Strength in Weakness

(An Introduction to 2 Corinthians)

2 Corinthians 1:1-2

9-27-2026

Introduction: **Background of Corinth:**

The Unique Features of 2 Corinthians:

- The most <u>personal</u> of Paul's Epistles
- The most <u>neglected</u> of Paul's Epistles

The Theme of 2 Corinthians: Strength in Weakness (power in suffering)

I. Comfort in Tribulation:

2 Corinthians 1:4

Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

II. Treasure in Earthen Vessels:

2 Corinthians 4:7

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

III. Growing Inwardly while Perishing Outwardly:

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For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

IV. Rich Giving in Poverty Circumstances:

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How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.

V. Strength in Weakness:

2 Corinthians 12:10 *- 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.*

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Introduction: Acts 18:1-11

Background of Corinth:

Corinth, located west of Athens Greece, was a major cosmopolitan city, a huge seaport and a major trade center. It was loaded with money, prosperity, jobs, idolatry, lust, worldliness, pagan religions, and immorality.

Wine, women, and wealth was what the average man of Corinth lived for.

To worship, for a male citizen of Corinth, usually meant going to the Temple of Aphrodite and having sexual relations with one of the 1,000 prostitutes who served Satan there.

The city had such a bad reputation that the term *"Korinthiazoma"* meant to "practice sexual immorality."

Corinth's reputation was such that prostitutes in other cities began to be called "Corinthian girls" (Life Applic. Bible note, p. 2,088).

It was to such a city, filled with sin and sensuality and crime and corruption, that the Apostle Paul went to minister the life-changing Gospel on his second missionary journey (SEE: Acts 18:1-11).

A miracle took place at Corinth! Actually, many miracles took place as men, women, boys and girls heard the Good News of Jesus Christ's substitutionary death, His bodily resurrection and His free gift of eternal life. Many were gloriously saved through the testimony of Paul and others. They became Christians. They went from being Corinthians to being Christians.

It is to these Christians (and to Christians everywhere) that this Epistle was penned.

The Corinthians at Corinth were sinners saved by the grace of God! After professing faith in Christ, they formed a church - a church, which like ours, existed in one of the largest, wealthiest, and most godless cities in the world.

The faith of those believers would be tested. The pressures of the world's ways, philosophies, customs and morals would force the professing believers either closer to the Lord or away from the Lord.

This church had problems. Christians are not exempt from them. They had conflicts which came in various shapes and sizes. We know of some of them by the issues Paul deals with in I and II Corinthians. Satan attacked that church like he attempts to do to every church today. Many in that church were proud, divisive, self-centered, immoral, confused, jealous, and doctrinally unstable. It is these and other issues which Paul providentially addresses.

V. 1

"Paul" - Formerly a Pharisee sold out to Judaism, but converted to Christianity by a direct confrontation from Jesus Christ (Acts 9).

"An apostle" - An official "sent one." (the last official apostle whom the Lord called to that unique, foundational office - I Cor. 15:8-10).

Paul had the office of an apostle. He was, as it were, "one born out of due time" (I Cor. 15:5-8). he was commissioned by Christ Himself (Acts 9:15; Gal. 1:1; Acts 26:14-18; Jn. 6:70); was an ear and eye witness of the resurrected Christ; had special guidance of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14:26, 15:26); and God confirmed his authority by signs and miracles (Acts 2:43; I Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4).

Paul states his apostleship to establish his authority to correct and guide that ailing church. In 2 Corinthians Paul defends his apostleship in 10:1-12:18.

"by the will of God" - He was not a self-appointed apostle, nor did he receive his office of apostleship from men (Gal. 1:1).

"Timothy" – A Convert of Paul, who first learned The Holy Scriptures (i.e. the O.T.) while a child (2 Tim. 3:15) from the sincere faith of his Mother and Grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5). Timothy, who was with Paul as He wrote from Macedonia, apparently served Paul as the amanuensis or penman and wrote this letter as Paul dictated it to him.

> ***"The church" -*** Not a building but people professing personal faith in Jesus Christ.
>
> There is the universal church of all truly saved people who will one day assemble in Heaven, and there is the local church of professing Christians who gather at a specific location. Here, Paul addresses a local church.
>
> "Each church has two addresses: a geographic address (***"at Corinth"***) and a spiritual address (***"in Christ Jesus"***) (Wiersbe, 1 Cor. p. 568).
>
> ***"The church of God" -*** This church did not have a denominational label (Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, etc.). [Unfortunately, today there are so many wolves in sheep's clothing claiming to be "Christian," that labels sometimes help. The infant Corinthian church existed at a time when distinguishing labels were not necessary.]
>
> ***"Of God" -*** It was a church (*ekklesia*) of called-out-from-the-world people who belonged to God.
>
> Any Biblical church is God's church, not man's! God had property in Corinth. That property was His people (Acts 18:10).
>
> These Christians were not lone rangers, scattered all over Corinth. They were a team, a family, an assembly that got together (1 Cor. 5:4) every week, particularly on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:2) to be mutually edified by the Word (1 Cor. 14:26).
>
> It is interesting that God gave His Word through Paul in the context of a Church that existed in Corinth. Why this church? Corinth and the province of Achaia had a

particular set of circumstances that they were facing. These were situations and circumstances produced the occasion for teaching. Teaching which we need for our local churches today. I believe God addressed the Church of Corinth via Paul in order that He might show us how our church ought to function through it's tribulations and trials by giving us an example of a church with challenges and trials.

"with all the saints" - Every blood-bought child of God is a saint (a holy, set-apart one).

There is not a select, few canonized patron saints. Saint Sosthenes was just as much a saint as Saint Paul!

Our sainthood comes from God by His grace! Not from the Vatican.

Sainthood was a present reality for the believers at Corinth, not merely a future reality.

Being a "saint" does not imply "sinless perfection." The Corinthian church was living proof of that.

However, in God's eyes, and in our relationship with Christ, we are just as if we had never sinned (Rom. 5:1).

The Corinthians shared "sainthood" with all Christians *"in every place"* who have called upon Christ for salvation (Rom. 10:13) and call upon Him for daily strength and needed blessing.

Our practice should match our position; our lifestyle should match our label (*"saints")*, but unfortunately such is not always the case (ILLUS: MacArthur, p. 6).

EX: Alexander the Great to a soldier named Alexander: "Either change your ways or change your name."

The term **"saint"** is a related term to the word *"Sanctified"* **-** To set apart from profane (common) use to be specially kept for a special purpose (EX: expensive china and silverware).

We are sanctified for God's possession and use. If you are saved, you have been sanctified. Are you living like it? (II Tim. 2:20-21 - *"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work."*)

Our positional sanctity comes only from Christ, not works and self-effort.

Don't be ashamed of being distinctly different from the world; this is a privilege to be uniquely set apart (separated) for God!

"grace be to you" - (v.2)

Although ***"grace"*** (v. 4) had already been ***"given"*** to the Corinthians at salvation, they still needed God's grace and peace to successfully live the Christian life; They needed grace to find "strength in weakness."

The hymnwriter said, "I need Thee every hour!"

Hence, Paul's wish for the Corinthians is that they would continue to experience grace and peace for daily living.

"and peace" –not "peace with God" (Rom. 5:1) which they already have, being "in Christ," but the "Peace of God" (Phil. 4:7).

NOTE: We must have God's grace before we have His peace.

Notice that the word order is always grace then peace.
No one has the peace of God, who has not first been a partaker of the grace of God.

Peace is the result of grace.
Calling upon God for salvation brings peace with God.
Calling upon God for help brings the peace of God (Phil. 4:6-7).

Paul gives this similar "Pauline" introductory greeting in the following Scriptures:

Romans 1:7
To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called *to be* saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:3
Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and *from* the Lord Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1:3
Grace *be* to you and peace from God the Father, and *from* our Lord Jesus Christ,

Ephesians 1:2
Grace *be* to you, and peace, from God our Father, and *from* the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:2
Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and *from* the Lord Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:2
To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 1:1
Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians *which is* in God the Father and *in* the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 1:2
Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philemon 1:3
Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word “mercy” is also added in the introduction to the Pastoral Epistles to Timothy and Titus:

1 Timothy 1:2
Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

2 Timothy 1:2
To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Titus 1:4
To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.

If Paul is so consistent in wishing God’s grace and peace to be with God’s people, I’d have to say that these are two of the most vital ingredients for successful Christian living. Especially success in the midst of trials and tribulations.

“from God our Father, and *from* the Lord Jesus Christ.” - The source of grace coming from both the Father and Son proves the equality and oneness of these Persons in the Godhead.

For Jesus Christ to be described as the same source of grace and peace as God the Father would be utter blasphemy, if He and the Father were not one in essence. Jesus Christ is Jehovah the Son!

Several other times, the Father and Son are described as the source of grace and peace.

“the Lord Jesus Christ”

"Lord" - He is Master
"Jesus - "He is Savior
"Christ" - He is Messiah

The Unique Features of 2 Corinthians:

- The most personal of Paul's Epistles
  (He deals with specific situations and circumstances in this book)

- The most neglected of Paul's Epistles
  Perhaps because it deals with a subject we do not like or want. That being "tribulation, trial, suffering, and affliction" Who likes pain?

  We live in a world that avoids pain at all cost and seeks to avoid even talking much about the subject.

Tribulation
2 Corinthians 1:4 - Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.
2 Corinthians 7:4 - Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.

Trial
2 Corinthians 8:2 - How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.

Suffering
2 Corinthians 1:5 - For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.
2 Corinthians 1:6 - And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.
2 Corinthians 1:7 - And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.

Affliction
2 Corinthians 2:4 - For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.
2 Corinthians 4:17 - For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;
2 Corinthians 6:4 - But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,

Paul's Testimony of Suffering for Christ:

2 Corinthians 11:24-28

Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

Any Doctrine which seems to suit our propensity toward ease and painless Christianity seems to be what people swallow up today.

Note: The Doctrine that we will not be here for the Tribulation and Persecution that will come via the Antichrist suits our modern tastes well, but does not line up with an honest exegesis of eschatological passages of Scripture. While we will not be here for the "Day of the Lord" and the outpouring of God's wrath (the Rapture will occur First!), nowhere are we told that we will escape tribulation from Satan and his cohorts.

Another reason why 2 Corinthians is neglected today:
Perhaps one of the greatest reasons why many within Christianity tend to neglect verse by verse exposition of this Book is because our Adversary, the Devil, hates with a passion the great thoughts and passages in this book. Some of the Greatest verses in all of Sacred Text are found in 2 Corinthians.

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Just as in 1 Corinthians, Paul is deflating the pride of the Corinthians and is showing them that God does His greatest work through what the world might view as the weakest of people:

God delights in taking a Sarah who could not bear children and making her the mother of one of the largest races on earth (Gen. 18:14, 32:12)

God delights in taking a humble slave like Joseph and elevating him second to Pharaoh over Egypt (Gen. 41:38-44).

God delights in enlisting 300 soldiers of Gideon to fight and conquer 120,000 Mideanites (Jud. 7:2, 7, 12; 8:10) (NOTE: 400 to 1 odds).

God delights in utilizing a Samson to destroy 1,000 wicked Philistines with a jawbone of a donkey (Jud. 15:16).

God delights in using a red-headed, freckle-faced, baby-faced (I Sam. 17:42) shepherd boy named David to wipe out a 9'9" fully armored Philistine named Goliath (I Sam. 17).

God delights in providing adequate food for a poor widow of Zarephath who only had a few drops of oil and a handful of grain (I Ki. 17:9ff).

God delights in using three Hebrew youths to show up King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Dan. 3).

God delights in using as His mouthpiece a John the Baptist, "who had no formal education, no training in a trade or profession, no money, no military rank, no political position, no social pedigree, no impressive appearance (or diet!)" (MacArthur, p. 51). Yet Jesus said, "*Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist*" (Mt. 11:11).

God delights in taking a boy's lunch consisting of two sardines and five bite-size biscuits to feed 5,000 men besides women and children (Mt. 14:17-19).

"Little is much when God is in it." -- Conversely, much is little, if God is not in it!

God delights in taking unlearned, ignorant, dumb fishermen from Galilee and turning them into the most bold and influential mortals ever to spread the Gospel message (Acts 4:13).

God can take someone the world views as a "nobody" and make a somebody out of him!

... He can take something the world views as "nothing" and make something out of it!