

**Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians:
"Its Major Themes Reviewed, Part 4, Section 2"**

- **Review, Part 4: The Central Doctrinal Teachings, Section 1:**
 - ***The Central Focus of God's Work Under Grace Is Our Blessing***
 - ***But God's Working Under Grace Is Through Our Weaknesses***
- ***The Central Focus of God's Work Under Grace is Our Blessing***

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* steadfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so *shall ye be* also of the consolation.

- ***This is such a compassionate and yet engaging introduction to this wonderful letter. While the emphasis is on the Lord God in the introductory words ("Blessed be God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"), the real focus is on his people and in particular, the Corinthian believers to who Paul is writing. They were surely in need of comforting so that is where the apostle begins, directly addressing that need.***
 - ***His teaching is that we as his children are in the very central part of his will and his working, even when we are suffering like the apostle himself was. This is foundational doctrine or teaching indeed and leads us to the next doctrine so thoroughly taught here in this letter. In fact, this second letter to the Corinthians is the premier letter conveying this central truth:***
- ***But God's Working Under Grace is Through Our Weaknesses***
 - ***This teaching covers a wide range of what scripture calls infirmities and weaknesses. Some are inherent in us a individual sinners.***

Others come upon us through no fault of our own. Of the latter sort are persecutions. But, we should be always rejoicing and triumphing, even in our failures, as Paul did and as he wrote in chapter 2:

2 Cor. 2:12-17

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.

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.

- ***Paul testifies so strongly here in this letter that it is the Lord's intention during this dispensation of grace to manifest his strength though our weakness. So the apostle writes to the Corinthians that he rejoices in his weaknesses. That these are not entirely due to his physical infirmities or external challenges such as persecution is also revealed as we have just seen there in the second chapter. The apostle's own failures like in Troas were sometimes the means the Lord used and in Rom. 7 he mentions sin as well concluding in verse 25 with this triumphant statement:***

Rom. 7:25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

- ***So indeed, according to the apostle, God's strength is manifested through our weakness.***
- ***Indeed, Paul's Example Was that Service with Suffering Marked His Apostleship as we have also recently seen:***
 - ***His many trials were often trials of love for the saints and of course also for the lost: His many persecutions and trials are detailed in several places in this letter. That is a major theme and Paul's testimony stands in the middle of it, for it is revealed in this letter and was revealed to all as he ministered***

and served, with great suffering, everywhere. No one who had seen him in his ministry could reasonably have denied that he was the Lord's apostle, indeed, even THE apostle of the Gentiles:

2 Cor. 4:1-7

1 Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;

2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

- ***But this was not only for him as we read in chapter one, but it was also for us!! We are in the very center of his working under grace even in our trials, even in our sufferings, for unto those we are appointed.***

2 Cor. 4:8-12. 15

8 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;

10 Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

11 For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

12 So then death worketh in us, but life in you.

...

15 For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.

- ***What he is saying here in effect is that when the conviction of his heart was set in that manner, then the practical application necessarily followed. And so it should be for us as well.***

Our Outline Today:

- ***The Greatest Enemy of Pure Grace Is Legalism!***

And Next Time Lord Willing:

- ***The Free and Sure Promise of Eternal Glory Is Given to Us All***

I. The Greatest Enemy of Pure Grace Is Legalism!

- ***In many letters of the apostle Paul this fundamental distinction between the principle of Law and the principle of Grace is taught. And yet so few will receive it. For example, it is highlighted at the beginning of 1 Timothy:***

[READ] 1 Tim. 1:1-7

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, *which is* our hope;

2 Unto Timothy, *my* own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, *and* peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

3 **As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine,**

4 **Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying [*rather, in the best manuscripts, “the dispensation of God”*] which is in [*or, “by”*] faith: so do.**

5 **Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned:**

6 **From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling;**

7 **Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.**

[READ] 1 Tim. 1:11–16

11 **According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.**

12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;

13 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief.

14 And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

15 This *is* a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

16 Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

- *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth is therefore essential! And that is the reason why many have failed to grasp the distinction between grace through faith and works by law. That was revealed to Paul as part of the Mystery, the Sacred Secret, that he was therefore honor bound to preach and teach everywhere.*

That message of grace and the accompanying administration WAS THE PURPOSE for calling out Paul as the new apostle for the Lord God had begun a new dispensational plan. And Saul, renamed Paul, had been called to head up and be the administrator of this new working of God.

- *This administration of God is the one by faith alone while the others add works of law to faith although some, like with the Abrahamic, begin with faith without works.*
- *As verse 16 indicates, Paul was singled out as our example. And for that his weaknesses were used to magnify the strength and glory and grace of the Lord. There are many references to that in his letters and we will select some today, for that is surely a major doctrine taught in Second Corinthians.*
- *So we have this question set before us: What is the difference between grace and law? We need to be careful in our answer so that we do not equate the totally different concepts of mercy and grace:*
 - *The essence of grace - riches freely given (not as if without value though) — “God’s riches at Christ’s expense” = “GRACE”*

- ***The essence of law - blessings earned for obedience, punishment otherwise.***
- ***So we live in the Dispensation of the Grace of God, the one which is by faith [alone], 1 Tim. 1:4, not in one that is based on legal systems derived from Moses Law (or even the Law of the coming Kingdom).***
- ***That is pure doctrine, pure teaching by Paul concerning Moses Law, and law in general, and how the operation of law and the operation of grace are most, fundamentally, incompatible. Therefore, he concludes, legalism which is any teaching promoting law as the standard of how God is working today becomes the enemy of how God is in fact working today and therefore the enemy of God's Dispensation of Grace.***
- ***Now for this foundational teaching on how God is working today, not by Law but by Grace, as taught here in the third chapter of Second Corinthians. You will see how the language Paul uses here differs from what is found in Romans (or Galatians) but it is doctrinal teaching nevertheless and in fact is a necessary part of that teaching that all believers need so much to know. Today we will see how the teaching here in 2 Corinthians gives further doctrinal teaching that is essential for our understanding of what the apostle has taught in other places, for example in Romans and in Galatians.***
- ***Here we see the contrasts so boldly made between the words of God written on stone tablets or with ink on papyrus on the one hand, or in the hearts of sinners, between the merely external or rather the internal working of Almighty God, between death and life, between condemnation or justification.***

[READ] 2 Cor. 3:1-6

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;

6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

[READ] 2 Cor. 3:7-9

7 But if the ministration of death, written *and* engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which *glory* was to be done away:

8 How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?

9 For if the ministration of condemnation *be* glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

- *What we see here is a teaching on the method the Lord uses in each of us sinners to work out his will and purpose in and through us. Under grace this is his technique while under the rule of other dispensational plans he used other ways. Under Moses Law it was through the hundreds of legal requirements and a religious system of sacrificial offerings. But today under grace it is by the Spirit as he works within each of us. At the end of the chapter we just read from chapter 3 we see in only two verses a summary of what the entire chapter teaches about how God is working today, his method of working, as it were. This is new, this is all of his unlimited grace through the completed work of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

These are those words:

2 Cor. 3:17-18

17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty.

18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord.

- *Most of Paul's teaching on law vs grace is elsewhere in his letters, as for example, in Romans or Galatians. But here it is dominant as well as we have seen and the dynamic of that working is predominantly in 2 Corinthians. For it is a foundational teaching of this letter as we see found here in this chapter. All else is in a sense based on this teaching.*

The false teachers, the apostles of satan and not of Christ were teaching pure law and not grace. What a contrast with Paul's teaching:

- ***Most of the contrasts that the apostle wrote of there in the Corinthians passage (and some of the same words also) we shared a moment ago are also in the Romans and Galatians teaching although there Paul was writing about how the truth of God's unlimited grace worked in the hearts of those who had believed the good news of the grace of God in Corinth. He contrasts that with the giving of the Law of Moses from Mount Sinai and the religious system defined in words written on stone and on words written by ink on paper scrolls. What a difference there is between that and how God was working in Corinth in the hearts of sinners. And there are more contrasts as well, like that between the merely external as Jewish religion had developed and then under Paul's ministry, God's working internally in the hearts of sinners. One the one hand additionally there were words of condemnation and death and on the other hand, justification and life even life eternal. Amen.***
- ***But now I want you to see from Paul's own words in Romans how that teaching in 2 Corinthians is foundational to his teaching on law verses grace in Romans. What does he say in Romans, what words does he use there?***

[READ] Rom. 7:22-25

22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:

23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

- ***And then in the following verses introducing chapter 8:***

[READ] Rom. 8:1-4

1 *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

2 *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*

3 *For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:*

4 That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

- ***Conclusions - How important are these teachings?***