

***“Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians —  
Grace Triumphs Even Over Our Humanity”***

***Review: “Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians — Grace Reigns Through It All”***

- ***Paul's Salutation Says It All in Few Words: “Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” So Grace Reigns indeed.***
- ***The Apostle Was Comforted That His Many Trials and Sufferings Were for the Sake of the Church and Its Members***
- ***His Sacrifices for the Truth Must Therefore Be Made Known to the Church***
  
- ***The Apostle Was Comforted That His Sufferings Were for Our Sakes. And for that reason, the church must be made aware of them. Amen? For the Corinthians that must have seems very personal for they had much shared history together. But the implication is that it is true for us as well.***

***2 Cor. 1:3-7***

***3 Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;***

***4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.***

***5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.***

***6 And whether we be afflicted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation.***

***7 And our hope of you *is* stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so *shall ye be* also of the consolation.***

- ***Paul had received this comfort and now possessed it, he testifies, to share with others. But the next verse, verse 5 adds a foundational truth here that makes such a difference, “For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ”. He writes concerning the balance the Lord promises to provide if we will receive what he offers. Now this is a profound and critically important teaching indeed for our understanding. And the rest of the letter will explain why this teaching is so very important. And that is due to the weight of that teaching yet to come here and the sheer burden of that for the apostle for those whom he held so dearly in his heart.***

- ***His Sacrifices for the Truth Must Therefore Be Made Known to the Church***

- *To do this he must remind them of shared history and even more than they had shared with him, for his history regarding his care for the churches, his ministry of the Lord to sacrifice all for them. These next verses remind them so well of his trials and sufferings for their sakes:*

**2 Cor. 1:8-10**

**8** For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life:

**9** But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead:

**10** Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver *us*;

- *Now Paul provides the historical and biographical background that he doesn't want the Corinthians to forget though they surely knew it already so well:*

- ***The Lord God Still Works Through His Word of Grace Today***

- *Today, one might exclaim? But we do not share the same life experiences with the apostle and therefore his words see distant and perhaps even irrelevant. But we must refrain from ever thinking in this way. For God, through his abundant grace, IS STILL WORKING TODAY as he did then. Amen.*

**2 Cor. 1:11-13**

**11** Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift *bestowed* upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.

**12** For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.

**13** For we write none other things unto you, than what ye read or acknowledge; and I trust ye shall acknowledge even to the end;

- *Here the apostle mentions his testimony directly and his description of it is a model for our own, of course. That is his intention too, I am sure: "... that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and*

more abundantly to you-ward.” *These words state in a very short but precise, profound and powerful way what Paul wanted the recipients of the letter to remember well his ministry in their midst. They should all have been saying in their hearts (or out loud) “amen!” For they surely remembered so well what they had shared in their sacred history together:*

- *He now concludes this introductory part of the letter with even more words of power and compelling authority:*
- *The Ministry of Grace and Truth Rests In the Hands of His Chosen Ones*
  - *Now the grand finale and the chapter division is for once so properly made here:*

**2 Cor. 1:21-24**

21 Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God;

22 Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

23 Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth.

24 Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.

*But would they receive this testimonial? We are never told, actually. But so be it.*

**Our Outline Today:**

- ***God’s Super-Abundant Grace Is Available Even In the Hardest of Times***
- ***Grace Rules Today and True Forgiveness Reaches Even Lowly Sinners***
- ***We Are Triumphant For It Is God Who Is Working In Spite Of Our Humanity***

**I. God’s Super-Abundant Grace Is Available Even In the Hardest of Times:**

**[READ ] 2 Cor. 2:1-5**

1 But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness.

2 For if I make you sorry, who is he then that maketh me glad, but the same which is made sorry by me?

3 And I wrote this same unto you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice; having confidence in you all, that my joy is *the* joy of you all.

4 For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.

5 But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all.

- ***We have the same theme further amplified here from the end of the first chapter. Paul is concerned for their best always and as circumstances have changed it is now time to write again for some serious issues continue in the Corinthian church.***
- ***So there was a tradeoff between writing with the intention that the problems might therefore be successfully addressed and the risk that such a direct and difficult letter might result in harm to the very believers that it was intended to help. But what is the risk that Paul senses exists here? For they might be grieved by the letter with unintended consequences? The next verses make that clear. The apostle is so very direct in his writing here as there really is no room for misunderstanding, and no ambiguities:***

## **II. Grace Rules Today and True Forgiveness Reaches Even Lowly Sinners:**

### **[READ ] 2 Cor. 2:6-11**

6 Sufficient to such a man *is* this punishment, which *was inflicted* of many.

7 So that contrariwise ye *ought* rather to forgive *him*, and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.

8 Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm *your* love toward him.

9 For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.

10 To whom ye forgive any thing, I *forgive* also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave *it*, for your sakes *forgave I it* in the person of Christ;

11 Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

- ***There are several details here that are important:***
  - ***Paul is concerned not that there may be general grieving due to the directness of his letter sent before this one which we do not have a copy of today. It has been lost. No, his concern is***

***rather that the one responsible for the crisis in the first place may be overwhelmed in his sorrow not due to his full repentance but due to the believers in Corinth as they continue to show an attitude of unforgiveness towards the sinner, now repentant.***

- ***A second detail is that they were concerned whether the apostle would himself be willing to forgive the repentant sinner if they themselves were. The letter was apparently taken so personally by the church as a whole that they now wondered whether Paul himself might remain unforgiving of the man, causing a division that would separate them from the apostle and that would be unacceptable.***
- ***Thirdly, there is another thought here also critically important for the spiritual understanding of this letter. For Paul addresses their former concerns as misguided, writing: “whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.” He announces here that there was an always present work of God under grace that must be noted. In other words, he most powerfully states that there will be no such division possible between him and the Corinthians for if the forgiveness of Paul is truly “in the person of Christ”, then, since we are all in him and in him is an essential unity, then your forgiveness of the repentant brother will suffice for me and I will forgive him as well. And that settles it.***

***This is actually a somewhat amazing statement, isn't? For Paul is trusting the believers in Corinth with the forgiveness of this brother who has caused so much harm to the assembly. Is it because he is not present and they are, so only they know the situation as it truly is? Or might there be another reason? Verses 8 and 9 give us insights into Paul's additional intent:***

- ***It was that he desired for their love for this sinner would be the basis for their forgiveness. He wanted their love to be, in effect, the cover of the multitude of the man's sins! That is wonderful indeed, isn't it? This is often Paul's message, you will recall, for example in Galatians 5 where the fruit of the spirit is listed beginning with love.***

### **III. We Are Triumphant For It Is God Who Is Working In Spite Of Our Humanity:**

- *This leads us today into what has been for me a transforming section of this letter. For here we find yet another blessed testimony by Paul of God's abundant grace toward him. In the face of his own (and our's) always present humanity with all that means, Paul openly displays his testimony in this most humble and quite unforgettable way:*

#### **[READ ] 2 Cor. 2:12-13**

12 Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord,

13 I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia.

- *That the apostle now reveals his significant unwillingness to pass through that door is most amazing and personal. But the facts spoke for themselves and his transparency here is central to his subject, so he reveals it all in a few powerful words.*
- *These confessions were stark reminders of Paul's humanity, but nevertheless with much boldness he repeats here what he must have already told the Corinthians often (for he was there with them many months and perhaps as long as 18 months). But the personal nature of it all as revealed here should strike to the core of our being as we apply to ourselves and our own history what Paul has written here of his. Are we willing to open up as he did making our own vulnerably so visible?*
- *But, far more importantly, what Paul characteristically reminds the Corinthians of here is not his humanity alone (though he is detailed in that description) but how the Lord God had worked through his weaknesses to reveal his riches through the glory of his grace. And it is that transforming message of abundant and triumphing grace in the lives of sinners that we must take to heart now as we read and hear these words:*

#### **[READ ] 2 Cor. 2:14-17**

14 Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.

15 For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish:

16 To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?

17 For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.

- ***This is a fitting ending to this chapter and yet it could just as well be the opening of the next chapter, for the apostle in chapter 3 launches into his unforgettable teaching on how grace is working today in contrast to how the Lord worked under the Law of Moses. But here as he ends this chapter he introduces the teaching that will follow with these words. Let's look at them carefully:***
  - ***"Now thanks be unto God ...": This is always a blessed place to start in sharing our testimony, but do we? That is what Paul is doing here.***
  - ***"... which always causeth us to triumph in Christ": For this is all about the work of almighty God in the apostle. But notice what adverb he has written here, the word "always". And then the verb "causes" and then the qualifying phrase "in Christ"! Can we confess what Paul has here? If not, why not?***
  - ***"... and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place": The sentence continues with what Paul testifies concerning God's great work in him and its consequence in his life and ministry. The Lord revealed in Paul the knowledge of the Lord though Paul "in every place", even in Troas in this case? Amazing statement indeed.***

***So he then summarizes it this way:*** "For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish, To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life." ***These words explain the previous statements (the word "for" makes that clear). For, he writes, the human failures on his part had not defeated God's work for it had gone on nevertheless, for the Lord God had made Paul a sweet savor of Christ before both believers AND unbelievers! Do we hear what he is saying here? In both, in the one a savor of life unto life and in the other a savor of death unto death. Marvelous.***

***But this is especially remarkable as a confession of God's super-abounding grace in the lives of believers with the***

***apostle himself as our example. For later in this letter, in chapter 7, he writes this:***

**2 Cor. 7:5-8**

5 For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.

6 Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus;

7 And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more.

8 For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though *it were* but for a season.

- ***So Paul's testimony of God's abundant grace was indeed what could only be accounted for in such words as these: "And who is sufficient for these things?": Indeed. What other words could follow but these? Or maybe these: "Lord, I cannot comprehend .... But I will believe you if you say so." Or as many often say, "I believe; Lord, help me in my unbelief." And then these chapter closing words:***
- ***"For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ": His confession is humble yet bold, both at the same time. But how could it be otherwise if Paul was indeed from God, in the sight of God, speaking these words "in Christ".***

***He then again makes it so very personal and we will conclude there today with these words that open the next chapter:***

***[READ ] 2 Cor. 3:1-5***

**1** Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you, or *letters* of commendation from you?

**2** Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men:

**3** *Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.*



4 And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward:  
5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as  
of ourselves; but our sufficiency *is* of God;

**Application / Conclusions:**

- ***So, he ends chapter 2 with the question (rhetorical, of course), “who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which corrupt<sup>4</sup> the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” And then begins this one with the bold declaration “we are never sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.” It is a precious realization to know this in our hearts that we may never stumble whatever the challenges to our faith may be.***

***As he writes here at the beginning of the new chapter,*** “Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.”

- ***And so we must respond also, amen and amen. Our sufficiency is of God and his abundant grace is always sufficient, for today, for tomorrow, and for eternity. For God has promised and he will always keep his promises. So be it.***