

The Pattern of Sanctification: Submission to Authority

2 Corinthians 13:3-4

47-92

We turn now in the Scriptures to 2 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians chapter 13. And we are patiently drawing to a conclusion in this wonderful study of 2 Corinthians. I'm having a hard time letting this book go because it has so much to say that is precious to my own heart and I trust to yours as well. We're taking in very small bites as we wind it down.

The text for this morning is 2 Corinthians 13 and I'll just read you verses 1 through 4 and then we'll focus on verses 3 and 4. Paul says to the Corinthians, "This is the third time I'm coming to you. Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses. I have previously said when present the second time and though now absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past, and to all the rest as well, that if I come again I will not spare anyone since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me and who is not weak towards you but mighty in you. For indeed He was crucified because of weakness, yet He lives because of the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, yet we shall live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you."

Now you remember last week I referred to a new book that has been written for pastors and church leaders and it's a book that calls for the church to reinvent itself or die. I'm convinced it's a very harmful book for many reasons, most notably because it ignores what Scripture says about the church. It completely bypasses God's clearly revealed plan for the church and makes suggestions about what the church should be based upon surveying people.

Among many suggestions made in the book, one that is greatly disturbing is the book calls for a rebellion against the current style of the church where pastors exercise authority. Among the mandates the author calls for in the reinvention of the church is radical change in church life in the realm of authority, specifically control is to be taken out of the hands of pastors and given to the people. That is to say authority centralized in the pastors who preach the Word of God must be decentralized and spread out among the people so that there is less vertical authority and more horizontal interactive authority. Rather than power coming from above down to the people, it is to be spread among the people. The book suggests the church must have less authority from the top down.

Nothing could be more contrary to what the Bible teaches. The only true authority in the church is vertical. And by that I simply mean that the only authority in the church is the Word of the Lord of the church, isn't it? It all comes down from above. And the preacher and the teacher, the elder in the church is simply one through whom the Word of God is disseminated. Christ is the head of His church. The church is not its own authority, it's not its own leader. Leadership is not defused

throughout the church. The Lord of the church rules in His church. The book also suggests that pastors because they're culturally irrelevant and preach sermons which tend to be ineffective one-sided communication need to be replaced by leaders. You decentralize, you defuse authority and spread it around the congregation giving it to leaders rather than teachers who can make the church more culturally relevant.

I see this as a tragic mutiny against the Scripture and against the Lord of the church. All faithful pastors understand, in fact all students of the New Testament understand that the Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the church and everything comes down from the head. I mean, the analogy is pretty clear. All the orders that come down to your body come from your head, they come from your brain. Christ is the head of the church, everything comes down vertically from Him. There are no independent operators. There is no defused authority. There is no decentralized authority in the church. And all faithful pastors understand that they are servants of the Lord of the church who brings His sovereign, divine authority to the church through the Word and therefore we are to tell the people what the Word of God says.

Jesus when He preached, preached with great authority. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:29, the people were amazed because He spoke with such authority. There was nothing horizontal about it. He didn't quote peers. He didn't quote various rabbis. He didn't ask for various opinions. He didn't share consensus. He didn't share the results of surveys. It was all vertical, He just spoke. In fact, in Mark 11:28 they went to Him and said, "Where did you get this authority?" And He answered them in John 7, and in John 8, and in John 12 when He said, "This authority isn't Mine, I speak only what God tells Me to speak." That's what He said. Listen to His words. John chapter 7, Jesus said in verse 16, "My teaching is not Mine but His who sent Me." John 8 verse 28, "I speak these things as the Father taught Me." Verse 38, "I speak the things which I've seen with My Father." Verse 40, "I told You the truth which I heard from God." And then in John 12:49, "I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me commandment what to say and what to speak. I speak just as the Father has told Me," verse 50. It was all vertical.

If the church is to survey and have power and influence and impact, it must not decentralize its authority, it must centralize its authority singularly and holy and only into the Word of God. Jesus said to the Apostles, "You go out, you go to every person in the world and you teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." In Titus 2:15 the Apostle Paul said to Titus, "These things teach and exhort and reprove with all authority and let no one disregard you." The Lord of the church demands authority in the church and that authority is His authority passed down through those who proclaim His Word. Ours is not a personal authority, it's not something that belongs to us because of oratorical ability, or communication skill, it's not something that belongs to us because of personal charm, or the ability to manipulate you or intimidate you, or overpower you, it's not a personal authority. It doesn't belong to us because of education. It doesn't belong to us because of intellectual ability. It doesn't belong to us because of erudition. It doesn't belong to us because we're well read. It doesn't belong to us because we're in the position we're in. There is no such thing as personal authority in the church.

Nor is there ecclesiastical authority. It's not ours by virtue of ordination. It's not that we're authoritative because we passed an ordination test and somebody put a stamp on us and gave us a plaque to put on the wall. There's no such thing as experiential authority. Our authority is not based

upon the fact that we have experienced something of God, something from God and in some mystical way therefore have transcended the hoi polloi, that's the common folk, and we are the ones in the know because we have had the experiences. The only authority that we ever have, the only authority that we can ever exercise in the church is biblical authority. And I never say anything authoritative unless it's the Word of God. If I say anything other than the Word of God, it has no authority. What the church needs today is not less authority, it's not de-centralized authority, it's not spreading some imaginary authority across the congregation so everybody feels like they can throw their two cents into the dialogue. What the church needs today more than its ever needed it in my life time is a more centralized authority, a more singular authority, a more focused authority in that the Word of God which is the only authority that speaks to the church is carefully, clearly, and powerfully proclaimed by the leadership. That's what the church needs.

And that authority, I again say, doesn't operate on our personality. Paul says to the Corinthians, "I didn't come to you with human wisdom. I didn't come to you with cleverness of speech." It doesn't come from intimidation. It doesn't come from creating fear. It doesn't come from personal charm. It doesn't come from coercion. It doesn't come from cleverness and ingenuity or any other device. The only authority over the church is the Word of the Lord of the church. And preaching that doesn't carry the full weight of biblical authority is a sad, poor counterfeit of the real thing. Paul said preach the Word, 2 Timothy 4:2. Peter said in 1 Peter 4:11, "If anyone speaks...if someone speaks, let him speak the oracles of God." In the church when you open your mouth, let God be heard. And why? Peter wrote, "So that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." For the glory of God, let God be heard in His church. All preaching is designed and required by God to give His voice a hearing. It carries the character of a command, to establish God's dominion in the soul. I mean, I suppose we could say that's what preaching is to do. It's to establish the dominion of God in the souls of men. First Timothy 4:11, Paul said to Timothy, "These things command...these things command."

And it's not a burdensome thing. John Piper in his book The Supremacy of God in Preaching says, "God's aim is not to constrain man's submission by an act of raw authority, His aim is to ravish our affections with irresistible displays of glory producing glad submission." I like that. As the Word of God is unfolded and you see the irresistible displays of glory, your affections toward God are ravished and your submission becomes a glad submission. A faithful preacher is concerned to bring the strong and blessed authority of God's Word to the church. The church does not need decentralized dialogue. It doesn't need less authority. Lord, help us if that happens, there's hardly any there now as it is. It needs more authority. It needs the clearly preached and taught Word of God.

Now if you're going to survey people to find out what they want, I understand what you're going to get. I agree the surveys will reveal this is not what people want. People don't want authority. They don't want the binding Word of God upon them, especially if you survey unbelievers outside the church or unbelievers inside the church, or if you survey ignorant Christians. The other day there were some men who were singing in a place that I was speaking and they said, "Well we'd like to introduce ourselves." And one introduced himself from the Assembly of God, another from the Church of Christ, and another from another Pentecostal group, and another from The Free Methodist, all of which are basically theologically Arminian groups and very different in many ways in their doctrine. And the last gentleman said, "And isn't it wonderful, it doesn't matter...none of that really matters, all that matters is we all love Jesus." And the audience broke into applause and I was

pained in my heart. It does matter what you believe. Theology does matter. It does matter that you're precise with Scripture. It does matter that you're accurate. But, you see, that's the non-authority mentality. The mentality of the world in which we live where everybody's opinion is as valid as everybody else's opinion. Strong, authoritative pulpits which bring the Word with conviction and challenge are not popular with sinful people and they're not popular with ignorant people. Why? Because it's the spirit of the age. This is an anti-authority age that we live in.

It hasn't always been this way in the world, and it isn't always this way in every place. Russian believers who were growing up under the regime of communism in Russia understood authority very well. They understood it very well. And I suppose in some ways the church benefitted by that because people were raised to comprehend the significance of authority. We're living in a society today where all authority is being undermined at every level. It's being undermined from every conceivable perspective...philosophically, religiously, politically.

Let me tell you why people resist authority. This is just a little bit of a sidelight here. We're not surprised if you go out and survey somebody you're going to come up with the idea they don't want an authoritative speaker, they don't want an authoritative doctrinal statement. They don't want somebody telling them what to do. They don't want to have God's law put upon them in a binding fashion. They don't want...they don't want to submit to the supremacy of God and to the truth of His Word. We understand that and I'll give you several reasons.

Number one, it's the nature of sin to be rebellious. The Bible says sin is rebellion. Nothing is truer of sin than to say it is a form of rebellion and it is a rebellion against whom? God. All sin is a rebellion against God. That's a definition of sin. You want to know what sin is? It's a rebellion against God. It's an unwillingness to do God's will. Any violation of God's will is sin. Any violation of God's will is a form of rebellion. Satan inaugurates the whole deal, bolts out of heaven in rebellion against God. Eve inaugurates it on a human level, rebels against the commands of God, believes the lie and Adam joins her and catapults the human race into fallenness. Romans chapter 1 says it's the cycle of history, "When they knew God they glorified Him not as God, and neither were thankful, turned against Him," and so forth.

A lack of respect for God, a lack of respect for God's character, a lack of respect for God's law, a lack of God's will, God's Word is the nature of sin. So we aren't surprised that if you go survey a lot of sinners they'd like to say, "Well we just want less authority." That's the nature of sin. Sin is rebellion.

Secondly, it is also true basically in our philosophy...we're not only dealing with an endemic sin issue here, we're dealing with a philosophical issue...secondly, that we have a lack of moral absolutes in our culture. Because our culture has rejected the Bible, there is no law, there is no standard, just opinions. And all we know about anything is what the survey says, right? Forty-nine percent of the people said this...and sixty-two percent of the people said this...and we hear this every single day and that's how we define our morality. It's sort of the weight of the people. That's what happens when you have a decentralized authority, it's all put in the hands of the people and then you just take a vote. And by the way, it's just going to get more chaotic at that point because philosophically we've been entered into the time period called post-modernism-post-modernism.

In the Dark Ages, just to give you a little quick ride through history, in the Dark Ages the church said what was true and the church wasn't always obviously reflecting the Word of God, but the great monolithic Roman system in western civilization stated what was true. The church said this is true and you will do it. And then came the enlightenment. Then came the Renaissance and Reformation and men discovered the human mind and that engaged us from the Dark Ages into the modern era. And Modernism, by definition, is a search for the truth. Modernism says we'll find the truth, we'll use our intellectual abilities and our capacities and we'll discover the truth. We will find the truth. The scientific method comes in, science flourishes and all that went along with it during Modernism because Modernism says there is truth and we will find it. Post Modernism doesn't say that. Post Modernism doesn't say we'll find truth, Post Modernism says we'll make it, we'll create it. Post Modernism says there is no singular truth, there is no generic truth, there is no objective truth, there is no ontological truth, we make truth.

Another way to look at it is, I'll give you a few technical terms here, we live in a time of phenomenology. Have you seen that word in any of your reading? Phenomenology? Phenomenology is simply a word to define the way things appear...the way things appear. And the way things appear is not always the way they are, true? But today the current trend is toward phenomenology, that is to say you define truth in any way that it appears to you. Phenomenology is said over against ontology. Ontology comes from the Greek verb "to be," *ontos*, and it means the way things are. In Modernism we were trying to find the way things are, in Post Modernism we're simply determining the way things appear to us. This is a huge philosophical shift.

Now in all honesty, I reject phenomenology because I don't trust my senses or yours. And I'll tell you something else, I reject ontology because ontology has its limits. Even when I have seen what I see and I see things the way they are, there may be more there than I can see so I have to go behind phenomenology, behind ontology to theology. And the reality that I'm going to link up with is the reality that is clearly indicated by the God who created everything. The only real assessment of things the way they really are is biblical, isn't it? Only God knows. We've abandoned theology, theoretically we abandoned that when we abandoned our Christian heritage, we have abandoned now ontology, the scientific methodology and now we're catapulted into phenomenology where we make our own truth by virtue of what it appears to be by us. Every man does what is right in his own eyes.

Now in our society with that kind of thinking and that kind of mentality being piped into the young people of our culture, that's what the people in our universities are teaching, that's what they're learning. So that's what the school teachers are being taught. That's what the lawyers are being taught who become the judges and who become the senators and the congressmen and the leaders, and you know how the story goes. It's the idea that there is no absolute truth, there is no real truth, even ontology is unacceptable to them, to say nothing of theology. And so we live in a society where they don't want anybody to tell them what is right what is wrong, what is true. If you go to a homosexual and confront him with the sin of that, he'll call you a homophobic and all of a sudden you become the deviate. And, you know, he's very sincere because all he understands is an environment that has no morality but that which he has perceived to be true for him.

There's a third reason why there's such a lack of authority in our culture, such a lack of interest in it, and if you're going to survey the people, why you're going to get them to answer you that they don't want authority in their churches like they don't want it anywhere else. And I really believe it's because

of parents to discipline children. We now have a generation of children who have grown up without discipline. The breakdown of the home, sexual immorality, homosexuality, divorce, single moms, working wives, working mothers all of that has produced a terrible, terrible effect, children untaught, children who have never learned to respect authority, to respect their parents even. I keep hearing about children killing their parents, don't we? You know, in the Old Testament if a child disobeyed his parents he'd be executed according to the law of God? That would have a chilling effect on disobedience. Why did God make such a stern law that if a child was rebellious toward his parents he would die? Because God understands what a destruction of society occurs with a generation of young people who grow up without respect for authority. We're living that out now and it's only going to get worse.

And then you could add a fourth feature here that has kind of contributed to that and that is the media destruction of authority. The assault on the police, the assault on people in leadership, the exaltation of personal private vengeance, the portrayal of criminals as victims, the system is bad, anybody who succeeds in the system is evil and bad and money grubbing and etc., etc., you shouldn't trust anybody, you shouldn't trust your leaders, everybody's out to get you.

And then you could add a fifth, humanism, the overestimation of human rights. Humanism didn't do us any favors. All this stuff about personal rights and personal rights is way overstated. Our society is engulfed in a sea of personal freedoms and personal rights that is totally destructive.

Now I don't want to go into those any further, you can think them through yourself. But those are the kinds of things that contribute to the thinking of a culture. And that culture, unfortunately, finds its way into the church and unless the Word of God is clearly and thoroughly taught to people, they will have those residual ideas in their minds. So when you go into the church and ask them what they want, you're liable to get the kind of foolish answers that would lead you to conclude that the church needs less authority instead of more.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 and verse 13, Paul writes, "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you heard, or received, from us the Word of God's message." Boy, that's...that's so important. He never preached anything but God's message. "When you received from us the Word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men but for what it really is, the Word of God which also energizes its work in you who believe."

You see, the Thessalonians they understood that when Paul preached it was God's Word. And they didn't take it as just another opinion from some man, but as the Word of God which powerfully worked in those who believed. So we can establish, I think, rather readily certainly from Scripture repeatedly in the Old and New Testament the fact that the church is under the authority of the Lord and that authority is communicated through His Word and His Word is communicated through His preachers and teachers. The only authority in the church is the Lord of the church, the living God Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ and all that comes from Him is binding.

Now all of that is just a walking start to get to the text. Let's go back to it. What was going on in Corinth? I'll tell you, among many things Paul was being attacked, as we know. And one of the areas they attacked him, and they attacked him in every area, they attacked his morality, they attacked his

credentials, they attacked his integrity, they attacked his honesty, they attacked his message, they said terrible things about his lifestyle, all kinds of things.

But one of the things that was at the heart of their assault, false teachers came to Corinth, they wanted to undermine Paul because everybody believed Paul, he was the great teacher and they couldn't teach lies unless they could get rid of Paul. So they had to discredit Paul. They had to destroy his credibility in the eyes of the people. And one of the things they began to attack was his authority. They would say things like, "Well, he's just telling you what he thinks. He doesn't have any authority." In chapter 3 he refers to the fact that they expected him to have some kind of papers, some paperwork from Jerusalem that authenticated him. "Where is his letter of commendation?" They questioned his authority. They said, "He doesn't speak for Jesus Christ. How do you know he speaks for Christ? Where does he come off wielding all this power over you and telling you all these things and you believe them, and exercising all this authority and you just acknowledge it? Where does he get this authority?" And so at this very point they systematically attempted to undermine Paul's authority.

In chapter 2 of this letter, verse 17 he says, "We're not like those false teachers peddling the Word of God, but as from sincerity as from God we speak in Christ in the sight of God." And the very fact that that sentence is such a compound indicates how strongly he wants them to know that he has authority. "We speak from God in Christ in the sight of God." That's an answer to those who were questioning his authority. Chapter 4 in verse 2 he says, here again answering their accusations. "We have renounced the things hidden because of shame. We are not walking in craftiness, we are not adulterating the Word of God but by manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Before God, he says, we're speaking truth, not lies and craftiness, not adulterating the Word. And again he's defending himself against these accusations.

Down in verse 5, "We do not preach ourselves." You see, that's exactly what they said, he's just giving you his own opinion telling you what he wants. He wants to have power over you. "We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord and ourselves as your bondservants for Jesus' sake."

Over in chapter 6 it's the same thing. They're questioning his authority and in verse 7 he says, "We speak in purity..." or verse 6, "In purity, in knowledge." In verse 7, "In the Word of truth, in the power of God."

Chapter 10 verse 8, he even uses the word authority. "Even if I should boast somewhat further about our authority which the Lord gave for building you up." Chapter 13 verse 10, same thing, he says, "In accordance...at the end of the verse...with the authority which the Lord gave for building up and not tearing down."

So you can see repeatedly he answers this attack that questioned his authority. Well that's exactly what he's doing in our text. Look back at verse 3 and 4. The false teachers had convinced the Corinthians, some of them, that Paul lacked authority and should have to prove that he could really say he spoke for Christ. So verse 3 says, "Since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me," that's the issue. They were saying, "We want some proof that it's really Christ speaking in you, how do we know it's not just your opinion? You're just telling us what you want to tell us. You're

just saying what is your own view and your own idea. How do we know? Give us some proof of the Christ who speaks in you."

That was the issue here. Now remember, Paul had already indicated that his concern for his people was repentance, chapter 12 verses 20 and 21. That was our first point in this little outline. And secondly, he was concerned for the discipline of his people, verses 1 and 2. And now in verses 3 and 4 he's concerned for the authority of his people. Any faithful pastor is concerned with these issues. He's concerned about sin and repentance. He's concerned about discipline which is the purging and purifying of the church. And he's concerned about making sure the people come under the authority of the truth. Those are the faithful pastor's concerns. And we come to this third one, this matter of authority, and Paul wants to address it.

So he says in verse 3, "You're seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me, huh? You haven't had enough proof already?" Go back to verse 12 of chapter 12. "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance by signs and wonders and miracles." They had a lot of proof...miracles that Paul had done there. That was proof enough. And there was even more proof. How about this? "You're saved. You've been justified. You've been regenerated. You've been converted. You've been transformed. You've been changed. You've been born again. You've been redeemed. Isn't that indicative of the fact that the truth came through me, the saving truth? Not only that, you're in the process of being sanctified, you're in the process of growing and maturing and being nurtured and becoming more like Christ. Isn't that evidence?" They had evidence from signs. They had evidence from salvation. They had evidence from sanctification. But they were so fickle they allowed themselves to get sucked into this false teacher's effort and to question things that they really had no reason to question.

So, he says, "Okay, you want more proof of the Christ who speaks in me?" Go back to verse 2, "If I come again I'll not spare anyone." That's what he's talking about. "I'll not spare you and that will give you more proof." What does he mean? He means when I come I'm going to take out the sword, if need be, of discipline and I'm going to act in behalf of Christ in dealing with your sin.

Now you remember in Matthew 18 the Lord outlined the process of church discipline, remember that? You know, you go to your brother and then you tell the church and ultimately if they don't repent...there's four steps. You go to your brother, you take two or three witnesses, you tell the church and then you put them out of the church. And you remember when it says right after that it says, "Where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I...what?...in the midst?" When you're in the midst of this discipline and you're working to purge sin in the church, Christ says there am I in the midst of them. So Paul says, "Look, you want proof of Christ who's in me? You're telling me signs aren't enough proof? You're telling me salvation is not enough proof? You're telling me sanctification is not enough proof, that Christ is speaking through me? I'll give you more proof. When I get there I'm going to wield the sword of discipline and I'm not going to spare anybody and you're going to feel the authority of Christ then." That's what he's saying. "I will not spare anyone since you're seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me." You want *dokime*, you want a test? You want the proof? You're going to get it.

Just a footnote. I love that phrase "proof of the Christ who speaks in me." Boy, what a great

statement. Every preacher who...who is faithful to the Lord and understands his role would love to be a living illustration of that. That...that's our passion. That's our calling for Christ to speak through us. What a great statement. "The Christ who speaks in me." And how does Christ speak in us? Not in an audible voice, He speaks in us when we proclaim His Word. Christ isn't indicated to have given special words to Paul on every occasion. Once the Word of God was revealed, Paul preached it and rep preached it and rep preached it. He gave it to us. When you speak the Word of Christ, Christ speaks in you.

So you...that was the question. And that should be the question. That should always be the question. Is it really Christ speaking in him? How do I know that about a preacher? How do I know that about a teacher? How do I know if Christ is speaking in him?

You say, "Well, maybe Christ spooked him and he had a vision." No, I don't know that, I don't know he had a vision. It's not reproducible, it's not verifiable. Remember that? Back at the beginning of chapter 12 Paul says, "I went to heaven but it doesn't matter. It's not reproducible and it's not verifiable. I can't build my credibility on that." Don't tell me Jesus told you this, and Jesus told you that, I can't...I can't verify that and neither can you. There's only one way I know if Christ is speaking through a person. And how's that? If he speaks what is known to be the Word of Christ, right? And the Word of Christ is the Word of God.

How can we say we need less of that in the church? That's mind-boggling to me. Paul says you want more of the Christ who speaks in me? You're going to get it. You've had it in signs and you've seen it in your own salvation and sanctification and you're going to see more when I come and don't spare anybody and apply Matthew 18 to all of you. And then you'll see the Christ who speaks in me, verse 3, "And who is not weak toward you but mighty in you." And he's saying you already have seen that. He's...He is not weak toward you, you know that because you're saved and you're being sanctified. He is mighty in you and you know that. You're experiencing it. Your lives have been changed and transformed. You know that and you've seen the signs and wonders. You want more proof of how mighty Christ is? You want more proof of how powerful He is? Then I'll give it to you when I come against that unrepentant person with the very same authority of the Word of Christ.

Beloved, always there is power when believers act in line with the truth of God's Word. Christ is the Lord of the church and He expresses authority in His church through His Word proclaimed by gifted and called and faithful preachers and teachers.

One of the things the false teachers also said was that Paul just didn't have it. His speech was unimpressive...or his speech was contemptible, his presence was unimpressive. He...he just lacked charm, he lacked oratorical ability. He was just a...he was a nobody and a nothing, wasn't very interesting. All he ever talked about was the cross. He wasn't clever in his speech and they were...they were, you know, worshipers of speech makers. And Paul was just not up to the standard. He was just...he just didn't fit the picture. He wasn't overpowering. He wasn't domineering. He wasn't preeminent. He wasn't successful. In fact, he was pretty much beaten up, battered and haggard. Didn't have particularly great communication skills and he was just in trouble all the time. And he was just...he's just a weak person, just didn't have the power of personality and charm persona to captivate people. Didn't have the style that it takes. Didn't understand the cultural hot buttons. Didn't know how to be relevant, just kept droning on about the cross, just a weak person.

You know what? Paul was weak. There's no question about that. He was weak. Chapter 1 starts talking about his afflictions, sorrows; chapter 2 he's crying; chapter 4 he gives a whole list of his suffering; chapter 6, another list of his suffering; chapter 7 talks about his depression; chapter 8 about more sorrow; chapter 10 about more suffering; chapter 11 a long list of suffering; chapter 12, more suffering, verses 7 to 10. Particularly verse 10; insults, distresses, persecutions, difficulties, all of that were forms of weakness. Verse 10 he says he was content with weakness. He was not only weak but he was content to be weak. First Corinthians 2:3, "I was with you in weakness. I planned it that way. I came to be weak. I am weak. I confess it." He calls himself a clay pot, remember that in chapter 4? He was weak. And that was part of their criticism. He just...he's just not impressive. He's just...he's just weak and he's always battered and beaten up and haggard and he keeps getting thrown in jail everywhere and he's got a lousy reputation. He's just a nothing. He's just weak.

Well he gives a tremendous analogy, brilliant analogy. Listen to this, verse 4, the middle of the verse, start with the word for, "For we also are weak in Him." We admit it, I admit it, I'm weak. I'm weak, I'm in Christ, I'm in Him, that is I'm in Christ, saved, redeemed, belong to Him but I'm weak. I admit it.

"Yet we shall live with Him." What does that mean? What does it mean we shall live with Him? Well what it means is that he's found spiritual life and it's eternal. He has found eternal life and it's eternal spiritual life and he found it because of the power of God. God in power came into his weakness and made him alive with spiritual life forever. And then it says in verse 4, "God directed that same power through him toward you."

Wow...what's he saying? He's saying, "Well, my weakness didn't stop the power of God, it facilitated it because there's no other explanation for my life than that it was the power of God because there's no human explanation. I'm too weak, too frail, too inept, too unimpressive to have pulled it off myself. Whatever has happened has been the power of God surging through my weakness."

Back to verse 9 of chapter 12, God said, "My grace is sufficient for you for power is perfected in weakness." God says power is perfected in weakness. Wow! "Most gladly therefore I will rather boast about my weaknesses that the power of Christ may dwell in me." That...that's the principle, God said I'll perfect My power through your weakness. Paul said, "I'm happy to be weak because in my weakness God's power came." It was in Paul's weakness and brokenness that he was redeemed. It was when he was going to Damascus a proud, confident, arrogant Jew persecuting Christians and he was crushed in the dirt and shattered and broken and dismantled and made blind and halting and stumbling he fell before God and in the midst of that weakness he was crushed into nothing and through that weakness God saved him and began to sanctify him and he became the great, great preacher...the greatest preacher ever next to the Lord Jesus Himself. His power was perfected in Paul's weakness from the beginning. And so when he went to Corinth he knew that he had to keep his posture weak so that the power of God could surge through him.

What does it mean to be weak? It just means to keep yourself out of the picture and just become a channel through which the power flows. You can't mingle yourself with it without somehow polluting the stream of pure power. So all the faithful preacher wants to do is put himself out of the way and let the power of God surge through the truth of God. And again I say, the church doesn't need less of

this, it needs so much more of it. So he says, "We're weak in Him." It's true. "Yet we have received spiritual life which is eternal because of the power of God that has come to us and through us as directed toward you." You've experienced it. You saw the miracles. You were saved. You're sanctified. And you're about to see some of it, too, if I find some sin there you'll see more of the power of God coming through.

And then he gives this really wonderful, wonderful analogy. The beginning of verse 4, "For indeed He was crucified because of weakness yet He lives because of the power of God." Well I mean, that is the end of the discussion right there. Who's He? Jesus. You're saying I'm too weak to be powerful, let me give you an analogy, I am weak that's why I'm powerful and so was Jesus. This is great. Indeed He was crucified because of weakness, or literally it could be in the Greek, He was crucified in weakness. The bottom line is that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is an unmistakable evidence of His weakness. I mean, He came into the world in the form of a servant, Philippians 2 says, He humbled Himself, came in the fashion of a man, became a servant. He lived a very humble life. But when He got to the cross you really began to see His weakness. Through His life you could see human weakness. He was weary. He was sad. He sorrowed. He was disappointed. He wept. But then He was betrayed and then He was taken before a court of Jews in a mock trial and blasphemed and then He was blasphemed by the Idumaeans and then He was blasphemed by the Romans in a mock of a trial before Pilate. And then He was treated with disdain and abuse and spit on and punched and poked and laughed at. And then He was crucified and then He died. And that is weakness. The supreme evidence of His weakness is His death. And Paul says, "Indeed, that's true," indeed meaning truly, that's true, "He was crucified because of weakness, yet He is alive because of the power of God."

What's that refer to? Resurrection, right? The resurrection. God raised Him from the dead. Romans 1:4 tells us God raised Him from the dead. The Lord Jesus was weak, He was so weak that His enemies defeated and executed Him in the most debasing humiliating and shameful manner possible. His human nature was so weak that it was fully susceptible to death. Yet He lives. Once weak in death He was made alive in power and He came out of that grave on the third day. His resurrection being the most monumental evidence and revelation of His power. So Jesus is the pattern. He was weak, weak all the way to death and yet He is alive because of the power of God which raised Him from the dead.

So Paul, he's weak, he's in fear and trembling, he suffers a lot, he lives with sorrow, pain and disappointment. He's been beaten and battered and rejected. Humanly he's not welcome. He's not ranked among the great preachers, their speakers and orators of his day. He says we're weak in Him yet we shall live with Him because of the power of God directed toward you. Like Christ it was Paul's weakness that God used to make him strong. The power of God came into his life, transformed him and surged through his life to transform the Corinthians. Paul says, "You question my authority? Wait till I get there. If you don't already have enough evidence of it, I'll give you some when I arrive."

Did he mean that he would come in and use some personal authority? No, he meant that he would come in and take the Word of God and apply it to the sin of that church with a firm hand. He would come like the Lord in the book of Revelation and fight against them with the sword of his mouth to purge his church. The next time he came it wouldn't be like the first time. Philip Hughes has a wonderful paragraph on that. He says, "The Apostle discerns an analogy between the smaller

localized setting of his relations with the Corinthian church and the cosmic drama in which his Master, Christ, is the chief actor. The weakness of the cross at Christ's first advent is to be followed by the manifested power of His majestic authority as King of Kings and Lord of Lords at His second advent when He will appear as the judge of the whole world." The first time Christ came He came in weakness, next time He comes He comes in power and judgment.

Hughes says, "When Christ comes again He will not spare. The two things go together in Him, the infinite patience of the cross, the inexorable righteousness of the throne. So too Paul who is one with his Master in the weakness of compassion and patience and long-suffering desiring the repentance of all is one with Him also in the power of authority and judgment. If his first visit appeared to be marked by weakness, the defiant ones in Corinth will find that his impending visit is marked by power," end quote. Great statement. It's like the second coming of Paul is going to be like the Second Coming of Jesus. If I have to, I'm not coming in weakness, I'm coming in power to deal with sin.

The church needs this authority. Our only authority is the Scripture and we're commanded to bring it clearly, compellingly with conviction and to call you to obey it that you may be blessed and Christ may be honored. The need of the church today is to repent, to discipline and to submit to the authority of God's Word. That's the issue. The faithful pastor is concerned that his people understand the authority with which he speaks is not his own, cannot be his own but is the authority of God. And ravished by the truth of God they should submit in glad submission knowing the blessings that attend that submission. More to say, but no more time. Next time there's another thing that concerns a faithful pastor, not just the repentance of his people, the discipline of his people and the submission of his people to divine authority, but the authenticity of his people and that's for next Lord's day. Join me in prayer.

This is such rich truth, Lord, and we thank You for it. We thank You for the depth with which Your Word speaks and yet its clear, easily understood so that we are convicted as to its personal application. Bring us, Lord, willingly, joyfully, gladly under submission to Your Word, help us to long for more of the authority of the Word to bring it to bear upon our hearts. Raise up more weak men who in their weakness can offer nothing but can be channels through which Your power may flow for Your strength indeed is perfected in our weakness. Bring your authority to bear on Your church through weak but faithful men and women and apply it in all our lives. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2017 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).