

10,16,25 2 Cor. 1:8-14, Delivered Through Affliction Into Eternal Glory

As I mentioned last time, in 2 Corinthians Paul shares a massive amount of personal information; his thoughts, feelings and struggles. And what's interesting about this is that most of us would probably be more likely to be this transparent with people we knew we could trust; people who were on our side and ideally, people who were mature and might be able to give us some support.

None of what I just described fits the Corinthians, but more than any other church, Paul bares his soul to this one. I'm not sure what our takeaway from that is; but one thing's for sure- love was his motive.

For example;

(1 Cor. 4:14) I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you.

(2 Cor. 2:4) For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not so that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.

(2 Cor. 7:3) I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together.

Transparency and love seem to go together; at least they did for Paul. We could say the same about Christ's love for us – what more could He have done to open His heart to us and to reveal Himself than leave Heaven, take on our form, and allow us to see and touch Him for 33 years – and then die for us?

(Jn. 1:1,14) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God . . . and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory.

(1 Jn. 1:1-2) That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us.

I believe that some of these things we've looked at are the reason vs. 8 begins with; "We do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia . . ." Paul wasn't worried about whether they would think he was complaining, and he genuinely wanted their prayers for him (which he asks for in vs. 11). Those aren't things you do unless you love and trust those you're writing to. He was willing to risk any misunderstanding that some of them might have in order to draw as many as possible to him – hoping that they would appreciate his vulnerability and see it as an invitation for mutual love and friendship. Here's the first verse in the section we will be looking at tonight;

(2 Cor. 1:8a) We do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia . . .

Before we look at the implications of this, you should know that Paul's use of the word "brethren" is a little different than what we normally think of. The word in the original is "adelphos" and it means, "from the same womb". Paul saw the Corinthians as siblings; except in this case, their shared life had its source in the Spirit through the new birth, rather than the flesh. The point being, that rather than the normal use of "brothers and sisters" that is tossed around in contemporary churches today, and is thought of more as comradery or fellow members of an organization or a movement, Paul saw the deep reality of our common Life in Christ for what it really is.

Which, again, I'm sure, is one of the reasons Paul was willing to be so open with them – they were family. And it was also the reason he didn't want them to be "unaware" of what he was going through. In true body life within the Church, the fellowship of the saints needs to be close enough relationally that sharing our deepest joys and pains with one another is not awkward, but desired. Try that on Sunday morning in a megachurch.

And if this genuineness, honesty and transparency is meant to be like this between *us*, then it would be even *more* important in our relationship with the Lord. He already knows us better than we know ourselves, and He remains unconditionally faithful to us, why would we hesitate to share everything we are thinking and feeling with Him? Why would that ever have to be something we felt was awkward or inappropriate? As I'm sure you all know – the ideal father longs to hear the thoughts of his child, no matter what those thoughts are.

These comments by Sparks show a little of what I'm getting at;

I am constantly brought to this: I believe in the finished work of Christ, yet sometimes I am just as miserable about myself as any man could be. I am often almost at the point of giving up because of what a wretched kind of thing I am. If there is anything in this world that would cause me to give up, it is myself. Do you understand what I mean? Oh, how we are discouraged by what we find in ourselves!

This is the age of Grace. We don't ever have to hesitate to come to God because of "what we find in ourselves".

So, bear with me for a few minutes, I want to continue to read from Spark's article, because it's so important that we don't allow the enemy to try and use us against us, and put a barrier between us and our Father in heaven that, from the Lord's side, is absolutely not there.

We need never come before God saying, "I have had pure motives; I have been very honest, earnest and conscientious, and my intentions have all been solid." Let us stop talking nonsense. We do not know ourselves. Only God knows the truth about us, and none of that finds a place with Him or counts with Him for a moment. The point is, have I recognized that the Cross of the Lord Jesus was the ending of me, good *and* bad, so that I am not holding up anything before the Lord? I am as capable of the worst as any being in God's creation. For anybody to take the attitude that they are not capable of the worst is an attitude of the deepest deception. We do not know the power in our natural self until we are put to it. If we have never committed the worst, it is because we have never been put to it in the mercy of God, but it is all there. You may discover that you are capable of things of which you would have stood in utmost horror at one time.

But the Lord says to us; "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembles at My word." That statement embodies all that we are saying. To what one will He look? Not to the one who says, "I am right!" but to the one who says, "I may be as wrong as ever a man or woman was wrong, there is nothing of which I am not capable; my only ground is Christ."

When I first read that, it reminded me of Paul's exhortation in Rom. 12 to "present our bodies as living sacrifices to the Lord". What do we think we are presenting to Him? We are giving Him, presenting to Him, exactly who and what we are right now; and it's not much. But that's what He wants. Whatever He makes of us, as the Potter shapes the clay, is *His* concern, not ours. Our concern is to give ourselves to Him just as we are, and not hold back because we don't feel worthy – where in the Bible does it ever say we will be worthy of God's grace? The word "grace" itself cancels any hope of that – grace is "*unmerited* favor". Grace is God giving us what we don't deserve and mercy is Him *not* giving us what we *do* deserve – and because of the Cross, both grace and mercy are in action in our lives 24/7.

Now, (2 Cor. 1:8b) ". . . we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life." We've seen several passages in the past telling us that Paul is the one person in the New Testament, more than any other, who was given to us as a pattern of the life of a true disciple of Christ; like Phil. 3:17 and 1 Cor. 4:16-17;

Brethren, join in following my example, and recognize others who walk as I do; you have us for a pattern. I urge you to imitate me. For this reason, I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.

And 2 Corinthians, more than any other book in the New Testament, shows us the real life of Paul. When we look at what Paul went through and when we understand why it was like that, we will understand why we're going through what's happening to us.

It all begins with what Jesus said in the foundation of, or entrance into, discipleship in Matt. 16:24; "If any man would come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

This isn't meant to be critical, I can't read minds, but based on what we see in Christianity today, and knowing what we do of the various stages of the *development* of Christianity over the last 2000 years, it would be safe to say that most Christians have not picked up the cross. Being saved is a simple matter of

trusting in Christ, but discipleship will cost us our lives. If you've never read the book "The Cost of Discipleship" by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, you might consider it.

And when confronted with the possibility that Phil. 1:29 is actually true, most believers opt for a much easier version of Christianity. Here's Phil. 1:29; "To you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake."

Believing in Him is how we start the Christian life, but suffering is part of what God uses to conform us to the image of Christ; suffering burns off the flesh and enables us to grow spiritually. What form that takes will be different for everyone, but no one who truly desires to grow to spiritual maturity will be able to avoid some degree of suffering.

Once Paul understood this, he embraced his suffering and in this epistle we're studying, he made sure the Corinthians realized that what Paul was going through was extremely valuable; it was a picture or pattern of what life in Christ is for someone, like Paul, who wants the will of God more than anything else.

So, Paul uses phrases like "despaired of life", "burdened beyond measure", "pressed above our strength"; Paul was being shattered and all he could do was "... trust in God Who can raise the dead" – and ask for the prayers of the Corinthians.

I don't know how often it's happened to you, but I can't count the times I've had no words for my prayers; all I could do was whisper "help", and wait on the Lord. I know Rom. 8:26 tells us that when we are in that situation, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with "groaning that cannot be uttered". I'm counting on that. And related to that, when we pray for strength to endure, we don't necessarily *feel* the strength God gives us. Our weakness will remain because as we'll see in chapter 12, God's strength is perfected, not by removing our weakness, but He does this *in* our weakness. What we experience is coming to the realization that somehow we have endured when we thought for sure we'd never make it.

All of these things not only refine us as gold is refined in the fire, but as our lives progress, we are developing a personal intimacy and history with God; learning His ways with His people and learning more of Him personally, because in some mystical, supernatural way, enlightenment and revelation in understanding God's Word is directly connected to suffering.

(1 Pet. 1:6-7) . . . if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

What happened to Paul (and others throughout history) is now happening the Church corporately throughout the world. It's the final purification of the Body of Christ being prepared to meet our Lord, and what the Holy Spirit allows us to see in the life of Paul is a perfect description of the universal experience of those in the Church who are moving forward spiritually, just as Paul was.

And ultimately, going through things like what Paul experienced results in sharing the throne of Christ; (2 Tim. 2:12) "If we endure hardship, we will reign with him . . ." As we're told in Heb. 12:2, our divine Forerunner or Prototype, the Lord Jesus, " . . . endured the cross, and is sat down at the right hand of God." God's "right hand" represents the place of power and ruling authority.

(We are to be) fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The advantages of remaining faithful to the Lord under pressure are innumerable, both in time and in eternity.

We will expand on this more when we get to chapter 4 where Paul goes into greater detail on the specifics of what he's experiencing. Trusting in God when everything you're going through seems to be providing solid evidence that the Lord is *not* trustworthy is what "walking by faith, not by sight" is all about. And we can see in books like Job that this not only glorifies the Lord but also defeats the enemy. The Cross, which appeared to be Christ's greatest defeat, was actually His greatest victory. *Satan was defeated when Christ was at His weakest*. That never seems to make sense when we are in a place of desperate weakness, but it's the way God works in crushing Satan. Never discount the reality of God's strength being perfected *in* our weakness.

Now let's look at some other phrases Paul uses to describe his experiences;

(2 Cor. 1:9-11) We felt we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered

us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.

When Paul speaks of being “pressed above his strength” and “despairing of life”, we have to realize that he’s not just being poetic. Getting to a place where his suffering was so bad that he was certain he wouldn’t be able live through it was a very real experience for him; and it wasn’t a one-time event.

He already told us *one* of the reasons it was happening in vs. 4, “. . . so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”

We can’t have a ministry to others by just giving them verses that often feel detached from their most desperate questions. The Christian life isn’t a campus; the Word had to become flesh and live among us in order for the Lord to be able to empathize in every way with what we go through.

We can’t help others in pain at a level that genuinely helps them if we haven’t suffered and learned something of God’s enabling *us* to endure.

What Paul is describing is real life, real Christianity, not the kind we get involved in that gives us a spiritual rush on Sunday morning and leaves us to spend the rest of the week navigating through what the rest of the world is going through.

And the purpose of suffering this intensely is so that we will learn experientially, not just theologically, that there is no point relying on ourselves for overcoming or for experiencing true spiritual Life, we have to learn to rely on God alone. We never learn how to do that, to live purely by faith, as long as there is one ounce of self-reliance in us. Mature faith does not begin until we end. This was Paul’s point in vs. 9;

(2 Cor. 1:9) We felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

Again, that’s not meant to be inspirational poetry, that’s a very personal sharing of an extremely painful experience. An experience that God deliberately took Paul into to accomplish the transition in Paul’s thinking from self-reliance to faith in God alone.

Listen to this overview of “overcoming”;

There is only one Overcomer in the universe, and that is the Lord Jesus Himself, and if there are ever any other overcomers, they will simply be the extension of His overcoming; the expansion of His victory. It will be by reason of that vital corporate oneness with Him which is not two distinct experiences, but which is one and the same experience *shared*. That is the nature of overcoming. It will simply be the impartation of His own triumph, the sharing of His own victory. He is the only Overcomer, and He will have to do all the overcoming in us, and for us. He will have to work out His overcoming, work out His victory, simply sharing with us that which He has within. Our part is to trust Him to be Who He is in us. “Christ in us (is) our hope of glory.”

The Lord will make sure there is an abundance of opportunities to learn, by experience, what this means. To bring us into a deep and genuine faith in God and to equip us to truly be able to minister to others, God has to introduce the Cross into our lives, throughout our lives, to bring us to the place of abandonment to the Lord in everything.

And as I said, this is something that is avoided by most believers because a Sunday morning inspiration is all they want. But for those who want to become God’s overcomers, they have to *learn* to overcome, to endure hardship as a soldier of Christ and like Job, and Paul, to know in this life what it’s like to be refined as gold is refined in fire in order to stand immovable in faith.

These are the things suffering accomplishes, and Paul spends an immense amount of time in his letters trying to make this as clear as possible so that when we enter into what God determines for us, we won’t be asking “why” all the time – we know why. The issue will be, will we let God be God? Will we let faith be our foundation?

So, the next time you find yourself “despairing of life” and being “pressed above your strength”, spend at least as much time praying for strength to endure, as you do pleading for deliverance; and end with “ . . . nevertheless, not my will, but Thy will be done”; because He may deliver you, but if He doesn’t it’s because there are things He wants you to know and experience that deliverance would sabotage.

(Dan. 3:16-18) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if He does not deliver us, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.

Now in vs's 12 & 14 Paul continues the defense of his apostleship;

For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you. For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand. Now I trust you will understand, even to the end (as also you have understood us in part), that we are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Let's look at the idea of having a "clear conscience". That has to be one of the biggest struggles most of us have, and the more we grow and become increasingly aware of who we are; in other words, the more that God's Word reveals *us* to us, it would seem like the result would be the opposite of a clear conscience.

But the source of a conscience free of accusation is not our perfection; it's the Cross.

(Heb. 10:1-4) For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once cleansed, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

As John the Baptist said when he saw Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God, that *takes away* the sins of the world".

When I set the passage in Heb. 10:1-4 next to the reality of Heb. 10:17, which says, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more", it makes me think that a constant guilty conscience might be evidence that we are trying to live under the Old Covenant of Law rather than enjoying the freedom that comes from realizing that God has removed our sins through the death of His Son.

As to our legal position before God, instead of being condemned sinners, He sees us in Christ, clothed in *His* righteousness; (1 Cor. 1:30) “. . . of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”

We are forgiven and safe forever; not because of us, but because of God’s grace.

But knowing that doesn’t always resolve the issue of struggling with a guilty conscience. The foundation of freeing our conscience has to start with believing that Christ paid for all our sins on the Cross, and that God is satisfied with that sacrifice.

That might seem very simple and elementary, but without a real assurance of that, the means God has given for us to be cleansed from our daily sins and self-condemnation is going to be sporadic at best. Here’s what I mean, try to listen to the following verses as if you’re hearing them for the first time, even though I’m sure you’ve heard them a million times.

(1 Jn. 1:7-10) If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Vs’s 8 & 10 confirm that in spite of our righteous standing in Christ, we continue to sin; and to think otherwise would be a total deception. But *because* of the Cross, God is free to “. . .forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

But if Hebrews (and countless other passages) tell us we’re forgiven all our sins the second we believed in Christ, then why would we continue to need forgiveness for sinning?

Because 1 Jn. isn’t talking about our legal position related to our eternal destiny; John isn’t talking about salvation or imputed righteousness; he’s talking about what he began with in 1 Jn. 1:3, “That which we have seen and heard we are declaring to you, so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” John’s not talking about salvation, he’s

talking about fellowship, about an open relationship with each other and with the Lord in our daily lives in spite of our daily failures.

And the way *that* happens is what he said in vs. 7 & 9; “If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship . . . If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us . . .”

Walking in the light is just another way of saying “be transparent”. Just like “confessing” means “agreeing” with the inward conviction of sin. As long as we are honest, open and transparent with the Lord, and agree with Him when He makes us aware of any sin we’ve committed, fellowship is maintained. It can be constant and unbroken, as long as we’re willing to “walk in the light” rather than going into denial about our sins.

Now, how does all that tie into a “clear conscience”? Only the lies of the enemy can unsettle the conscience of someone who is walking in transparency with the Lord. Paul knew all these things, and he was careful to stay in the light, to stay in fellowship. Whenever he discovered either thoughts or motives rising up in himself that were selfish or dishonest, he agreed with what he was seeing, turned his back on it, and moved on.

Paul knew that he had “conducted (himself) in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity . . .” Anytime he found himself being *insincere*, he acknowledged it and returned to a place of honesty before God and man. And as we saw, he also knew that it was “by the grace of God” that he was able to see and transition when necessary.

The Corinthians had been accusing Paul of duplicity, dishonesty, even manipulation of others for personal gain. But Paul rebuked all that and said that his conscience was clear before God because, whenever those kinds of things would try to get a grip on him, Paul would stay transparent before God, trusting Him to keep Paul on the right path.

The Corinthians (and us, by application) are exhorted to do the same. Because of Christ’s sacrifice, God is legally free and faithful to forgive us without violating His righteousness and justice. He can restore us based simply and solely on the grounds of us walking in transparency before Him. If we believe these things, we can walk and live with a clear conscience even though we sin frequently.

The reason our conscience isn't guilt-free is not because God hasn't made a way for us to be free from guilt, it's because we are buying into whatever lies the enemy is throwing at us to condemn us. He is, after all, "the accuser of the brethren" (Rev. 12:10). And if his accusations are successful, why would he stop? The truth *will* make us free, but only if we believe it.

Paul's last verse in that section is vs. 14, "Now I trust you will understand, even to the end (as also you have understood us in part), that we are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus."

That might not be the best translation when it comes to clarity, but in essence this is what Paul is saying; this is from Charles Hodge;

Paul believed that in the day of the Lord Jesus the Corinthians would rejoice over him as he would rejoice over them. In that day they would appreciate the blessedness of having had him for their teacher, as he would rejoice in having had them as his students. The joy, however, was already theirs to some extent. 'We are, and shall be, your rejoicing, as you are and shall be ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus.'

I also like the way Dr. Constable put it;

This outburst of praise sprang from Paul's deep-seated conviction of God's working in and through him, regardless of those who opposed him. This viewpoint is one of the great emphases of this epistle. Jesus Christ is without exception continuing to advance in His work. He is building His church and the gates of hell are not prevailing against it. And since Paul and the Corinthians were in Christ, they shared in this triumph.

There will be a time, I believe in the near future, when all of God's children will be gathered together and received into eternity to live with our Lord in His kingdom. When that occurs, it will be a homecoming like nothing we can even imagine now; it will be something only the power, compassion, creativity and intelligence of God could accomplish for us.

And that will only be the beginning.

God, by nature, is creative. He could no more cease creating, that He could cease to be Who He is. As Isa. 9:7 puts it, " . . . of the *increase* (not just *duration*) of His

governance and peace, there will be no end.” Scientists tell us that our universe continues to expand at an immeasurable rate of speed. They have no explanation for how this is happening, because they have rejected the truth, which is that Christ is continuing to create, and will do so forever (“. . . there will be no end).”

Here's how 'science' words it;

In the late 1990s, scientists discovered that the expansion of the universe is not only continuing but accelerating. This acceleration is attributed to dark energy, a mysterious force that counteracts gravity and pushes galaxies apart. The nature of dark energy is still unknown, and it's one of the biggest mysteries in cosmology. Observations of redshifted light from distant galaxies, the cosmic microwave background radiation, and the *distribution* of galaxies all support the idea that the universe is expanding and has been since the beginning. Furthermore, this expansion is not uniform; it's accelerating . . .

Now, let's look at the true explanation of this;

Everything which has to do with the realization of God's purpose in creating man, and this world, and its universe, is a matter of knowing God in Christ, which, of course, means knowing Christ. Every aspect and detail of God's will and God's way and God's end is a matter of knowing the Lord Jesus. All progress, as all life, rests upon that – knowing Him. The Christian life here is meant to be one of continuous growth and development and progress, but that only takes place as we come to know more, and still more, of the meaning of the Lord Jesus. This progress will not stop when we leave this world, and when time gives place to eternity: "Of the increase of His kingdom there will be no end." Life there will be ever manifesting itself in new and more wonderful forms. Therefore, the knowledge of Christ which will, in time and eternity, be the secret of growth and progress; it will continue in heaven, and it will take eternity to exhaust it.

The Lord, in His Person and in His work, stands related to an eternal, heavenly order. He Himself, in His wonderful, complex Person, is the very embodiment of all the principles and laws of a great heavenly order. When everything is conformed to Christ and takes its character from Him, it will be one harmonious whole, perfected into one glorious unity... I have only

opened a window to you through which you can see an eternally expanding and wonderous universe *contained within* the infinite Personhood of the Son of God.

All of creation, from the smallest to the greatest things and beings that exist, everything is in some way an expression of Christ Who fills all in all. In eternity past, it was the Father's desire that the Son have a creation that perfectly represents the Lord's glory and personality. And when the new creation is established, as shown in Revelation 21:1, that is exactly what it will be; "I saw a *new* heaven and a *new* earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away."

(John 1:1-3, 14) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. *All things* were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made . . . and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory.

This humble Galilean carpenter that we read about in the four gospels was the God of Creation, revealing Himself to us and laying down His life for us - all so that we can know Him and be with Him forever.