

# Boasting About Weaknesses

2 Corinthians 12:1—10

## Introduction

Paul says in verses **5** and **9** of our reading in **2 Corinthians 12** that he will *boast of his weaknesses*. I don't recall hearing anyone boast about their weaknesses. They may talk about them or mention them by way of apology. But let's face it, weaknesses are nothing to boast about.

## Boasting – Why?

Paul says here that he is being forced to boast. The Corinthians have been troubled by men that called themselves apostles and taught a different doctrine than what Paul did. They claimed to have ecstatic experiences that proved they were superior apostles to Paul and the people should listen to them. In **chapter 11**, Paul boasted about his lineage, his service, and his faithfulness, outlining his imprisonments, beatings, whippings, being stoned, and shipwrecked – all for the sake of Christ and the Gospel. In **chapter 12**, to match the “super-apostles” claims of visions, he talks about his vision from fourteen years earlier. He does so in the third person to play down his part in it. He wants the focus to be on Christ.

## Boasting and Conceit

He also talks about himself in the third person to not sound conceited. Even if what a person is saying about themselves is true, it comes across as ego. However, people often did this in ancient times. They had no hope of an after-life, except maybe some sort of disembodied immortality. If they were going to get any glory, it had to be in this life. So, they would boast about their accomplishments to get themselves glory. Boasting about weaknesses will not bring glory.

## True Power

However, Paul had learned the secret of true power and true glory. The Lord had sent him a *thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass* (v. **8**) him. We don't know what this thorn was, but we do know that God sent it to keep Paul from becoming conceited on account of his revelations. When Paul prayed for Him to take it away, the Lord replied, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness”* (v. **9**). God's power is true power and is unleashed in our weaknesses.

## Our Weakness, God's Power

The church father, Basil put it this way: *Not in the amount of money, not in the pride of power, not in the height of glory is victory gained, but the Lord freely gives help*

to those who seek Him through excessive affliction (**Homily 20 on Psalm 59**). Life is not about our strengths or skills. Victory does not come through them. Victory comes from God's power working through our weaknesses.

## Grace Alone

That's what we're talking about when we say we're saved by grace alone. We come to the realization that we cannot save ourselves. In fact, there is nothing we can do to contribute to our salvation. Jesus has done all the work. He died for us, rose for us, and sends His Spirit to enlighten us and instill faith within us so that we may be saved. Now all we must do is learn to live the rest of our life by His power, not trying to get by on our own strength.

## Contentment

There's another way this attitude toward weakness helps. Paul says that he is *content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities (v. 10)*. Notice, he doesn't say he enjoys them. He has learned to be content. Why? Because *when I am weak, then I am strong*. As the **Explanation of the Small** catechism says about the 7<sup>th</sup> Petition of the Lord's Prayer, *deliver us from evil: In a world ruined by sin, the Lord keeps us from harm and helps us to endure the troubles that He allows to come into our lives (Explanation of the Small Catechism, Lord's Prayer, 7th Petition, Q 232)*. So, we can **BOAST ABOUT WEAKNESSES** because then we're boasting about God's power.

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

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