

### 3,19,26 2 Cor. 12:16-13:4, Crucified In Weakness

But be that as it may, I did not burden you. Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you by cunning! Did I take advantage of you by any of those whom I sent to you? I urged Titus, and sent our brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did we not walk in the same steps? Again, do you think that we excuse ourselves to you? We speak before God in Christ. But we do all things, beloved, for your edification. For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced.

Once again, Paul writes in a way that is extremely personal and expresses the kind of burden he'd talked about before, the kind that covered his pages with tears. Apparently, they'd accused him of "taking advantage" of them. He hadn't, but the false apostles Paul mentioned several times in his letters to them had convinced the Corinthians that Paul couldn't be trusted.

So, Paul reaffirms that he and Titus had only one motive in everything they did for the Corinthians – vs. 19 “. . . we do all things for your edification”. The English Standard Version does a good job of bringing out what Paul said in this verse;

Have you been thinking all along that we have (just) been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and *all* for your upbuilding.

Much of this section is Paul's restating of things he communicated to them earlier in 1 Cor. 4;

(1 Cor. 4:3) To me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. (In other words, this isn't about us judging each other, it's about me having an opportunity to strengthen you).

Also, (2 Cor. 10:8) Even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for tearing you down.

(Eph. 4:11-14) He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the edification of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine. . .

In the Ephesian passage, there are two words that define Paul's goal with *all* the churches he wrote to; the two primary things that were an encapsulation of all Paul desired to accomplish in everything he taught and ministered to the children of God. Those words are "equipped" and "edification".

As we saw in Corinthians and also in Ephesians, these two things summarize what were always Paul's number one desire for all the churches he was ministering to.

So, let's start with a simple definition of each word and then we can look at their implications and why they were so important to Paul.

The word "Equipped" (katartismos) means to be trained and prepared for service. It's summed up in 2 Tim. 2:21 in the Amplified Version; ("That you will be) a vessel for honor, sanctified (set aside for a specific purpose), useful to the Master, prepared (carries idea of willingness and eagerness as well as of readiness) for every good work of God (as aligned with His purpose for you).

Dr. Lewis Johnson does the best overall explanation of this I could find, and he has some 'qualifiers' that are extremely important, but are usually overlooked;

What Paul is really saying is these gifted men, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, are given for the equipping of the saints – that's their one duty, to equip the saints – that the saints might do the work of ministry that the body of Christ might be edified. So that the work of the ministry is not the work of these gifted men; they are simply to equip the saints from the word of God. They are to teach the Scriptures so that the

saints, will be built up in the faith, strengthened, given doctrine of biblical knowledge and the application of it, are then everyone will be able to carry on ministry. Everyone is a minister in the body of Christ. You are a minister in the body of Christ.

Now in the case of each of these gifts, you'll notice that each one has something to do with the word of God. So, the concept that Paul is speaking about here is the concept of men who have instruction gifts to teach the word of God, to equip the saints to do the work that will lead to the edifying of the body of Christ. The following are comments by a 19<sup>th</sup>. Century author;

He could not exalt more highly the ministry of the word than by attributing to it this effect. For what higher work can there be than to build up the church that it may reach its perfection. They, therefore, are insane, who neglecting this means, hope to be perfect in Christ, as is the case with the fanatics who pretend secret revelations of the spirit (that is, they pretend they are prophets), and the proud, who content themselves with the private reading of Scripture and imagine that they do not need the ministry of the spiritual leadership.

So, that which leads to the edification of the church, the body of Christ, is the ministry of gifted men who bring the word of God to us. The knowledge of God's word is the source of the edification of the body of Christ.

Now I'd like to just draw a contrast here, based on that. You'll note that it all comes from the study of the scriptures. He does not say that God has given us organizers, or administrators, or fundraisers, to build up the church.

In other words, the edification of the body of Christ comes from the ministry of *every* believer who is equipped for those specific tasks by the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastor-teachers through their teaching of God's word. It is the word of God that equips the saints for ministry.

Now, let's bring that home to where you and I live our daily lives as disciples of Christ. In any vocation we are led into, whether it's a housewife raising her children, a husband working in his career, or a missionary planting churches in

third-world countries, each of us has a *spiritual* calling and vocation that lies behind everything we do – we are here to be of service to the body of Christ as well as to the lost.

The equipping responsibility is on the shoulders of those who teach the Word of God to us; but *that* work or service to us is not simply to provide us with increased information, but to clarify what the scriptures tell us in a way that also increases our understanding of the potential personal applications of what we are taught – and to take them seriously. The goal for Paul, and for all who teach, is not academic education alone; it's to communicate in a way that equips the hearers for *their* service to the Church.

Also, as we covered in a recent study, whenever you hear about things like Christian “service” and “being doers, not hearers only”, keep in mind that what the Lord is looking for isn't that you take on some major enterprise, but simply faithfulness *wherever* He's placed you. That's why I started with housewife, career, etc. There are no “small” services to the Lord. Anytime we do something God has asked us to do, however miniscule it may seem to us or others, that's faithfulness and it's all He wants. So, yes, we are in service to the Lord – He's preparing us for being a useful vessel for Him, but the *specifics* of what we are being led into will be different for everyone and most of those who follow the Lord faithfully are not on stage someplace; they are Anna's or Simion's or a billion other people who are completely unknown to the world, but well known to God.

Here's how Paul explained the Christian life to the Thessalonians;

(1 Thess. 4:1ff) We urge you, brethren, that you increase (spiritually) more and more; and that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands so that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.

That's where 99% of all faithful Christians are. That lifestyle is not going to shake nations or take you to banquets in megachurches honoring the great saints of our time. What it *will* do is bring glory to God and honor to you at His coming.

Some people may wonder why Paul and the other writers of the New Testament (not to mention books like Proverbs) put such an immense value on learning God's Word over all other priorities. There are two important realities around this that I need to mention. One is that the Holy Spirit uses the written word to reveal the Living Word to us, and that revelation results in Christ being formed in us.

(2 Cor. 3:18) We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The other reality is that this inward transformation does not happen if the one studying God's Word is not receiving the Spirit's revelation of Christ through what's being studied.

(Lk. 24:32) Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He *opened the Scriptures to us*?

It's possible to learn the Bible in all its parts perfectly and not move one inch closer to conformity to Christ. The only time our "hearts burn within us" and Christ is seen in increasing fullness and glory is when we are fully dependent on, and *praying for* the Spirit to open our understanding to the meaning, spiritually, of what we are learning.

Without humility and openness in our learning we won't learn in a way that will transform us. We have to be just as dedicated to prayer for revelation, for understanding, as we are to the studying itself. I've known several men with doctorate degrees in theology that are spiritually dead. They can quote and expound on any passage in the Bible, but like we read in Acts 13:27, they have only heard the words, not the voice, of the Spirit.

Those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him.

Every Sabbath they heard the scriptures read, but they never heard the voices of the Prophets – they didn't hear the real message that the scriptures were meant to convey.

Study *and* prayer are an absolute necessity anytime we open our Bible.

So, the teacher is responsible to make God's Word as clear and comprehensive as possible; the student's responsibility is to be not "hearers only, but doers of the Word of God";

(Jas. 1:22-25) Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

A learner that doesn't apply what he learns will eventually forget who he is in Christ and why he is here. And he will be fully "*unequipped*" to serve the Lord in a way that is in line with God's will. He may be busy (like Martha); but if he serves at all, it will be *his* will, not *God's* will that's being done; just like the difference between the service of Able and Cain. Both offered their sacrifices to God; both were 'religious' and committed to what they believed to be their religious obligations. But only one of them was actually doing what God specifically wanted done.

Listen to how Spark's describes this;

What I am going to say may be difficult to accept, just as it is difficult to say, and yet faithfulness demands that things like this should be said. There is going to be a tremendous surprise one day over this matter. There is an incredible amount of energy, and activity, and machinery, and zeal and devotion in the work of the Lord, in the service of the Lord, which seems to be producing something quite big, and carrying on something quite extensive. Eventually all work, all service, all activity, is weighed in the balances, to determine what will abide forever or pass away forever. All that which was merely human energy for God will go; all that which was merely man's enterprise for the Lord will go; all that which was in any way out from man himself, even though in devotion to God, will go. Only that which was

the energy of Christ, the wisdom of Christ, the power of Christ, will remain.  
God cannot set His seal upon anything that has its source in Man.

There is an immense amount of energy and commitment being put into “Christianity” by Christians who are not equipped to the level of spiritual maturity needed to know and do God’s will. Because of the clear prophetic descriptions of this final generation, we know from God’s Word that in our time, the amount of wood, hay and stubble of self-defined and self-directed Christian service far outnumbers the amount of gold, silver and precious stones being offered to the Lord. The deception of a “form of godliness” which sets aside the power of the indwelling Christ accomplishes only the religion of Man done in Christ’s Name. We’re repeatedly told in the New Testament to not only be aware of this, but to identify and avoid it at all costs.

(2 Tim. 3:1ff) Know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves . . . having a form of godliness but denying its power. From such people turn away.

The context of this is the Church, not the world. You probably remember 1 Cor. 5:9ff;

I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore “put away *from yourselves* the carnal person.”

And as we just saw in our passage in 2 Tim., Paul adds those who embrace a “form of godliness” (an imitation Christianity – which is idolatry) as people we are to “turn away” from, or “put away from among us”. This is paralleled in Heb. 13:13, “Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.”

We've spent several studies dealing with the difference between judging and discerning as well as passages dealing with what circumstances require such drastic measures and what circumstances (as in Rom. 14) that do *not* require this, so I won't go back over that now.

Our context in 2 Cor. 12 is focused on how to be equipped as a vessel fit for the Master's service and one thing that can sabotage that is too much association with, and influence by, either teachers or Christians that are pulling you in a different direction than that which the Lord wants us to go. So, we need to take note of passages like the ones in 2 Tim. and 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. because to some extent they touch on the dangers we face when we set our hearts to being equipped to serve the Lord in truth.

As James said, hearing, learning, understanding and even believing the Word is vital, but unless it's followed by *doing* what the Word has told us, nothing of true value is going to happen either in or through us.

And just to be overly repetitious, we *are* living in the most *successfully* deceptive generation in history, in terms of pulling believers off the narrow path of spiritual life; so, I believe that frequently pointing out the *specifics* of the dangers we face is not unwarranted considering the time we're living in.

Ok, Paul's other priority for the churches, besides "equipping" them, is "edification" (oikodome) in the original and means;

The building of a house and came to refer to any building process. Oikodome can refer to the actual process of building or construction. Another literal meaning is as a reference to a building or edifice which is the result of a construction process.

So, being fully equipped for spiritual service is the outcome, or product, of building the image, the character of Christ, in us as our minds are renewed and the Word of God is grafted into our hearts.

(Jas. 1:21) . . . receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to deliver your souls.

One commentary that emphasizes the original language of the New Testament explained it like this;

Oikodome refers to the church as the building for God's indwelling and the spiritual edification of the body of Christ. Building is a process of spiritual strengthening. It speaks of development. It is an interesting "architectural" word for Paul to use because the Ephesians were familiar with many magnificent edifices and temples in their famous city. Paul of course is elevating this word to refer to a spiritual edifice, one, which unlike the decaying Ephesian edifices, which would endure forever.

In Eph. 4:12 when Paul says, "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which has the power and inherent ability or resources to *build you up*. . . " Paul deposits the teachers near to God and then near to God's people) in order to build upon or erect a superstructure. And then Paul says, ". . . and to give you the inheritance" (part of which is "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph 1:3).

Another essential part of edification, especially at our time in history, comes from the word "parakaleo" (meaning either "exhortation" or "encouragement")

(Heb. 10:25) "Encourage one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

We are seeing "the Day approaching" and because of that, the conflict and deception coming against us is intensifying massively. More than ever, we need brothers and sisters in Christ standing beside us and helping us stay strong and true, and not give up or sidetrack because of how hard things have become or because of how difficult it's becoming to distinguish truth from error.

"Edification" means to strengthen and build up spiritually. There's nothing Paul did that was intended to have any other effect than that. If the Corinthians would have listened to him and believed him, then when he came there wouldn't be any "contentions, outbursts of wrath, backbitings, tumults, etc." Paul mourned for them, and even more so for those who had rebelled.

Now, Paul moves into another ‘personal appeal’ section at the beginning of chapter 13;

(2 Cor. 13:1-4) This will be the third time I am coming to you. “By the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.” I have told you before, and foretell as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare— since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you.

Paul attempts to bring all his exhortations, as well as his doctrinal instructions, into the realm of relationship. And we can see in his letters that this is a constant theme for him; everything he learned and taught was intended to either increase or repair the closeness of their relationship with him and with the Lord.

As we’ve seen before, Paul was given to us as a “pattern”; he’s the one chosen by God to best represent the Lord to the Church. In other words, Paul more than any other disciple, was the embodiment of the Lord’s heart for us. And one of the most consistent underlying themes in all of Paul’s writings demonstrated his deep desire for a personal, loving, trusting relationship with his spiritual children – which shows us that this is the Lord’s greatest desire for *all* of us. What we learn *about* Him is meant to enable us to *know* Him – to love Him and trust Him.

Paul’s intent was to remove any relational barriers that had come up between him and the Corinthians. Transparency, openness, trust and companionship are the goals, and if establishing the truth of Paul’s actions and motives through witnesses and proofs will help him get there, then that’s what Paul will do.

This is obviously something we all have to keep in mind in the relationships we have with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We’ve seen Paul’s highest priorities and his heart; and because of that, we’ve also seen the priorities and heart of Christ manifest through Paul.

Paul was uncompromising, and when needed, confrontational – but it was always love, not rules and regulations, that motivated any action he took.

We should be the same. If we have to speak the truth to be faithful to the Lord and helpful to those we interact with, it must be truth spoken in love.

If the Lord confronts us or disciplines us so we will know the truth (the full *reality* of our situation), we can be absolutely certain that His actions are motivated, driven, by love.

(Heb. 12:6, 9, and 10) Do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens. . . we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they (the human fathers) chastened us as seemed best to them, but He does this for *our* profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

God takes no action toward us that is not motivated by His compassion. All He does is for our benefit, because now, since the Cross has removed all barriers that could have existed, the Lord is free to act toward us in Grace, not Law.

Grace has been defined in the past as “All that God is free to do for us based on the Cross”.

(Eph. 1:7-9) In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and understanding, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself. . .

In spite of who and what we are, God has joyfully chosen to bring us into the closest possible relationship with Him as members of His own family; His children. And in that unbreakable place of Grace, His intention is to shower His kindness on us – ages without end.

Now, I need to make a few comments on vs. 4; “For though He was crucified through weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you.”

First, from Ironside;

The preposition translated “through” here is generally rendered “in.” He was crucified in weakness, but He lives again in the power of God. It simply means this: He chose to become a Man for our redemption. He chose to be made “a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death.” He who was higher than the highest “did not count [equality with God] a thing to be held onto,” but He emptied Himself of the glory He had before the world was, and “being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, and [such a death, as that] of the cross.” He was crucified in weakness.

We are told numerous times in the Gospels that if we are to follow in the Lord’s steps, to be his disciples, we must “pick up *our* cross daily”.

We’ve spent a great deal of time showing the connection between ‘weakness’ and ‘power’; that without a personal understanding and experience of complete weakness, we can’t understand or experience the power of God – no Cross, no Resurrection.

This is the primary reason for all the circumstances in our lives that expose and often discourage us because of our weakness and failure. It’s not just to build character and endurance; it’s to put us in a place of full, personal awareness of our need for complete dependence on God for everything. The greater our dependence, our ability to “walk by faith”, the greater will be our experience of God’s power working in and through us.

And the phrase “toward you” in vs. 4 is easy to miss, but essential to the context. We all want to know how we can have “power” that is beyond our own in order to deal with impossibly difficult situations and people, but in the context of this letter, Paul makes sure that the Corinthians realize that Paul isn’t just educating them on how to tie into God’s power for personal victory, he’s reminding them that what

Paul and Titus are trying to accomplish goes beyond their own experience of the strength of the indwelling Spirit; all that they are doing is meant to be “toward you”; toward the Corinthians. Paul’s understanding and appropriation of the power of God is not just for him, its to enable *him* to help *them*. That’s the heart of a servant, a disciple.

We’ll have to close soon, but it’s important that we have a real-life picture of how weakness, leading to supernatural strength, can be seen in the practical experiences of God’s children. So, I searched and found a couple great examples of this. What you’ll hear are true stories of people who saw themselves exhibit a power or strength that was not something any of them could have produced on their own – the only explanation for what happened was that in their *inability* and weakness, through their faith and dependence on God, His power was manifested. The first story is of a missionary to New Guinea;

A minister tells how on one occasion in New Guinea, where perhaps less than a score of years before the heathen were utterly wrapped in darkness, but through a powerful testimony carried on there by faithful witnesses, all the people were gathered reverently at the table of the Lord. One who was there was a missionary of the cross. Beside him sat an elder of the native church. The missionary recognized this elder as the son of a man who had killed and eaten the missionary’s father. The son of the martyred missionary and the son of the man who had killed him, were both remembering the Lord Jesus as the Savior of mankind. Do you know of anything but the power of God that could bring those hearts together like this?

This second story is about a man who was the first convert of the Moravian missionaries in Greenland.

When they went to that country and found the people so steeped in iniquity, they said, “They will never understand the gospel. These people are drunkards, gluttons, they are adulterers, they are living the vilest of lives. They won’t understand the grace of God, they will take it as a license for sin.” So, the Moravian missionaries drilled into the hearts and minds of that people God’s holy law. They said they had to do it to create a conscience in

the Eskimo. But the results were nil. No man ever sought out any of the missionaries to have a discussion about his soul. They listened to the messages and went back and lived their wicked lives again.

And then Hans Egede came, his heart burning with love for that people. He had left wealth and honor to sacrifice himself for those unspeakably vile Greenlanders. It was announced he would speak in a certain neighborhood on a Lord's Day. They crowded into a small lodge holding two to three hundred people. It was a poor affair, built up from pieces of old wrecked ships. There they sat. Hans Egede stood up and preached and, for the first time in the history of Greenland, told the story of the cross. Tenderly, lovingly, with a heart that had itself been broken by the power of the cross, he told of the One who had suffered and bled for the redemption of sinners. It took an hour or two to tell his story, and when he finished, a young chief, who had been listening eagerly as the gospel was proclaimed, sprang forward and cried, "Missionaries, why did you not tell us this before? You have been with us a year, and you never told us. You told us of a God who created a world, and it did not make us hate our sin. You told us of a God who gave His holy law. We learned the Ten Commandments, and we went out and got drunk again, but today you have told us how our sins broke the heart of God and He came to redeem us from our sins. I cannot sin against love like that. From now on I will be a Christian." And he became an outstanding Christian testimony for years in Greenland. "The weakness of God is stronger than men." We have sometimes tried to reason people into salvation, forgetting that our commission is to preach His Word, to preach Christ. Paul says, "We preach Christ crucified, the power and wisdom of God."

Next week, we will finish 2 Cor. 13 and begin a new study. Please be in prayer so that by God's grace I can approach every time I study consciously acknowledging my *own* weakness to comprehend what I'm reading, so the Lord will guide me and open my understanding so I can give you what He gives me.