
True Strength Is God's Strength

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

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These are rather famous verses. Revealed here is the reality that strength is not of our own design. It doesn't have its source in men or man's wisdom. Strength, true strength, comes from God! With this realization comes two powerful truths. The first truth is that...

Weakness Is God-Sanctioned vv. 7-8

This is a somewhat challenging thought. The weakness that Paul experiences here is said to have come from Satan. However, context and the experience of Job tells us that nothing can be done apart from God's permission. Therefore, this weakness in Paul's life has been permitted or sanctioned by God. He has authorized this with specific purpose or intent. Paul details the purpose in these verses. The first purpose is found right at the beginning of v. 7. Paul had experienced some incredible revelations. To prevent pride, he is given a "messenger of Satan", "a thorn in the flesh". God allows weakness into our lives with express purpose!

One of the amazing things that we learn as we grow in the Christian life is that Satan in all his rebellion and rage is still bound by his creator. He cannot operate apart from God's permission. Here we find God using him to produce this thorn that Paul might remain a usable vessel. Usable vessels are ones that don't have an inflated opinion of their own worth.

God is at work in our lives. He is using circumstances to keep us usable! Weakness in our lives is a tool of God. It is evidence that He loves us enough to grow and mature us. Every trial and difficulty is allowed by God for a specific purpose. While we may not always be able to see or understand that purpose, we can accept by faith that God is at work. However, acceptance of God's work through trials does not mean that we cannot ask for their removal! This is seen in v. 8.

Paul states that he pleaded with God for the removal of this thorn. He implored, entreated, and earnestly requested that he might be delivered from the trial he was facing. There is absolutely nothing wrong with desiring and asking for difficulty to be removed! It is how we respond to God's answer that matters. We see this in the next two verses as we discover the second truth...

Strength Is God-Supplied vv. 9-10

Verse 9 gives us God's response to Paul's repeated prayer. God's grace is sufficient. No matter what we are facing, His grace is sufficient. His favor, His care, it is enough! Why? Because His strength is made perfect in our weakness! "Perfect" is the Greek word *τελέω* (*teleō*) meaning *finish; complete; accomplish. To be or become thoroughly or entirely accomplished.*

The idea here is that God's strength is accomplished through our weakness! If we are strong, we don't need His strength. The weakness we face through the trials we endure is designed to make us dependent on the strength of God! Because this is true, Paul boasts in his infirmity. Why? Because it is only in our weakness that the power of Christ is fully realized in our lives! His strength is activated in our lives when we are weak! But for us to be weak a thorn, a trial, a test is required. We can never fully know the strength God gives if we have not experienced weakness! For this reason, we boast in infirmity because that activates the power of God in our lives!

Usually it is accomplishments that are boasted in. Paul says he boasts in weakness. Weakness ensures that it is God who does the work through us and it is God who gets the glory. Weaknesses is needed. It is necessary for a world in need to see the power of God. His power is displayed through our weakness!

Paul not only boasts in infirmity, v. 10 reveals that he takes pleasure in them. "Pleasure" is the Greek word *εὐδοκέω* (*eudokeō*) meaning *take delight; be well pleased. To take a high degree of pleasure or mental satisfaction in.*

Paul is delighted; he is well pleased to face these things because it exalts Christ! Let me just run through these really quickly. Infirmary is sickness or illness. Reproach is damage or disaster done intentionally. Need is pressure or distress. Persecution is deliberate harm or harassment due to one's religious beliefs. Distress is trouble or difficulty. The key here is that these things be endured for Christ's sake.

Paul is not facing these things because of his own failures or faults. Paul is facing these for the cause of Christ! When we are pursuing Christ and endure these things, we can take pleasure in them because we know that when we are weak it activates God's strength and in Him, we are strong!

Strength is found in weakness. This is one of those completely counterintuitive things. It seems contradictory. Yet it is so powerful! I can never know true strength if I do not first know weakness!

What does all this mean? That trial, that difficulty, that struggle you are enduring? God wants you to rely on His strength! He is at work in your life and what is in store for you is beyond imagination! However, we must first learn to walk in His strength and we do that by being weak. Weakness is not a danger to be opposed. It is an opportunity to be embraced. It is in weakness that God's strength is experienced and displayed.

CHALLENGE: Rejoice in trials because they bring with them the power of God!

V. 7

Abundance - ὑπερβολή (hyperbolē) *extraordinary degree. Extraordinary overabundance n. — the state of having extremely (even superlatively) more than is necessary.* Noun, dative of means, singular, feminine.

Interesting that messenger is the same word for angel.

Exalted - ὑπεραίρομαι (hyperairomai) *exalt oneself. To be over-exalted v. — to be or become exalted beyond what is appropriate.* Finite verb, present, passive, subjunctive, first person, singular.

V. 8

Pleaded - παρακαλέω (parakaleō) *urge; implore; exhort. To entreat v. — to ask for or request earnestly.* Finite verb, aorist, active, indicative, first person, singular.

Depart - ἀφίστημι (aphistēmi) *depart; go away; depart from. To distance v. — to put or keep oneself at a distance.* Finite verb, aorist, active, subjunctive, third person, singular.

V. 9

Perfect - τελέω (teleō) *finish; complete; accomplish. To be fully accomplished ⇔ be perfected v. — to be or become thoroughly or entirely accomplished; conceived of as becoming perfect or complete.* Finite verb, present, passive, indicative, third person, singular.

V. 10

Pleasure - εὐδοκέω (eudokeō) *take delight; be well pleased. To delight (take) v. — to take a high degree of pleasure or mental satisfaction in.* Finite verb, present, active, indicative, first person, singular.

Reproaches - ὕβρις (hybris) *damage; disaster; insult. act of hubris n. — an offensively disrespectful act or statement that is outrageously forward or bold.* Noun (prepositional object), dative, plural, feminine.

Needs - ἀνάγκη (anankē) *necessity; pressure; distress. Distress ⇔ necessity n. — a distressing state; especially one those that arises out of matters of necessity.* Noun (prepositional object), dative, plural, feminine.

Distresses - στενοχωρία (stenochōria) *distress; trouble; difficulty. Constricting distress n. — a distress of an especially oppressive and constricting condition.* Noun (prepositional object), dative, plural, feminine.

Strong - δυνατός (dynatos) *strong; powerful; possible. Capable adjs. — have the skills and qualifications to do something well.* Predicate adjective, nominative, singular, masculine.