to what we're used to. *"The first will be last and the last will be first"* (**Matthew 19:30**). *"The meek shall inherit the earth"* (**Matthew 5:5**). *"Whoever would be first among you must be slave of all"* (**Mark 10:44**). Here is another one today, where Paul says, *"For when I am weak, then I am strong"* (**2 Corinthians 12:10**). Of course, it's obvious that the strength is the power of Christ, for He says to Paul, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness"* (**2 Corinthians 12:9**). Yet, in summing it up, Paul doesn't say, "When I am weak, then He is strong." He says, "When I am weak, then I am strong." How can Paul be weak and strong at the same time? To understand this better, we unpack the whole reading.

Paul's Privilege

First, there's Paul's heavenly visit. Whether this was an in-the-body or out-of-the-body experience is unimportant. In some way, Paul was taken into the immediate presence of God and told things too wonderful to communicate in human language. This experience was so special, that he had kept it to himself for fourteen years. He was forced to share it now to make a point. While he didn't want to share it, he could boast about it, because he wouldn't be boasting about himself, but something God had done. We have such an experience. Everyone saved by grace is a child of God. We live in a familial relationship with the Lord of the universe! We have a heavenly inheritance. We can boast about this because it's all God's doing.

Paul's Thorn

Though it's God's doing, we could possibly get puffed up because of it. We don't know what the thorn given to Paul was, but some suggestions have been, eye disease, epilepsy, speech defect, sensual temptation, or persecution, to name a few. It's a blessing that we don't know, as the anonymity makes it apply to all afflictions. Whatever it was, it seriously affected Paul's life. The word translated "thorn" could mean a stake, which pins you down or a thorn, which is a constant source of irritation. The "thorn" hindered what he could do, and he couldn't get relief from it. What's afflicting you? What's holding you back? You feel like you have no power over it. It's winning the war.

Paul's Prayer

So, Paul did what was logical. He took it to the Lord in prayer. He prayed for deliverance *three times* (**2 Corinthians 12:8**). We should understand that to mean he prayed about it continually. Three is a number that expresses completion. He prayed until God gave him an answer. This tells us that we should pray for deliverance until God gives us an answer.

Christ's Answer

Christ's answer is two-fold: *"My grace is sufficient for you"* and *"My power is made perfect in weakness."*

Christ's Grace

Paul wasn't doubting God's grace. This was a gentle reminder that God's grace doesn't always mean deliverance. Sometimes, it means making it through or coping. His grace is sufficient for us no matter what the situation or how He handles it.

His Strength in Our Weakness

How can the power of Christ be made perfect in our weakness? The fact is, we are always weak. But it's only when we're under attack or afflicted that we realize our weakness. No one likes to admit to being weak. That's not seen as being a positive quality. But when we're beat up and losing, there's nothing to do but confess it. That's when we can rest in God's strength. Our own pretend strength isn't getting in the way. And that makes Christ's power perfect in our weakness.

Therefore – Conclusion

Our strength lies not in ourselves, but in trusting in Christ's power. So, Paul is saying, "When I am weak and not trusting in my own strength, then I am strong, trusting in the power of Christ."

Christ on the Cross

We see the best example of this kind of **STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS** on the cross of Christ. Humanly speaking, Christ was at His weakest as He hung dying on the cross. But because He is God, He was at that moment, defeating sin, death, and the devil. That's perfect strength made perfect in weakness.

Christ in the Bread and Wine

We say following the Words of Institution in the Communion service, "*Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes*" (**1 Corinthians 11:26**). We are reminded of His perfect **STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS** every time we receive the body and blood of Christ. We also receive His grace, knowing that His grace is sufficient for us, for His power is made perfect in our weakness.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
