

**Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians:  
"Paul's Apostleship Was and Will Be Proven By God's Work in Us!"**

**Review: "The Essence of God's Working Under Grace Is Explained"**

- ***Paul Boasts in Another and Not in Himself — Except in his Weaknesses***
- ***In the Flesh Paul Possessed Only Thorns as his Detractors Saw Him***
- ***Paul Boasts in God's Work of Grace in Him, his Weaknesses Made Strong***
- ***Paul Is Coming to Corinth and Shall Minister in Corinth as the Lord Wills***
  
- ***Paul Boasts in Another and Not in Himself — Except in His Weaknesses***

**2 Cor. 12:1-5**

1 It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory *[in myself]*. I will *[must]* come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

2 I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.

3 And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)

4 How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

5 Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.

- ***It is through this "figure of another man besides himself" that Paul begins this section. "Why?" is a good question. But we must know that the Lord God had intervened, had intersected into Paul's life and worked there to change the course of history, to bring to pass a new phase in the Redemptive Plan of Almighty God for sinners, even sinners of the Gentiles. But Paul could not properly glory or boast in himself for just that reason.***
  
- ***"It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord": It was the miraculous appearances of the Lord to Paul and his teachings that had authenticated his apostleship and ministry, convincing both himself and others of that fact. And that was not all, for others had experienced miracles here on this earth and the Lord had given signs for Israel before as an expected blessing of his covenant relationship. But there was something else the apostle felt obligated to mention:***

- "... caught up to the third heaven ... into paradise": ***This was more special indeed, being caught up into paradise and even unto the edge of the third heaven even! Most remarkable!! No wonder he had to write of it using this foil of "a man he knew". He knew him all right, for he was that man himself.***
- "Unspeakable words", "not lawful for a man to utter": ***No wonder Paul now could not write more about it. For doing so would be unacceptable to the Lord, it would be "unlawful" even, or "inappropriate".***
- ***The key words here are these:*** "Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities." ***Paul determined to boast only in his weaknesses or infirmities. This was the glory of God's abundant grace might be revealed and that was his constant desire.***
- ***In the Flesh Paul Possessed Only Thorns As His Detractors Saw Him***
  - ***He continues now to explain that the Lord had brought some special trials into his life for this reason:*** "lest I should be exalted above measure" ***due to those previous events.***

## **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.

- ***So the Lord had humbled his trusted servant in what might seem to us a dramatic way indeed. An instrument of satan had been sent to burden the apostle and this burden 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 he would leave the burden in place with explanation given here.***
- ***The reasons that burden was left are given here in detail:***
  - ***Regarding how Paul might think of himself: that he might think too highly of himself***
  - ***Regarding how others might think of him: that they might not esteem him as a mere man too highly***

- *The point of it is that all might understand that the Lord God uses men in ways he chooses and that in 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. Therefore the bottom line here is that grace operates in this way, through our weakness.*
- *In what way might this be normative to believers today? There are many applications to our lives, day by day and hour by hour. What truth do we know? What thorns do we bear? How is our weakness manifesting his strength? They are all very good questions.*
- *Paul Boasts in God's Work of Grace in Him, His Weaknesses Made Strong*

**2 Cor. 12:9-10, 13**

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

- *"My grace is sufficient for thee...": This is a remarkable statement and we need to take note of it well. It 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. Right? 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 an example for us.*

*The Lord did not relieve the apostle of this burden so that he 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.”*

But the gifts and offerings issue is still on his mind as the next verse indicates:

**13** For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except *it be* that I myself was not burdensome to you? forgive me this wrong.

- *Paul had ministered freely without obligations in Corinth. This was his free gift under grace empowering for them. But instead of being thanked for it, he sadly has been mocked and condemned by some. But as he had said before, he would boast in this and never cower in fear or be ashamed no matter what the false teachers might be saying.*
- **Paul Is Coming to Corinth and Shall Minister In Corinth As the Lord Wills**
  - *Well, as we reach the end of the chapter, we shall see that truth cuts both ways, it is a divider between the soul and spirit and a revealer of the thoughts and intents of the heart. So the apostle wants so very much to be a blessing and not a “burden”. But when the truth is not well received, it will be a burden and perhaps a great one indeed. Paul is concerned therefore, as he writes here, as to how it will go in Corinth, when this letter is received, and then when his visit there has been in the Lord’s good timing, finally accomplished, even regarding the gift collected for the saints in Jerusalem:*

**2 Cor. 12:19-21**

**19** Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but *we do* all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying.

**20** For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and *that* I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest *there be* debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:

**21** *And* lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and *that* I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.

- *Now we have reached the end of the chapter and the strongest affirmation probably anywhere of Paul’s apostleship. The false teachers had denied that and inserted themselves in his place in Corinth. The language is notable indeed:*

- ***But “in Christ” the apostle knew what might be necessary in the case of continued rebellion and opposition there. His work as apostle would necessarily then be manifested... “And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.”***

***But may it not be so! In that case the apostle knew how his apostleship would manifest itself. It would be through his weakness because Christ in him would transform his weaknesses into strength according to the fundamental principle of God’s working out his abundant grace into and through him. In a previous chapter he had written of this thus:***

***2 Cor. 10:7, 10-11***

***7 Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's.***

***...***

***10 For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.***

***11 Let such an one think this, that, such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such will we be also in deed when we are present.***

- ***NOW PERHAPS WE KNOW NOW WHAT THE “THORNE IN THE FLESH WAS” TOO. IT WAS HIS SPEECH (A STUTTERER), HIS EYES (WE CAN ONLY GUESS), AND PERHAPS HIS HEIGHT (PAUL MEANS SMALL!). BUT WE ARE ONLY GUESSING.***

***Our Outline: “Paul’s Apostleship Was And Will Be Proven By God’s Work in Us!***

- ***The Apostle Is Willing Again To Display God’s Strength Through Weakness***
- ***The Pauline Apostleship Stands Proven By God’s Work in the Corinthians***
- ***Paul’s Final Exhortation to the Corinthians and to Us — “Be Perfect!”***

***I. The Apostle Is Willing Again To Display God’s Strength Through Weakness:***

***[READ ] 2 Cor. 13:1-4***

***1 This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.***

2 I told you before, and foretell you, as if I were present, the second time; and being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare:

3 Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you.

4 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.

- *The Three Times: Paul is not writing about his three letters here as he already has in this letter. He is writing about his soon visit (he hopes) to Corinth. It would be the Third Time he had visited. He then comments that under the Mosaic Law, when there was an accusation made, then two or three witnesses were needed to convict of the infraction of the law. Or, if accusations had been made and the defense was successful against those two or three witnesses, then the conviction would necessarily be reversed. So it is written:*

**[READ ] Deut. 19:15-21**

15 One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.

16 If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him *that which is wrong;*

17 Then both the men, between whom the controversy *is*, shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days;

18 And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, *if* the witness *be* a false witness, *and* hath testified falsely against his brother;

19 Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you.

20 And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you.

21 And thine eye shall not pity; *but* life *shall go* for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

- *It is interesting how he applies Moses Law here, isn't it? The false teachers were Judaizers who were claiming that they were the true apostles of Christ and he was the false. He implies that his very presence is sufficient proof of the authenticity of his apostleship, so two or three visits in Corinth were all that would be needed. Well, what did he write about his first visit in Corinth?*

**1 Cor. 2:1-6**

**1** And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.

**2** For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

**3** And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.

**4** And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:

**5** That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

**6** Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:

- ***This explains it all. His very presence WAS ENOUGH since it was the working of the Lord God in and through him that had been and would make all the difference.***
- “Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me...”: ***This and other verses some of which I have listed here are so important.***

**1 Cor. 2:13** Which things also we speak, not in the **words** which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

**2 Cor. 12:4** How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable **words**, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

**1 Tim. 6:3** If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome **words**, even the **words** of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;

**2 Tim. 1:13** Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

- ***The “Word” of God, yes, but the “words” of God make up the “word” of God, and those were the very words that the apostle Paul spoke and wrote in his letters. And they were powerful through the power of God! Take note.***
- “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.”

***(2 Cor. 13:3-4): These are words that should have been emblazoned on our hearts. Praise God if they have been. For they are also as needed for our spiritual wellbeing as they were for the Corinthians as Paul wrote here. The spiritual dynamic of life under abounding grace is presented here as the apostle's testimony as he had previously ministered to them and they had been transformed by the words which he had shared. That was the only witness he needed against the constant onslaught of the enemy in Corinth. He would rest his case on that.***

***He had written of this earlier in this letter, you will recall:***

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

**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.**

- ***So both early and late in the letter we see this fundamental truth well expressed. It is summarized in verse 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.” And indeed the same is true of us. Any testimonies?***

## ***II. The Pauline Apostleship Stands Proven By God's Work in the Corinthians:***

***[READ ] 2 Cor. 13:5-10***

**5** Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

**6** But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates.

**7** Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates.

**8** For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.

**9** For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, *even* your perfection.

**10** Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.



- ***The Divine Counterpoint here is magnificent:***

***You — “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”: “reprobates”=“tested and approved”***

***Me — “But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates.”***

***You — “Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates.***

***Me — “For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection.”: “Perfection”=“well made or prepared”.***

***We — “For we are glad, when we are weak ...”***

***You — “... and ye are strong ... and this also we wish, even your perfection.”***

- “Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not ***[but not, he hoped and prayed]*** to destruction.”
  - ***This exhortation, again, demands an equal application to ourselves. It should be clear how that should be done. The Corinthians were asked by this letter to consider well what the blessings of God were that they had received at the hand (and mouth) of this apostle of the Gentiles. What had the word of grace that he preached and taught brought to them personally?***

***What has the blessing through Paul been for us? How has the word of grace brought the heavenly blessings of Almighty God to us sinners of the Gentiles?***

***But our weaknesses often overwhelm us and we cry out to the Lord of heaven as Paul also did. And we see his response. But do we receive it for ourselves as he received the word of the Lord to him in that day of great trial indeed?***

*His response was simply this:*

**2 Cor. 12:9-10, 13**

**9** And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in *[or through, your]* weakness. *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 is our response? Do we see the strength of the Lord in and through our weaknesses? If not, why not? Do we know and reckon on the Pauline teaching? That is, as he has written, the word of the Lord, even the very words of our risen savior. Amen.*

### **III. Paul's Final Exhortation to the Corinthians and to Us — “Be Perfect!”**

**2 Cor. 13:11-14**

**11** Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

**12** Greet one another with an holy kiss.

**13** All the saints salute you.

**14** The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, *be* with you all. Amen.

- *We have reached the ending in this important letter with these memorable words:*
  - *“Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect...”: Here, “perfect” = “fully outfitted” for the task at hand, such as with fishing and the nets needed for that. In multiple places he writes in a similar fashion. The same is true regarding the next part of the exhortation:*
  - *“... be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”: Paul uses this language elsewhere, especially near his closing words in his letters. For example, Rom. 15:33, 16:20; and Heb. 13:20 and then Phil. 4:9:*

**[READ ] Phil. 4:6-9**

**6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.**

**7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.**

**8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things.**

**9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.**

- *These verses summarize in an especially wonderful way the Christian Life in its several dimensions.... But verse 9 above all ... the dispensational aspect of the apostle's teaching. We all would do well to take this very seriously. But so many do not just as those in Corinth may not have either.*
- *"Greet one another with an holy kiss.": Not any kiss will do, of course, but a holy one would have, he writes here. There may have been cultural background of course.*
- *"All the saints salute you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.": He ends with a clear reference to the doctrine of the Triune God and emphasizes in the wording here the special work of each member of the Godhead in us. They all indwell us and change us every moment of our lives if we would have eyes enlightened to see it. Amen.*

**Conclusion:**

***End Note in KJV: "The second Epistle to the Corinthians, was written from , a city of Macedonia, by Titus and Lucas."***