

2 Corinthians: God of the Thorn

Memory Verse: 2 Corinthians 12:9 "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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

Background

Second Corinthians is the 47th book of the Bible and the eighth book in the New Testament. This letter was written to the church at Corinth around 56-57 AD, possibly while Paul was in the city of Philippi. Having written First Corinthians in regards to disunity and struggles in the church, Paul later received a report from Titus that his letter had accomplished much good including repentance among the Corinthians (7:13). However, there were still people in the church that were questioning Paul's authority and leadership. In response to this, as well as Titus' report, Paul wrote his letter of 2 Corinthians.

The Short Story

Paul defends his apostleship and ministry to the troubled Corinthian church.

What's the Big Idea?

By the time Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, many problems addressed in 1 Corinthians had been resolved. There had been repentance by many and the Corinth believers had come back into unity with each other and with Paul's leadership. However, there were troublemakers in the church stirring up trouble by claiming that Paul was fickle, proud, unimpressive in appearance, and unqualified to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. Second Corinthians is a very personal letter by Paul in defense of his ministry. Upholding his ministry, Paul tells the Corinthians, "You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts." (3:2-3). Paul also addresses concerns and misunderstandings about the new covenant in Christ, the ministry of reconciliation, persevering in godliness, and keeping away from idolatry. Paul encourages his audience to have a new perspective. "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (4:17-18). Paul then writes the longest section in the New Testament regarding the principles of Christian giving, inspiring generosity among believers. Paul focuses his final thoughts on giving a strong and direct defense of his ministry and authority as an apostle. Paul argues that he is forced to "speak foolishly" as he boasts about his sufferings for the Lord, challenging his critics to compare themselves to him by these standards. He also points out that he had deep knowledge of the Christian faith, suffered much physical persecution, as well as having received visions and revelations from God (11:1-12:13). In all of this, Paul's was sincere in his love for the Corinthians, caring for their spiritual well-being, desiring that they be pure in Christ and not be swayed by false apostles (11:1-14).

So What? Why is this book so important? What was God's purpose for the book?

Second Corinthians contains more personal information on Paul's life and sufferings for the Lord than any other book in the New Testament. Paul suffered great physical punishment and hardships in the cause of Christ as well as enduring a mysterious thorn in his flesh that kept him reliant on God. Through it all, Paul continuously points to Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one who comforts us in our sufferings. "For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ." (1:5). Jesus is the one who reconciles us to God, giving us the ministry of reconciliation, and transforming us into new creations, "that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (5:17-21). Jesus, as Paul shared, is also the one who gives us power and strength in our weaknesses. "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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (12:9-10).

**Material taken from various sources.*

Teaching Text

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 "...or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.....'

Sermon-Based Discussion Questions

- This section of scripture is written in response to what issue that was facing the Corinthian church?
- Why was Paul given "a thorn in His flesh"? How did he view it? What does "a messenger of Satan" mean?
- Why was Paul's request denied? What was given to him instead? What makes God's grace "sufficient"?
- What did God say about himself? What should we boast about according to this passage?
- What does Paul mean "for when I am weak, then am strong"? How does weakness become strength?

Practical Application

- What area of your life and spirituality would cause you to boast? What drives you to your knees?
- What is your "thorn in the flesh"? *Be careful to whom you disclose your thorn.*
- Where do you need to be more dependent on God? What does that look like in real life?
- How does it feel to have the "power of Christ rest on you"? What is your greatest weakness?
- What kind of strength would you want in exchange for your weakness? What would you do with it?

Hitting the Highpoints

- 4:5 "...We preach that Jesus Christ is Lord, and we ourselves are your servants for Jesus' sake."
- 5:17 "Therefore, If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come."
- 9:7 "...And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. 'For God loves a cheerful giver...'"
- 10:8 "...But our authority builds you up; it doesn't tear you down. "
- 11:21-23 "I know I sound like a madman, but I have served him far more! "
- 13:5 "Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves. "

Bonus Feature: God's Comfort

In 2 Cor. 1:3-5 Paul shares this encouragement: *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ."* ***TRUE COMFORT COMES FROM GOD:** He is called the "God of all comfort" Why Him? Because He is also the "Father of mercies." The term "father" implies "source" Thus He is the source of all kinds of goodness and mercy (cf. Jm 1:17). Comfort is just one of His many mercies, and so He is described as: The "God of all comfort," and "The God of patience and comfort" (cf. Ro 15:5). As the God of ALL comfort, there is no limitation to the comfort He provides. **Source ccel.org*

Personal Takeaways and Notes