

(Through the Bible) 2 Corinthians 11-13

by Chuck Smith

In this sermon, Chuck Smith explores Paul's defense against false teachers in Corinth, emphasizing the importance of grace and the simplicity of the Gospel.

Duration: 1:18:35

Scripture: Romans 12:12, 2 Corinthians 11:24-28, 2 Corinthians 11:30-33, Galatians 1:6-9, 1 Peter 5:7

Topics: "Heavenly Hope", "Christian Commitment"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the indescribable beauty of heaven and the experiences of the apostle Paul. He shares a story of a blind girl who regained her sight and was overwhelmed by the beauty of the world. The speaker emphasizes that our limited understanding of heaven leads us to grieve for those who have passed away, but we should instead rejoice for them. He admires Paul's commitment and sacrifices in spreading the gospel, highlighting the hardships he endured. The speaker encourages the audience to learn from Paul's example and strive for a deeper commitment to God.

Transcript

Let's turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 11. Paul's authority as an apostle has been challenged in the Corinthian church by certain Jewish teachers who had come in behind Paul as they so often did, seeking to put the people under the bondage of legalism. Knowing Paul as we do, we know the emphasis of his ministry was the grace of God.

And there were those who really could not handle the grace of God as Paul taught it. And they would come in following Paul and try to discredit Paul. And they would seek to, as I said, put the people under legalism.

Saying that you could not be a Christian unless you were circumcised and were obedient to the law of Moses. And they espoused a righteousness through works, which Paul disdained. Preaching the righteousness which is through the faith of Jesus Christ.

And so in order to bolster their own position among the people, they would seek to tear down Paul. Now Paul was the one that founded the church. Paul went out and did the groundwork.

He was the one who went into a heathen, pagan city and shared Christ with them and brought the people into the glorious knowledge of Jesus Christ. These men were parasites. They would come in after Paul

and seek to profit off of Paul's work, bringing the people into bondage.

So they would bolster themselves. They said, we're real Jews. Paul isn't a real Jew.

We're the real Hebrews. We're the real Israelites. And the rabbis in those days would often yell at their students and if they thought they weren't getting a point, they would start slapping them in the face.

And evidently some of these fellows were following some of the typical rabbi customs. For Paul will get to that in a moment as he talks about his ministry and the difference between his ministry and those who came in after him. Now having put Paul down, trying to destroy Paul's credibility, Paul feels that it is necessary that he reestablish his credibility, though it shouldn't be necessary.

That he should answer some of the charges that these persons had made against him and against his own character. And so Paul says, I wish that you could bear with my folly for just a moment and he talks about this boasting as folly. This boasting of the things that he endured for Christ.

It was forced upon him. He really didn't delight in waving his own banner. But it was something that was necessary because of the way that these false teachers were trying to build their own stock by tearing Paul down.

So, I wish that you would bear with my folly, Paul said, and indeed bear with me. So he makes a presumptive close here. I wish you would do it.

For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy. For I have espoused you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. Now, marriage in those days was by arrangement.

And the parents would get together and say, you know, you've got a pretty daughter, I've got a handsome son, why don't we marry your son and my son and your daughter. There were three aspects to marriage. There was first of all the engagement.

Now this could take place as early as three or four years old. You have friends, been friends for a long time. They've got a little girl, you've got a little boy.

Well, why don't we marry them off when they get old enough. They're engaged to each other. So little kids in kindergarten, who are you engaged to, you know.

As they grew up and the time came for them to get married, a year before the marriage, they would enter into an espousal, which was a total commitment, much as marriage. It was necessary to get a divorce from an espousal. However, the marriage was not consummated until the marriage ceremony.

It was during this year of espousal that Mary conceived of the Holy Spirit, the child Christ. That's why it was such a problem with Joseph. Now, the espousal lasted for one year and was more equivalent to our engagement period today, where the commitment has been made, but not yet consummated.

And then of course, the seven day wedding ceremony and the conclusion of the seven day wedding ceremony, the consummation of the marriage. So, Paul is talking now as a father. And I have espoused you.

I'm your spiritual father. You came to know Jesus Christ through my ministry among you. I have a jealousy for you, like a father has for his own child, for his own daughter.

And I have espoused you unto Jesus Christ and it is my desire to present you unto Him a chaste virgin. They had some interesting customs with their marriage. When the marriage was consummated, then they would have to show what they called the tokens of virginity.

The father would keep this as proof in years to come that his daughter was a virgin. It was an extremely important thing. In fact, just the other day in Israel, a girl was put to death by her family because she had relations with a boy before she was married.

And the family honors was at stake and they put the daughter to death. It's a Bedouin tribe. They're carrying on the old customs from way back.

And it's very severe. And the Bedouins still practice this today. If a girl is not a virgin when she is married, then that comes back on the family, the honor of the family and the father, because it's the father's responsibility to make sure that she remains a virgin until the time of her marriage.

And I mean, they take that as an awesome kind of a responsibility and an honor thing. And to them, that is so very important. And so, Paul says, Hey, I'm like a father.

I'm jealous for you. My desire is that I present you unto Jesus, unto Christ, as a chaste virgin. Don't want you corrupted by these other teachings and by these other teachers being led away into another Jesus, another gospel.

I've sought to keep it pure. I've sought to keep you pure in the gospel of Jesus Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, even as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your mind should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

It is so difficult to keep the gospel simple. There are always men who are wanting to complicate it. And all you have to do is go around and look at the way men have complicated the gospel.

A couple of weeks ago on Sunday morning, I was standing in the old city of Jerusalem just inside the Jaffa Gate and we were haggling with one of the shopkeepers there. And I heard this karoom, karoom, karoom. And naturally I looked up to see what was going on.

And here's this solemn looking guy. Looked like, man, he had a sour stomach or something. I mean, just looked awesome.

Fierce. Sour. Had this golden cane.

Big red hat on top of his head. Black robe. Walking down this little narrow street there in Jerusalem, the old city.

Taking this cane and popping it on the rock sidewalk as he was coming down. Kapom, kapom, kapom. And behind him, these guys in their black robes and black hats and all looking just very somber, sober, marching in cadence to this karoom, karoom, karoom.

And here they're marching to church. They're going to officiate in the services. And the shopkeeper said, well, there go the Christians to church this morning.

Sour, mean looking, fierce, awesome things. The guys were walking four abreast and in a line of about, oh, I suppose there's four lines, four abreast. Everyone just, you know, and this guy, kapom, kapom.

And there go the Christians. Well, my feeling was if that's Christianity, I don't want any. They've made it so complicated.

You know, you've got to approach Christ this complicated way. But Paul said, oh, I'm jealous for you. I wanted to present you in just the purity.

I'm fearful lest someone has taken away from you the beautiful simplicity that is in Christ. Wherever we start to create our religious systems, begin to create our hierarchies, I want to show man that I'm higher than you. So I wear a particular colored robe.

And my robe shows that, hey, I've got one on you. You know, I'm one above you. And so I try to, I want everybody to know how godly and important I am, you know.

And so we start making these degrees and these systems and we get so far removed from the simplicity that is in Christ. How I love kindergarten. How I love to go and sit in the classroom and just listen to the little children talk about God.

The simplicity of their faith. The simplicity and the openness of their love. Oh, their theology may be mixed up a little bit.

On the first morning when the voice came over the speaker in the kindergarten class, they're all sitting there and suddenly the voice on the speaker says, Attention please! One little kid says, Is that God? But oh, how I love the simplicity. I'm thankful that God made me a simple person. Not all complex.

Paul had a great fear that these people were coming in and laying all kinds of regulations. All kinds of rules. And hey, the other day in Israel we were sitting in a restaurant and in the corner there was this silver bowl with a little silver ladle and all.

And this fellow came in and he went over there and he took the thing and he washed it. And if you don't do it the right way and the right number of times and the right way and all, then you're not really clean. You just can't go in and take soap and water and wash your hands and dry it on a towel.

That's not clean. You've got to get into this little routine of doing it just a particular way. And so here were these beautiful, simple babes in Christ in Corinth.

They were trusting and believing in Jesus Christ, loving the Lord, having a glorious time, and then these teachers come in and start laying all kinds of rules on them, all kinds of regulations, and taking them away from the simplicity that is in Corinth. For if he that comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another Spirit which ye have not received, or another Gospel which you have not accepted, ye might well bear with him. Preaching another Jesus.

Preaching another Gospel. There are a lot of people who have taken the terminology and redefined it in order to confuse and deceive. For instance, the Mormons talk about their faith in Jesus Christ.

Their belief that He is the Son of God. That He died for their sins. That He is their Savior.

And to listen to them talk, you would say, well, we believe the same thing. However, the Jesus that they believe in was the brother of Lucifer. And they believe that God desired to redeem the world, and so He had a divine counsel, and Lucifer came up with a plan of redemption.

And His brother Jesus also came up with a plan of redemption. And the Father chose the plan of Jesus over Lucifer, and that made Him so mad He came down to disrupt the whole plan of redemption that Jesus had. And this is even worked out in pageantry within their ceremonies within the temple.

This big argument between Jesus and His brother Lucifer over the redemptive plan. Well, that's another Jesus than the Bible speaks about who is the only begotten Son of God. So you've got talking about Jesus, but what Jesus is it? You talk about God, but what God is it? When you're talking about God, are you talking about Adam, who Brigham Young said is our only God with whom we have to do? The one who impregnated Eve? Now, the Mormons today really disclaim, and it should be declared that they do disclaim Brigham Young's Adam-God theory.

They disclaim that, and it's only honest to admit that they disclaim the Adam-God theory. They do not disclaim Jesus, the brother of Lucifer. But the interesting thing is they don't realize that Brigham Young was actually following basic Mormon doctrine when he declared that Adam was our God.

Four, what is the goal of the Mormon? If you're faithful, if your marriage is sealed in the temple, you remain a faithful Mormon, you and your wife will become gods, and you will have your own planet, and you'll be able to go out and populate your own planet, begin your own experiment, and you can oversee your own planet, and you will be the god over that planet, and we other nice people will be your angels and have to wait upon you and take care of the menial details. That's Mormon doctrine. The ascension to godhood.

Now, what did Brigham Young do? He took the doctrine one step backwards. In other words, why should we believe that it only started 6,000 years ago with Adam and Eve? You see, Adam was a good, faithful Mormon on another planet somewhere. He and his wife were sealed in marriage, and so he came with one of his celestial wives, Eve, and they began to populate the earth.

And Brigham Young only took the Mormon doctrine one step backwards. They're abhorred at the thought Adam is our god, but it's only their very doctrine that they espouse taking back a step instead of forward a step. Brigham Young was just going back.

You see, all of us are progressing, if we are Mormons, into godhead or into godhood. Becoming gods. It seems to me that I remember someplace elsewhere, someone was told that they would become a god if they would only eat the fruit that God said don't.

Preaching another Jesus. Coming by subtlety. Leading them away from the simplicity in Christ.

So, Paul said, I suppose I was not a wit behind the very chiefest apostles. In other words, I really don't have to take a second seat to anybody. They had accused Paul of being rude in his speech.

His speech, they said, is contemptible. He writes powerful letters, but his speech is contemptible. His presence is, you know, he's a puny little runt.

So, he said, though I am rude in speech, yet I'm not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things. In other words, I've been wide open with you folks.

I have not been clever and tried to hide things and live a double standard. Have I committed an offense in abasing myself that you might be exalted? I didn't come in as some big shot. I didn't come in, you know, with apostolic authority and ordering people around and all.

I came in as a servant. I came in just, you know, in simplicity of speech and manner and all, though I'm not in knowledge. I know better, but deliberately I was that way among you.

I didn't exalt myself. Have I committed an offense in abasing myself that you might be exalted? Because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely. Now, the thing was, while Paul was in Corinth, he refused to take an offering.

He did not allow them to support him. His support came, some of it, from the church in Philippi who sent offerings down to him. And when there was a need, he went out and worked as a tent maker to supply the needs.

So he said, hey, just because I didn't take your money, I didn't rip you off. You see, these guys that were coming in, these teachers that were coming in, putting Paul down, they were ripping the people off financially. They had all kinds of give me gimmicks.

And just fleecing the flock of God. And yet, putting Paul down. Paul said, I robbed other churches taking the wages from them in order to serve you.

Now, he doesn't mean literally robbed the other churches, but he was receiving offerings that they had sent to him to support himself while he was ministering to those in Corinth. And when I was present with you and I was in need, I was not chargeable to any man for that which was lacking to me, the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied, and in all things I've kept myself from being a burden to you, and so I will keep myself. As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting in the regions of Achaia.

You can't say that I came down there and laid a heavy I need help trip on you. That I came down there to fleece you. That I came down to take advantage of you.

Because I didn't receive anything from you. Wherefore, why is this? Because I love you not. Oh, come on.

God knows, Paul says. But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off the occasion from them which desire or are looking for an occasion. That wherein they glory, they may be found even as I am.

In other words, I've done this and those that are speaking against me, I'd like to see them do the same thing. You know, if they're really hot shot apostles like they say they are. If they're really all they say, let them do like I did.

Let them not take anything from you. See how long they'll stick around if you don't support them anymore. See where the real love is.

You know, cut off their support. For such are false apostles. They are deceitful workers.

They transform themselves into the apostles of Christ. But that's no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light, and therefore it's no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness whose end shall be according to their works. So these guys coming in with all these, you know, big put-on kind of stuff, acting so spiritual, acting so godly and all of this.

I received a call yesterday, sort of a desperate call from Guatemala. Some guy has gone down there from the United States with this manifestation of Sons of God doctrine. And he's introduced it and some of the churches are just being ripped apart by this pernicious doctrine.

The doctrine basically declares that we are going to be manifested as the Sons of God and that is what the Second Coming of Jesus is. He's not really coming literally, but he's coming in the church and will be manifested through the church and we will be the manifested Sons of God. We are the Second Coming of Christ.

As soon as we be manifested in glorious power and, you know, we're suddenly going to be supercharged, super saints, and we're going to take over the world and it has a lot of ego, kind of prideful kind of stuff involved. You know, hey, you're, you know, which country you want to rule, you know. And, you know, you're going to be dynamic and you're going to be powerful and you're going to be manifested and the whole world is going to bow to you because they'll see that you are indeed, you know, the Son of God and all this kind of stuff and the world is waiting for your manifestation and all we have to do is get perfect and then we can be manifested.

Oh, well, that puts it off for a while, doesn't it? If you want to know one of the first ones in this area who began teaching that, he is on Channel 56 every once in a while. He's got a golden altar and a big crown and all. His name is Oil Jagers.

He's the one that began the teaching of the Manifested Sons of God and there you see one of the manifestations. To me, it's an abomination, not a manifestation. So they come on, angels of, you know, as ministers of light, apostles and all, but Paul said, no big deal, Satan himself transforms himself or comes on as an angel of light in order to deceive, so that his ministers do.

It's no big deal. I say again, don't think that I'm a fool, but if you want to continue thinking that, then accept me as a fool. But I want to boast just a little bit about myself.

You forced me to do it, so I will. Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I'll glory also. For you have allowed these fools gladly, seeing that you are so wise.

I mean, well, he's got them now. You know, you've been taken, you've been taken in. You've been a sucker.

These guys have taken you in. You're so wise, you know. And you've allowed these fools.

For you allow these men to bring you into bondage. If a man devours you, if a man takes from you, and here they were ripping him off. If a man exalts himself, if he hits you in the face, listen to me, man, you know.

Give me your wallet, you know. These guys you're accepting. You're sucking.

You're suckers. You're being taken in by them. Paul said, I speak as concerning reproach as though we had been weak, albeit whereinsoever any is bold, and I am speaking foolishly.

Hey, these guys are bold. I'm bold also. These guys, are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they the ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool.

I am more. In labors more abundant. In stripes above measure.

In prisons more frequent. In deaths or facing death many times. Of the Jews five times, I received forty stripes save one.

Thrice I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I suffered a shipwreck.

A night and a day I've been out in the ocean. In journeyings often. In perils of waters.

In perils of robbers. In perils of 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 in thirst. And in fastings often. In cold and in nakedness.

Beside those things that are without which cometh upon me daily the care of all the churches. Who is weak? I'm not weak. Who is offended? Hey, I don't burn.

If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern my weaknesses. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed forevermore, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus, the governor under Aretas, the king, kept the city of Damascus with a garrison desiring to arrest me and they let me out through a window in a basket and I was let down by the wall and I escaped out of their hands.

Now, this shows how incomplete is the record of the book of Acts. For Paul was writing this epistle to the Corinthians from Ephesus at the time in the book of Acts of the 19th chapter. And by the time you get to the 19th chapter, only about three of these things that Paul has listed or mentioned.

But all of these things happened before the 19th chapter of Acts. So, you see how incomplete the record of Acts actually is. It just sort of hit highlights.

Paul is giving you a little more of the things that he went through. It tells us a little bit of what Paul told us of the stoning at Lystra and a few of these things. But, man, what this guy went through to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with people who have never heard.

You think that you've really done something for the Lord, huh? You've really sacrificed for God. You've really made a commitment. Hey, look at this guy.

I love Paul. In fact, he's one of the first guys I'm going to look up when I get there. I'm not just going to go up and introduce myself.

I'm just going to go up and stand around and listen for a while to this guy. I'm anxious to meet him. He's been sort of a role model for me.

However, I haven't come anywhere. I mean, I don't even belong in the same league. I'm Bush league.

This guy's a major leader. What commitment? Forced, really, to share these things. If it had not happened, we wouldn't have known all these things about Paul.

But he felt it necessary. These guys were saying, Hey, we're Jews. We're this, we're that.

And Paul said, hey, they think there's something. I've got them beat hands down. If that's what you're looking for.

It is not necessary for me to glory, but I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. Now, I knew a man in Christ about 14 years ago or over 14 years ago. And whether in the body, I cannot tell or whether out of the body, I cannot tell.

God knows. But such a one was caught up to the third heaven. Now, I've heard preachers talk about Paul's out of the body experience.

And they said that he had one of these out of the body experiences. Well, that's interesting that they know that Paul didn't know himself and it happened to him. Paul said, I really don't know if I was in the body or out of the body.

Now, if you go back 14 years, you come back to Paul's stoning at Lystra. And it is possibly this very experience that Paul is talking about. You remember that they stoned Paul at Lystra and they drug him out of the city thinking that he was dead and his friends stood around him weeping.

They thought, oh, poor old Paul. He's had it, you know. His limp body lying there and the guys had gone home who threw the stones.

They said, hey, we've killed him. We got rid of that guy now. And his friends are there crying.

And suddenly, Paul's eyes begin to flutter and he gets up and he says, hey, let's go back and preach. Paul, you've got to be crazy. Now, it is possible that Paul actually was dead and that his spirit was taken up into heaven at that point.

And it could be that he is referring, it was about 14 years, a little over 14 years before he had written this epistle, that he says, I knew this man in Christ just a little over 14 years ago. And whether he was in the body or out of the body, I don't know. Whether or not I was actually dead or alive is what he is declaring.

I may have been dead and actually had an out-of-body experience. I know that my spirit went into heaven. I don't know if I was really dead or alive.

I don't know that. But I know that my spirit went into heaven. Now, it brings up an interesting point.

The fact that Paul didn't know if he were dead or alive, but he did know that his spirit was in heaven consciously there hearing things that were so glorious it would be a crime to try to describe them. Shows that the spirit immediately is there in a conscious state in heaven when you are dead. Paul said, I don't know if I was dead or alive.

If at death you went into a slumber state, then Paul said, well, I had a glorious vision. I couldn't have been dead because I knew what was going on. But in reality he is saying, I don't know if I was dead or alive.

What I do know is I was caught up to the third heaven. Whether in the body or out of the body, I don't know. But I do know I was caught up.

And I knew such a man, whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell, God knows, how that he was caught up into paradise. Remember Jesus said, today you will be with me in paradise. And I heard unspeakable words which is not lawful for a man to utter or which is more literally a crime to try to describe.

There is no language. There are no words that can describe the experiences that I had. I read once of a little girl who was blind, but the problem was not irreparable.

And a great physician performed a series of operations on her eyes. And they were taking the bandages off slowly, a few at a time to allow more light to penetrate to the optic nerves until finally they took off the last bandages. And the little girl sitting there on her mother's lap as the bandages were removed looked around for the first time could see her mother's face, the doctor's face, the room.

She got off of her mother's lap, walked over to the window, looked outside, saw the blue sky, the green grass, the flowers, the trees, the children playing. She burst into tears, came running back to her mother, fell into her arms sobbing. Her mother said, what's happened? What's wrong? She said, oh mommy, why did you tell me it was this beautiful? She said, well sweetheart, I tried, but it's just hard to describe in words the colors, the clouds, the sky.

I did my best. When we get to heaven, we'll go up to Paul and say, Paul, you were here, why didn't you tell us it was this beautiful? I told you, man. It would be a crime to try and describe it.

There are no words that can describe the glory, the beauty. You know, it's because of our misconception of heaven or lack of faith that we grieve over the Christians who died. Oh, what a shame.

He had his whole life in front of him, you know. He was so young. What a shame.

Oh, oh. What a blessing. He doesn't have to go through this cruddy world.

You know, if you really understood heaven, the glories that we should weep over someone's gone, no, weep for yourself, because you're still around. But don't weep for them. That's foolishness.

Caught up in the paradise. I heard these things, these words. It would be a crime to try and utter them.

And of such a one will I glory, yet not of myself, but in my weaknesses. For though I would desire to glory, I will not be a fool, for I will tell you the truth. But now I'm holding back, lest any man should think of me above that which he sees me to be or that which he hears of me.

I don't want you to think, I don't want you to think that I'm something or somebody. Because God has done all of this for me that I'm something special. Paul wasn't trying to elevate himself in their eyes.

He was forced to just defend his place because the truth that he proclaimed was being challenged. And that's the only reason why he was declaring these things to them because the truth was standing in jeopardy. But he said, I'll tell you what I really glory, and I glory in my weaknesses.

Unless I should be exalted above measure because of the abundance of revelations there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. So Paul here now makes reference to this thorn in the flesh and the Greek word is actually a stake or a tent stake. Now, when those Bedouins set up their tents, which incidentally is the job of the woman.

The men don't even know how to handle them. They don't know how to set a tent up. They can make good coffee, but they don't know anything about setting up a tent.

That's a woman's job. Women have to take down the tents, carry the tents, and set up the tents when the guy decides to move a bit. Of course, he has to determine when it's time to move.

That's his job. Not enough green grass here for our sheep. We better move along, you know.

And he determines where they'll pitch the tent. But then it's the woman's job. But out there in the wilderness, I mean, they really get some good howling winds, so they take these tent stakes, about 18 inches long or so, and they drive these tent stakes in to hold the tents against those desert winds.

Paul said, there was this tent stake in my flesh. Man, a spike near this stake, really. Not a thorn, not a little irritant.

Hey, this thing was really major. There was given to me. Interesting statement.

Now I'm sure that as Paul was praying that it be removed, he didn't know that it was given to him. That's something he discovered in prayer. This thorn in his flesh, whatever it is, and God doesn't tell us what it is, and I think that that is deliberate, that it wasn't told us what the thorn in the flesh was.

There are hints. There are those who have made their guesses. Some believe it was an oriental eye disease that made Paul very repulsive to look at.

Some believe that it was malaria fever, a special form that they have around Asia there that so incapacitated him and left him with constant migraine headaches. There have been all kinds of guesses, but we don't know. The Scripture is silent, and so it's only guesswork.

And really, you're better off if the Scripture is silent, that you remain silent. I believe that God deliberately didn't let us know what his thorn in the flesh was because any of us who have any thorn in the flesh can relate to Paul and relate to his experience. You see, if we knew exactly what it was, we'd say, well, that's Paul, but mine's different.

God could do it for Paul, but you see, mine is so different than Paul's. The fact that we don't know, we can all relate to it because it was a bothersome thing. It was a painful thing.

It was a weakness. He calls it an infirmity, and we have the word infirmity, infirmity. They're both the same root.

An infirmity is a hospital, a place where the sick people are taken. And so Paul talks about this infirmity, a weakness, an ailment, whatever it was. There was this messenger of Satan buffeting him, but Paul discovered that there was given unto me.

In other words, he discovered that there was a divine purpose for it. It was something that God had allowed in his life. Now, three times Paul said, I sought God, that he would remove it.

Asking God to take away that very thing that God had brought to him, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness. So, Paul came by the Spirit to a totally new attitude towards this thorn in his flesh.

Where at one time he was praying to be delivered. No longer was he praying to be delivered, but now he speaks about, I glory in it. Therefore, I will glory in this weakness.

Because God's strength is made perfect in my weakness, I will glory in the weakness that God's power might be manifested in my life. And then he says, I take pleasure in this weakness. In the reproaches, in the necessities, in the persecutions, in the distresses for Christ's sake.

For when I am weak, then I am strong. Why? Because I am now experiencing God's strength. So, the way that Paul dealt with the thorn in the flesh.

You see, God didn't answer his prayer as he prayed it. Because God is sovereign. God doesn't have to answer my prayers as I pray them.

God is not a genie. He isn't there to fulfill three wishes. He isn't there to bow to my demands.

I'm not running the universe. And if I have good sense, I won't even seek to run my own life. But I will commit the keeping of my life to Him.

I will commit my destiny to Him. I will seek His guidance and His direction. A man is a fool who tries to direct God to condescend to his will, to his demands.

What do I know? What do I understand of the things that are going on around me? I see such a minuscule part of the total picture. I have been so mistaken in my judgment on issues because I didn't know the whole truth. And when I knew the whole truth, I was so embarrassed by what I said.

Oh, look what I did. Do you know what I did? Now I found out the whole truth. I told that guy off.

I told him how stupid he is. And he's the judge I have to face next week. Man, if I'd only known! And so here I am, so limited in my understanding.

I'm saying, alright, now God, this is what I want You to do. And if You want me to keep serving You, You better do it. I won't believe in You anymore.

If You don't come through on this one, Lord, forget me. And here we're trying to twist God's arm and force God and cause God to bend to our wills. Paul prayed.

He got an answer. It wasn't the answer that he was praying for. Many times this is true.

God doesn't give us what we ask for because He has something better. And what God had for Paul was a greater revelation of Himself. Paul, no matter what you're going through, my grace is sufficient for you.

I'm going to see you through, Paul. My grace is sufficient for you. And my strength will be made perfect in your weakness.

Now, you see, this new revelation gave Paul a totally new attitude towards the thorn. Rather than complaining and griping and saying, oh God, take it away! God, remove this thing! He says, alright, glory in that thorn. Because through it, I've come to a deeper relationship with God where I know more of His power in my life than I've ever known before.

A messenger of Satan to buffet me, but God has turned it into an instrument of His to bring me into a greater experience of God's power working in my life. And so I take pleasure in this weakness. Because when I am weak, then I'm really strong.

The changed attitude that came to Paul through prayer. And many times that's the greatest effect of prayer. And the greatest answer to prayer is not the taking us out of the circumstance, but God's all-sufficient grace taking us through the circumstance with great victory in our hearts.

A far greater witness to the world that if in going through this trial, in going through it, that I maintain a happy, joyful spirit of victory in my heart. That's a far greater witness than if I forced God to come to my rescue and save me out of this dilemma. Paul said, I've become a fool in glorying, but You forced me to do it.

For really, all the while, You should be commending me. You're forcing me to commend myself. But I should have been commended by You.

For in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I am nothing. Interesting, isn't it? Hey, I'm not behind any of those chief apostles, but I'm nothing. God help us to realize that.

We're all nothing. And when you think you're something, then you've deceived yourself, and you're in a dangerous position. When you begin to think that you are something.

God said, My grace is sufficient for you, Paul. Whatever God does for you, He does on the basis of His grace. Not because you deserve it, but because He is so loving and kind.

And thus, each of us can experience the all-sufficient grace of God. Because none of us deserve it. It gives God the opportunity to work.

Truly, the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in the signs and in the wonders and in the mighty deeds. Now, Paul here declares that a mark of the apostle was really the gift of miracles. There were signs and wonders and mighty deeds.

This was a part of the credentials, you might say, of an apostle in those days. That's one of the things that they look for in an apostle, that they have these mighty deeds wrought through their ministry. For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except it be that I Myself was not a burden to you? Forgive me, that's wrong.

The only thing that you were inferior to other churches is that you didn't give any money. I mean, you didn't support me. So forgive me, that's wrong.

But behold, I'm going to come to you the third time. And I won't be a burden to you this time either. For I do not seek what you have, but I seek you.

I love that. I'm not here because I'm wanting to be enriched. I'm here because I love you.

I don't want your possessions. I want you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children.

You know, I shouldn't be inheriting from my kids. They should be inheriting from me. I should be laying up for them.

I shouldn't go and say, Hey son, I really need some help this week. Can you help old man out, you know? They do. They follow this.

They believe this scripture. They come and say, Dad, can you help me out? That's the way it should be, and I love it. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you.

I love that. Don't you love this attitude of Paul towards him? Hey, I don't want what you've got. I want you.

And I'm glad to spend and be spent for you. As a parent, I want to lay up for you. You don't need to lay up anything for me.

I will very gladly spend and be spent for you. Though it's interesting, there's a paradox. The more I love you, the less it seems that you love me, the less that I'd be loved.

But be that so, I did not burden you. Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile. Now, did I seek to make gain of you by any of those that I sent to you? I desired that Titus, with a brother, come to you.

Did Titus take advantage of you, make gain of you? Did he not walk in the same spirit? Did we not walk in the same steps? Again, think ye that we are excusing ourselves unto you. We speak before God in Christ, but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying. We are there and our desire is to build you up.

Our whole purpose is to build you up. You know, there is a subtle philosophy of ministry that is extremely important. And many people don't catch it.

You know, there are many people that come here from all over the world to discover the secret of Calvary Chapel. They want to, you know, find the secret and go back and do the same thing in their communities. And they sit for a couple services and they get hold of Romaine and say, what's your secret? And he says, we don't have any.

Oh, come on. You know, you can tell us. There is a subtle thing here, though.

People usually don't catch it. But Paul mentions it here. There are many ministries that exist for the purpose of being ministered to.

There are many radio programs that exist for the purpose of being ministered to. Now, folks, we want you to write in this week. We need your help.

And we're going to be going off the air if you don't support this ministry. This ministry is supported by God's people. And they're always presenting their needs and they're seeking to get you to minister to their needs.

And they exist to be ministered to by the people. That was not Paul's ministry. Paul's whole purpose was to minister to the people.

Not to take from them, but to give to them. And so that is the philosophy upon which we founded Calvary Chapel. To give to the people, to minister to the people, not to seek to be ministered to by the people.

And that is why you are never asked to give. We give you the opportunity if you so desire to give. And we say the ushers will come forward and receive.

But we don't say, now folks, we ask you not to give from the top of your purse, but from the bottom of your heart. And all these clichés. We don't do that kind of stuff.

It's there. If you can give cheerfully and hilariously, fine. If not, keep it.

And we're very open with this. Because we are not here to be ministered to. We're here to minister.

We're not here to receive. We're here to give. And that's the basic philosophy behind the ministry.

And it was borrowed from Paul. We seek to build you up. For I fear that when I come, Paul says, I'm not going to find you.

I'm coming again this third time, and I'm afraid that I'm not going to find you like I would like to find you. And I'm afraid that you're going to find me, not what you would like to see. Lest there be debates, envyings, wraths and strifes and backbitings and whisperings and swellings and tumults.

Unless when I come again, my God will humble me among you and that I shall be well many which have sinned already and not repented of the uncleanness and the fornication and the lasciviousness that they have committed. Paul is saying, I'm afraid that when I come, if things aren't straightened up, that I'm going to really be bewailing you because God's going to wipe some of you out. Actually, what he's declaring.

He's talking about some of them will actually be like Ananias and Sapphira. You remember how God struck them dead? And Paul is warning the Corinthians, unless you clean up your act, I'm afraid that I'm going to be standing at your funerals. That the power of God's Spirit working through my ministry and my life will really come down heavy and hard and some of you will die.

Several years ago, we were approached by our supervisor to take a pastorate out in the Chino area, which we were rather reluctant to do. It was a large church, but the pastor who had been there who had founded the church had gotten into some moral improprieties and had to leave. The people were shattered.

And the supervisor wanted me to go out and to take that church and try to pull it together. And so, we went out and we spoke at the church. And other pastors went and spoke at the church.

And the church was then to vote upon receiving a pastor. And I told the supervisor that I didn't think that I was interested. I had a smaller church, but I enjoyed being where I was and the ministry I had to those people.

And yet, in my heart, I sort of felt that God was asking me to go there. That that was really God's will, but I was trying to fight it because I didn't necessarily care for the area to live, and I enjoyed living where I was at the time. So, they were to have a church membership meeting and to vote, and the supervisor said, Well, would it be alright with you if I left your name on the ballot as they vote for their pastor? Would it be alright with you if I left your name on the ballot? I said, Well, as long as I don't have to go, you know, I still have the option of not going.

He said, Yeah, I won't force you to go, but I'd like to have your name on the ballot. So, I said to my wife, I said, You know, we'll put a fleece out to the Lord, and if, on the first ballot, the church would vote unanimously to have me as their pastor, then we'll know it's God's will that I go. I figured I was, you know, covering my bases and sort of a cheating kind of a thing, but I didn't really want to go in my heart, but yet I felt, you know, that God was saying go.

So, we received a phone call from the chairman of the board, and he said, Pastor Smith, he said, the church voted tonight for their new pastor, and on the first ballot, they voted unanimously to ask you to come as their pastor. And I said, Are you sure it was unanimous? He said, Yes. I said to Kay, What do we do now? She said, Well, it looks like we better go.

So, we prepared to go out there. Well, the Wednesday night, before we were to start on a Sunday, there was a lady in the church who decided to get a group of people together to support the pastor who had to leave because of the moral improprieties and to try to block our coming. And so, she had started this little

undercurrent in the church, started calling people and started this undercurrent in the church against us.

That Wednesday evening, prior to our going on Sunday, she was struck by a car and killed. A very interesting thing because I definitely believe it was a situation like with Paul. I don't want to be grieving over you, you know, if I come and find you in these conditions and I find myself really grieving over you.

God will deal severely if He has to with His church and for His church. And on other occasions, we have had things like this happen. Now, not that I'm a Paul or that I'm anything, but it's God's work and a person who dares to lay their hand against God's work is really putting himself in a very precarious position.

I wouldn't dare touch the work of God. I could relate other similar stories that we have seen. But a person who takes upon himself to touch the work of God is putting himself in a very precarious position.

And Paul is warning them of this. Now, he said, This is the third time I'm going to come to you. And in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.

For I told you before, and I'm telling you again as though I was present with you, the second time, and now being absent, I'm writing to them, which heretofore have sinned, and to all of the others, that when I come again, I'm not going to spare. I'm going to be really hard on you this next time. Since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you, word, is not weak, but is mighty in you, for though He was crucified through weakness, yet He lives by the power of God, and we also are weak in Him, but we will live with Him by the power of God toward you, so you better examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith.

I mean, Paul is saying, Look, I'm going to come, and it's going to be heavy. I'm going to come, not in weakness, but in the power of God's Spirit to deal with the issues that are there in Corinth. And so you better examine yourselves, because this is going to be a heavy-duty thing when I arrive.

You remember when Paul was on the aisle and ministering to the governor, Sergius Paulus, and the guy was listening and very interested, and this sorcerer, Elymas, started to say things against Paul, and Paul turned and said, God smite you with blindness, man! And immediately the guy was blind. And everybody feared. They said, Wow, what kind of a preacher is this? And they gave greater attendance to the Lord.

But Paul says, Hey, when I'm coming, I'm coming in power. Even Christ was crucified in weakness, but He was raised in power. And I'm weak in Christ, but hey, I'm coming in the power.

And so you better examine yourself to see if you be in the faith and prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves how that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless you're a reprobate. But I trust that you will know that we're not reprobates.

Now I pray to God that you do no evil. Not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates, or you consider us as reprobates. For we can do nothing against the truth, but only for the truth.

For we are glad when we are weak, and you are strong. And this also we wish. I desire your perfection.

Isn't that glorious? Here the guys are giving Paul a bad time, speaking against them all, and yet his heart towards them is that they might be perfected. He's longing. He said, I wish that you were strong and I was weak.

I desire your perfection. Therefore, I am writing these things still absent, lest when I am present, I should use sharpness according to the power which the Lord has given to me to edify and not to destroy. I don't want to come with the power of destruction.

I want to come and build you up. Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect.

Okay. The word there is fully matured. Grow up.

Be of good comfort. Be of one mind. Live in peace.

And the God of love and peace shall be with you. So these beautiful little exhortations of Paul. Be fully matured.

Be of good comfort. Be of one mind. Live in peace.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. In some of the churches in the eastern part of the world, in Greece and all the Italy, you know, you go in and the guys will kiss you on each cheek, you know. They still practice that in the church of greeting one another with a holy kiss.

You walk in and they, ah, arrivederci, you know. Brethren, I can't quite handle it, but all the saints salute you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Notice the, ah, trinity here in Paul's benediction. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. So Paul joins the Father, Son, and Spirit in this benediction to the Corinthian epistle.

Shall we pray? Thank you, Father, for your Word, a lamp to our feet, a light to our path. May we walk in His truth. Help us, Father, help us to grow, help us to become fully matured.

Help us, Lord, to walk in unity, to walk in love, to live in peace. Help us, Father, to experience your all-sufficient grace so that we will learn, Lord, to rejoice in tribulation, for we know that it works patience. Patience, experience, and experience hope, Lord, that we might realize that you are in control of those circumstances by which we are surrounded.

And so we just commit the keeping of our souls to you through Jesus. Amen. Next week, the first two chapters of Galatians.

As we move along, it just gets gooder and gooder. So, do your homework. Read Galatians this week.

Get your background. So that as we gather together again next Sunday night, we might again be enriched through the Word of God, the love of Christ, the power of the Spirit, that we might grow up in all things in Christ Jesus, becoming matured in our walk with Him. May the Lord be with you, and may His hand be upon you to bless you through this week as you experience more and more His love, His grace, working in your life.

In Jesus' name.

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