

**WHEN WE ARE WEAK IN
OURSELVES, WE ARE
STRONG IN CHRIST'S
POWER**

2 CORINTHIANS 12

INTRODUCTION

- Paul first puts a reluctant finishing touch on his “apostolic resume” for the Corinthians by recounting his experience with spiritual raptures.
- Second, Paul reveals the unexpected way to experience God’s power during adversity, namely, weakness.
- His entire perspective changes regarding the painful afflictions he has undergone in his ministry.

**BELIEVERS SHOULD
BOAST IN THEIR
WEAKNESSES INSTEAD
OF THEIR STRENGTHS**

2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-6

VISION

- Paul continues his “fool’s speech” from chapter 11.
- In chapter 12, Paul continues the same pattern, but this time he boasts about another credential that the foolish Corinthians consider a mark of a true apostle: ecstatic spiritual visions.
- Paul chooses to play the part of the fool, and begins to boast of his intense spiritual visions and experiences, something about which the Corinthians admire.

VISION

- Paul starts his account in the third person, referring to himself as “a man in Christ” (verse 2).
- This title simply means that this ecstatic experience took place during the time he was “Paul the Christian,” not “Saul the Pharisee.”
- He also tells us that this experience happened “14 years ago,” which would place the vision a few years after his conversion on the Damascus Road.

VISION

- Paul gives two major details about his transcendental experience—first, that it was in the “third heaven,” otherwise known to him as “paradise.”
- The second detail Paul offers about his ecstatic experience is that what he hears, he cannot share.
- Whatever was uttered in that experience was meant for Paul’s ears alone as an epic encouragement for the epic suffering he had undergone.

VISION

- Being caught up in such an experience as described in these verses places Paul on the level of great heroes of the faith who experienced similar revelations.
- Paul knows this will greatly elevate him in the eyes of the Corinthians, and so he quickly returns to his mantra of weakness in order to humbly draw attention away from himself (verses 5–6).

**GOD'S SUSTAINING
POWER IS BEST
EXPERIENCED IN OUR
WEAKNESS**

2 CORINTHIANS 12:7-10

THORN

- After speaking indirectly about his paradise-rapture in the third person, Paul switches to the first person.
- Unlike his opponents who purposely paraded their ecstatic experiences in front of others and build their egos based on the level of their transcendental visions, Paul does not make a showy spectacle of his rapture.
- Instead, he immediately describes how he was kept from becoming too conceited.

THORN

- Paul is clear: building an ego was not the goal of his experience; in fact, thwarting his ego was necessary in order to keep his Christian character in check.
- The means by which God kept him from conceit about his ecstatic rapture was a thorn in his flesh.
- There is much speculation on what this affliction was, it is clear that it was a source of frustration for him: he asked the Lord to remove it three times.

THORN

- Just as Paul and Jesus both prayed three times for something to be removed, in both cases, the petition for relief was not granted.
- However, just as Jesus was strengthened to face His horrific crucifixion, Paul was also offered encouragement and strength to deal with this perpetual thorn via God's grace.

THORN

- Once it is made clear to him that (1) God's answer is "no" regarding the removal of his thorn at this current time, and (2) that God's power is released in the atmosphere of weakness, Paul transitions from experiencing relief to boasting in his weaknesses.
- For Paul, even the cruelest of wounds inflicted by Satan himself can be used to showcase the staggering magnitude of God's power.

THORN

- For the sake of Christ, Paul is now content when recalling all the hardship he's been through.
- If there's any reason to boast, it's in his weaknesses and hardships, for that is where the power of Christ can be experienced at its highest measure.
- Paul has been granted the unexpected secret of Christian confidence: divine strength fills up only those who admit their weakness.

**TRUE CHRISTIAN
LEADERSHIP IS MARKED
BY SIGNS AND SACRIFICE**

2 CORINTHIANS 12:11-18

CHURCH

- Paul refocuses his attempt to get his enemies to acknowledge his authenticity as a true apostle.
- He does this in three waves: first, his authenticity is proven by apostolic signs (verses 11–12).
- Second, by apostolic sacrifice (verses 13–18).
- Third, by apostolic fears (verses 19–21).

CHURCH

- “Signs, wonders, and miracles” do not refer to three types of miracles:
- First, “signs” denotes their ability to authenticate the message paired alongside the miracle.
- Second, “wonders” refers to the ability the miracles had to evoke awe.
- Third, “mighty deeds” indicates the miracle’s ability to display divine power.

CHURCH

- For the Corinthians, a true apostle must have accompanying signs that prove his message is divinely authenticated.
- Paul has performed these signs “with utmost patience.”
- While the false apostles may have claimed to produce “signs and wonders” as Paul did, they did not demonstrate the kind of fortitude that Paul did as he experienced persecution.

CHURCH

- Apostolic sacrifice: This is the second way Paul's apostleship is proven. Paul turns up his use of irony in verse 13, and his tone is reproachful and sarcastic.
- "Forgive me for working to support myself so that I would not be a financial burden to you. Forgive me for attempting to do good to you. Forgive my selfless sacrifice!"
- Paul is not afraid to show his raw emotions.

CHURCH

- While the false apostles draw much attention to their alleged signs and wonders, fortitude and sacrifice are clearly missing components of their ministry.
- Showy spectacles can indeed be used by God to minister to people, but without true love, concern and sacrifice, church leaders amount to nothing more than the false apostles.

**TRUE LEADERSHIP IS
ALSO MARKED BY GODLY
FEAR FOR THE WAYWARD**

2 CORINTHIANS 12:19-21

FEAR

- Paul adds that his fears are a third form of apostolic authentication. Paul anticipated that some of the Corinthians would assume his letter was merely a defensive attempt to defend his ministry.
- While he did spend portions of his letter defending his apostleship, he wants to assure the Corinthians that his intentions had very little to do with his personal issues and much more to do with their health and edification as a church.

FEAR

- He only defended his ministry in order to bring them back to theological soundness, otherwise, their entire church would be founded on a false gospel propagated by false apostles.
- The acceptance of his true apostleship was tied to the very health and longevity of their faith. Paul reassures them when it comes to his Corinthian correspondence: Everything he wrote was ultimately for their strengthening, not his.

FEAR

- Paul's fears in these verses are threefold.
- First, he fears mutual disappointment when he arrives. Paul could be disappointed and embarrassed by the church's relentless questioning of his apostleship and inability to repent of sin.
- The Corinthians would also be disappointed by the vigorous church discipline he would have to exercise for all the churches nearby to see.

FEAR

- Second, Paul fears that Corinth's particular sins have been so established that they will still be present and growing when he arrives.
- Third, he fears that they will have to undergo a second bout of the humiliation they experienced under God's hand due to the non-repentant group in their midst during Paul's second visit to them.

FEAR

- Since he considered himself their spiritual father, Paul simply could not forsake them even in yet another round of chaos, discord and rebellion.
- In his steadfast commitment and love for the Corinthians, Paul chose to endure the fears unknown to the uncommitted heart.
- Paul pictures for us a final marker for an authentic Christian leader: one who bears the weight of godly fear for the wayward in his care.

APPLICATION:

**GOD'S GRACE
IS SUFFICIENT**

Sermon by Steven Bareis

GRACE

- During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world debated what, if any, belief was unique to the Christian faith.
- The debate went on until C. S. Lewis wandered into the room.
- “What's the rumpus about?” he asked and heard his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among world religions.

GRACE

C. S. Lewis
responded,

“Oh, that’s easy.
It’s grace.”



GRACE

But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

2 Corinthians 12:9

GRACE

- God's grace is sufficient in supply.
- Compare God's grace to God's creation.
 - How many stars in the universe? 70 sextillion (7 followed by 22 zeros).
 - How many grains of sand? 7 quintillion, 5 hundred quadrillion = 7,500,000,000,000,000,000,000).

GRACE

- C. H. Spurgeon - "When God forgives our sins, there's more forgiveness to follow. He justifies us in the righteousness of Christ, but there more to follow. He gives us grace, but there's more to follow."
- Ephesians 2:6-7 - "He also raised us up . . . so that in the coming ages He might display the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness to us in Christ Jesus."

GRACE

- God's grace is sufficient in salvation.
- 1 Timothy 1:15-16 - "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."

GRACE

- God's grace is sufficient in suffering.
- “the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (1 Peter 5:10).
- God can restore your marriage. He can restore your relationships. He can restore your life.
- God can strengthen you through the trials you face and establish you.

GRACE

- God's grace is sufficient in sin.
- Romans 5:20 reminds us that where sin is multiplied, grace is multiplied even more.
- You cannot out-sin God's grace. The Good News is that God's grace exceeds your sin.

GRACE

- God's grace is sufficient in service.
- 2 Corinthians 9:8 - "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work."
- We can serve others in the body of Christ because of God's grace in our lives.

RESOURCES

