

WEAKNESS PERFECTS POWER

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Sometimes, important truths of God's Word are hard to grasp so we have to repeat them again & again--not be-cause they're hard to understand--truth is often simple.

They're hard to take hold of because it's *counter-cultural*.

Though God's Word is clear,

it goes against everything our culture tells us.

Sometimes it *sounds like* a contradiction.

One seeming contradiction is found in 2 Cor 12.

Paul's thought: "*Power is perfected in weakness*".

People think that strength proves God's presence.

Actually it's *weakness* that produces, or perfects, God's power in us.

Vindication of Paul's Ministry 10-13

Paul responds to those who attack his ministry as inferior to others.

He demonstrates his divinely-given, apostolic authority.

Suffering on account of the gospel 11:16-12:11

Paul has cause to boast, if that's what they want to hear.

This is not the kind of message Paul likes to give.

He doesn't enjoy bragging about himself. "

Boasting about myself is foolish!"

BUT--circumstances force him to it.

They established precedent of following people who promote themselves.

God doesn't operate by their standards.

God doesn't consider outward appearance

COMPARISON WITH JUDAIZERS 11:16-33

Rather than rely on prestige & power, as world does,...

God's servants are identified by suffering

He lists sufferings he endured for Christ.

In 2 Tim. 3, Paul affirms that all who seek to live godly lives will suffer persecution.

That's a promise; he experienced it; we can count on it.

EXPERIENCE IN HEAVEN 12:1-6 *"I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I'll go on to visions & revelations from the Lord. ²I know a man in Christ who 14 yrs ago was caught up to the 3rd heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I don't know— God knows. ³I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I don't know, but God knows—⁴was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man isn't permitted to tell. ⁵I'll boast about a man like that, but I won't boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. ⁶Even if I should choose to boast, I wouldn't be a fool, because I'd be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say."*

Besides the suffering,

Paul could boast about his revelation of heaven

He repeats that he would prefer not to boast. 1

Twice he introduces the occasion. 2-3

While he talks about this experience as though it's another person, he later clarifies that he's talking about himself.

He uses 3rd person language to play down his part.

He's not sure whether he was dead or alive.

What he heard & saw there, he can't repeat. 4

His experience could give him cause to boast. 5-6a

Exciting spiritual experiences—like going to heaven & back—have a way of inflating our ego.

Only similar biblical experience is found in Rev.

Kent Hughes: "Most people, had they been granted an ecstasy like Paul's wherein they'd been raptured to paradise... would scarcely be able to contain them-selves. Today they'd write a bestseller—*My Rapture: A Personal Account of My Trip to Heaven & Back*.

Paul doesn't want to go there. God protects him from that by sending affliction to keep him from going on an ego trip.

He doesn't want his experience to be basis for his credibility. 6b

He wants his credibility to be based on his integrity and ministry. 6c

Paul's critics fail to understand that the weakness *they* use to attack his authority is actually God's affirmation that He's working through Paul.

They think suffering indicates a lack of faith.

They don't understand:

God works best in our weakness.

THORN IN THE FLESH 12:7-9a *"To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸3 Xs I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."*

Things revealed are significant enough that he could have become proud.

God sends a "thorn"—a source of affliction into his life to keep him humble & dependent on Him.

Paul never tells us what the affliction is.

Some suggest it could be a physical ailment such as his eye trouble.

It might be another physical problem.

It could be the presence of false teachers or persecution that continually hound him.

It could be a struggle with Satanic opposition & accusing attacks.

It could be his own struggle with the flesh
—problem many of us struggle with

Fact is we don't know what his problem was.

It's good we don't know, so *WE* can focus on the principle underlying his struggle, whatever we may be facing. Whatever problem was, his struggle negates view that sickness or affliction results from lack of faith. Some people tell us that a suffering Christian is a disgrace to God.

"If you trust God, you'll never be sick!"

What a cruel thing to tell suffering people!

Paul indicates that the opposite is true.

Faith trusts God to reveal His power through our weakness: It trusts Him in our affliction.

Paul's affliction shows us bad things *do* happen to God's children

We know that whatever struggle we face...

Satan will use it to lash out against us, to make us feel God is out to get us, or like something is wrong with us.

God uses it to show that His grace is sufficient for us, & His strength is perfected in our weakness.

Paul repeats purpose of the affliction twice:

It's designed to keep him from getting conceited.

He could start to think he's important.

His affliction reminds him of his human weakness.

He struggles with same kinds of problems we do.

Satan uses affliction to attack him.

(To take pot shots at him; to torment him).

What God intends for his good, Satan uses to attack or defeat him.

However Satan may try to use affliction, God's still in charge & plans to use it for good.

**3 Xs Paul asks God to remove the affliction
But God doesn't remove it**

God's response:

1. My grace is sufficient for you.

"It's enough for me to give you my grace."

God promises to provide everything we need,

We don't have to *get rid of* the affliction.

God gives us ability to live with it.

2. Power is perfected in weakness.

In our weakness God's
power is made perfect.

God cares more about showing his ability to use affliction
for His glory, than He is in removing it!

STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS 12:9b-10

*"Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weak-nesses,
so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰That's why, for Christ's
sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in
persecutions, in difficulties. For when I'm weak, then I'm strong."*

After responding to man's perspective which sees *power & strength* as the indicator of greatness, Paul points to God's perspective on greatness:

God's power is made perfect in weakness.

We just don't get it!

How do *WE* respond when faced with similar struggle?

When we pray & God *doesn't* remove affliction?

Some determine to hang in there; to tough it out.

That may work through a short affliction; but what if it
doesn't go away?

Sometimes it comes in waves (Job) & doesn't go away.

Then what?

Some people blame
themselves:

"I must have done something bad!"

Some get angry with God:

"How can God let this happen to me!"

Some whine and complain.

Some get discouraged and give up.

Paul's response is strange! As a result of this lesson,
Paul's determined to *BOAST* about weakness

He boasts how God uses weakness for His glory:

"Isn't it exciting that God uses my weakness to show how great HE is?!!"

In which of 2 experiences is God most glorified?

His victorious experience going to heaven & back?

Or, his daily struggle with affliction?

He doesn't tell us! It seems to be by both.

But, when it comes to

boasting, he decides to *brag* about suffering!

Result of boasting about our *weakness* is that God's
power "rests upon us."

Image Paul uses reminds us of the tabernacle; God's glory
 was revealed to His people.

The root underlying "*rest*" relates to pitching a tent.

God's power & glory pitches it's tent on us—resides in
 us—when we acknowledge our weakness.

It's not among rich & fa-mous God pitches His tent

God pitches His tent among the weak

—among those who're sick, lack ability to go on

Then it's obvious that God's at work in us!

Therefore... **He's content** [*lit., he delights*]

**while *still* facing weakness, insults, distress,
 persecution & difficulties—because God's glorified
 in *his* weakness, not *his* strength!**

LESSONS PAUL HAD TO LEARN (so do we!)

When we're weak, God's power is evident in us

When we're weak, we're truly strong.

God's power's revealed through our weakness

—**NOT** through our own strength.

**When people see how weak we are,
 –then they can see how great GOD is!**

Henrietta Mears struggled with eye trouble all her life.

She cried out to God repeatedly for healing, but God didn't do it.

Had impact on the church like no one in modern times.

Founded Gospel Light publishers.

Wrote numerous significant books—esp. for teachers.

Mentored Billy Graham, Bill Bright, Richard Halverson,

Driving force behind outreach of Hollywood Presbyterian church
 to many stars.

Later she affirmed: “I believe my greatest spiritual asset
 throughout my life has been my failing sight.

It has kept me absolutely dependent upon God.”

I hear it over and over again:

People I've never met ask me about **Kelly**.

Divine paradox: “*When we're weak, we're truly strong*

That's when God does His best work through us!

NOT when we're strong—it's when we're weak—

HIS STRENGTH is perfected in us!