

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

- ***Review, Part 3: The Pauline Apostleship, Under Attack and His Defense:***
- ***Paul's Predicament: Even His Apostleship Was Under Attack by Evil Ones***
- ***Paul's Defense: His Words and His Word Made Living Letters in Corinth***
- ***Paul's Person: His Service with His Suffering Marked His Apostleship***
- ***Paul's Promise: The Full Power of His Apostleship Always Stood Ready***
  
- ***Paul's Predicament: Even His Apostleship Was Under attack by Evil Ones***

***2 Cor. 11:10-1***

10 As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting in the regions of Achaia.

11 Wherefore? because I love you not? God knoweth.

12 But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we.

**13 For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.**

**14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.**

**15 Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.**

- ***These leaders were acting dangerously true to form and just as they were in fact, as false teachers. As the instruments of Satan himself they presented themselves as "ministers of righteousness" just as Satan had with all subtlety offered himself to the other angels as an angel when he was not (for he was a seraph and not an angel) and as a "light-bearer". See Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 for the details.***
- ***The chapter ends with the strongest statement to be found anywhere in Paul's letters concerning his apostleship. But his defense there is all about his infirmities, his weaknesses. Praise God for his unlimited grace that has included even us sinners of the Gentiles:***

**2 Cor. 11:30** If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.

- ***His overriding theme therefore is weakness made strong as we share in Christ's work of grace in and through us. And verse 30 says that so powerfully and in such an encouraging way that we may very well***

*fall to our knees and weep considering all that the apostle has written here. That is the effect those verses have had on me often. What about you? Have you read verses 16 through 29 recently?*

- *Looking ahead near the end of this letter, we cannot forget his teaching there regarding these same realities of grace working in and through his children under the fullness of grace:*

**2 Cor. 13:3-4** “Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you. For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.”

- *So that is his summary statement about how grace works in daily living for the believer. We continue today with that as one of the central doctrinal teachings of this letter:*

**Our Outline Today: Part 4 — The Central Doctrinal Teachings:**

- *The Central Focus of God’s Work Under Grace Is Our Blessing*
- *But God’s Working Under Grace Is Through Our Weaknesses*

**AND NEXT TIME:**

- *The Greatest Enemy of Pure Grace Is Legalism!*
- *The Free and Sure Promise of Eternal Glory Is Given to Us All*

**I. 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, for even then ...*
- *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:*

## **II. 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 as 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:*

### **[READ ] 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:***

***[READ ] 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:***

***[READ ] 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.**

**[READ ] 2 Cor. 4:8-10**

**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.**

**[READ ] 2 Cor. 4:11-12, 15**

**11 For we which live are always 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.**

- ***In the Flesh Paul Possessed Only Thorns As His Detractors Saw Him:***
  - ***He explains how the Lord had brought some especially difficult burdens upon him: “lest I should be exalted above measure”. These had plagued Paul and he had responded in a most human way crying out to the Lord for deliverance three times. It had been a learning experience indeed for him as he writes here:***

**2 Cor. 12:6-8**

**6 For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth:**

**but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.**

**7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.**

**8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.**

- ***This “thorn” had persisted for some considerable time, it seems. Finally Paul cried out three times for deliverance. But the Lord’s***

***response to his call was that the burden would be left there perhaps for his entire life.***

- ***The point is that we might through that example come to learn that the Lord God uses men in ways he chooses and that at the heart of it all is this fundamental principle, that our weaknesses are and will be used to magnify not our strength but the Lord's.***
- ***And so, we are to rejoice in our weaknesses and infirmities as Paul did, for his glory is thereby revealed through our weaknesses or at least that is his intention. My we learn as Paul did through his example. Amen. But he is not finished as there is more to the doctrinal teaching here:***

**2 Cor. 12:9a** And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in [or through, your] weakness...

- ***There are two parts here and they help to explain each other:***
  - ***“My grace is sufficient for thee...”: Take note that this is a statement of fact. The Lord is saying to Paul that he needs to learn something more about what the Lord God is doing. And what he is doing is right and good, even in the apostle's life at that time. This should be an example for us too. What a difference it makes when we learn what Paul was learning. The Lord also explained his response further by adding “for my strength is made perfect in [your] weakness, [Paul].”***

***In other words, the Lord was using Paul to communicate his working today “under grace” by manifesting that grace in Paul [through his weakness, of course] and using him also as our example.***

***The Lord did not relieve the apostle of this burden so that he (and then also we) might learn more about God's abundant grace and then be a testimony to others that they also might learn of that abundant grace through Paul's witness. Amen. And so he writes this concerning his response to this life transforming learning experience in these words, dwelling on the practical side of it. But to apply this in our living moment by moment demands more. This is where the rubber meets the road, isn't it? “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”***

**2 Cor. 12:9b-10 ... Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.**

**10 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.**

- *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.*

**Conclusion:**

- *Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound! Sin reigned to death and that everlasting. But grace reigns unto life eternal and full of glory. Romans does say it so well. And the hymn writer also conveyed this truth so very well:*

**O soul, are you weary and troubled?**

Author: Helen Howarth Lemmel (1922)

1. O soul, are you weary and troubled?  
No light in the darkness you see?  
There's light for a look at the Savior,  
And life more abundant and free!

Refrain:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,  
In the light of His glory and grace.

2. Thro' death into life everlasting,  
He passed, and we follow Him there;  
O'er us sin no more hath dominion--  
For more than conqu'rors we are!

3. His Word shall not fail you--He promised;  
Believe Him, and all will be well:  
Then go to a world that is dying,  
His perfect salvation to tell!