

God's Power Among You

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[0 : 00] 2 Corinthians chapter 12. The living word meets us in the written word.

! Last Sunday night we saw that thorn in the flesh! and how three times Paul says, I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. And I'll begin reading at verse 9 of chapter 12 and read on into chapter 13.

I'm sorry. Verse 9. Oh, chapter 3? Chapter 5. Oh, 19. Okay, I hear what you're saying. All right, we're going to start it at verse 19 rather than verse 9.

2 Corinthians 12, 19. Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ.

And everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening. For I am afraid that when I come, I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be.

[1 : 12] I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorder.

I am afraid that when I come again, my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin, and debauchery in which they have indulged.

This will be my third visit to you. Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time.

I now repeat it while absent. On my return, I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me.

He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God's power.

[2 : 22] Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you. Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.

Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you? Unless, of course, you fail the test. And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test.

Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test, but that you will do what is right, even though we may seem to have failed.

For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. We are glad whenever we are weak, but you are strong.

And our prayer is for your perfection. This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come, I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority, the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.

[3 : 27] Well, what would motivate you more? A chance to win \$30 or to hear good job from your boss?

A Duke professor went into a workplace and set up an experiment to see what exactly motivated workers. And that was sort of the basic premise.

Was it money or was it affirmation? Which would do a better job of motivating people? And on day one, the money did provide some motivation, but the good job did better.

That might be a little surprising, but that's the truth. And the results got even more interesting. As the days went on, something strange began to happen. The money prize actually started working in the opposite direction.

People were less and less motivated. They were more discouraged. They were more discouraged when they came to work.

[4 : 39] But the good job, the affirmation, actually got better as time went on at motivating people. The relationship only made people work harder.

And then it creates a better work environment. So people are working harder. And what they found out was that this kind of affirmation actually leads to more profit for the business.

In other words, the company flourishes. The people on the ground, they flourish. The employees flourish. And one author said this, Respect causes people to run through brick walls for people.

Those kind of relationships will lead to great motivation. Kindness and mutual respect means increased communication, which tends to increase revenue.

So some of you probably know what it's like to work in a toxic work environment. You probably have firsthand experience of that, where it's not the work so much that is the problem.

[5 : 44] It's the people. It's the relationships. It's the management. It's the mistrust. It's even some of the things that Paul was saying, I'm afraid this is what I'm going to find when I show up in Corinth.

The mistrust, the jealousy, the gossip, anger, faction, slander. Every day, if that's the work environment, every day, if that's the church environment, it's a miserable experience.

But that's how relationships work here sometimes. It's bad. It's hard. People are one of our greatest joys when the relationship is good.

And people are also our greatest sorrows when the relationship is bad. But it's not just work.

It's family. It's children. It's parents. It's churches. And they can become so difficult, so rough, that we just want to give them up.

[6 : 53] We sort of want to circle the wagons. We want to say, no, I can't. I've got to protect myself. And some of that is certainly understandable. We want to retreat. God is calling us toward them, towards those relationships.

And yet, we feel like those are the very relationships that are so impossible, so discouraging, so hard. And the question is, what do you need then?

When God is calling you towards them, but just the whole dynamic of it is saying, stay away. What do you need then? 2 Corinthians 13 has the answer.

And I think it's going to be an answer that surprises you. Certainly not one of them that I would think of. If I were sitting down and looking at a pair, or people that are having toxic relationships, a toxic relationship, I would certainly not be thinking, this is what they need.

But this is what Paul does. And we're going to find out what that is. But first, we need to look at Paul and the Corinthians' relationship.

[8 : 03] And the reason I want to dive into this and look at the relationship is because I think this is where it begins to connect, where you see, oh, I do have relationships that look like this.

Or I have been in relationships like this. And it connects to your life and your situation. And maybe you're going to be able to start saying, yeah, there are people that are like this. Or that's what this relationship is like.

And so first, the Corinthians didn't trust Paul. They didn't trust him. And if you don't think that's a big deal, I'm here to say, I think trust is probably, without trust, relationships are impossible.

Or almost impossible. I'd say that trust is probably even more basic than love itself and dynamic and creating the dynamics of a relationship.

Because without trust, without me trusting you, I'm going to have a hard time feeling any sort of love towards you. So in an affair, one of the greatest thing, the most devastating part of that is the breaking of the trust.

[9 : 18] And that's what takes so long. And when that gets restored, then progress will happen. But without trust, love doesn't have anywhere to go.

And without trust, I can't feel love by you. And so it's like a train off the tracks. It's a train with no engine. So here they are. They don't trust Paul.

That is a sad situation. We could have gone back, but Paul says, I'm like a father, like a mother to you. They don't trust him.

You can see it in chapter 13, verse 3, where he says, since some of you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me.

Can I tell you two words that you can always hear when someone doesn't trust you? It's prove it. Prove it.

[10 : 15] Well, that's what the Corinthians are saying. You demand proof when you don't trust someone. And so your teenager says, we were here or there, and you don't trust them.

And so you say, prove it. Prove it. I want some other people to clarify that, or I'm not going to believe you until you prove it.

We saw this morning, Thomas didn't trust the other apostles. Now, he was being called to trust and believe some testimony that was pretty extraordinary. And maybe it's somewhat understandable to understand Thomas' lack of trust, but here the Corinthians are not trusting Paul.

And Paul had been nothing but a father or a mother to these Corinthian believers. They were his own spiritual children. That's why he tells them, examine yourself.

And he says, I think what you're going to find out is that you have Christ in you. And if that is proven true, then doesn't that prove that I'm for real?

[11 : 21] He wants them to examine themselves. It's one way of confirming what he's saying, but they were his own spiritual children. And when a child doesn't trust his parents, that's hard.

It hurts. The Corinthians didn't trust Paul and it had to be a dagger in Paul's heart. He loved them. He wanted what was best for them. We heard it.

He said, you know, if I'm weak and if that makes you strong, that's fine. That's what parents feel. I'll intentionally weaken myself in order to strengthen you.

That's what Paul's heart is. But here they are. They don't believe him and there's nothing more disheartening than that. Well, so they didn't trust him, which obviously leads to they're going to not understand him.

They're going to misunderstand him. They're going to misrepresent. They're going to not see his heart and things. And that's what you see happening in chapter 12, verse 19. He goes in and he starts to correct some of their misconceptions about his intentions.

[12 : 26] He says, have you been thinking all along that we've been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening.

This isn't about defending me. This has been about strengthening you. And so why was Paul so adamant about defending himself?

Well, they just thought he was vindicating himself for his own glory so that he could have standing. There were other these so-called super apostles around and so they thought, oh, he's just trying to look good right along with them.

They thought it was about Paul. And Paul says, that's not it at all. You totally missed the point. All Paul wanted to do was strengthen them.

All Paul wanted to do was love them and care for them. And it wasn't about him. It was about them. But they totally misunderstood his intentions. They put the worst possible spin on his actions.

[13 : 35] He can't win now. He can't win. And that hurts. And maybe you're starting to see, I know what that's like.

I've been there. And now that person is acting like you're the enemy when in fact they've taken the role of enemy and now you can't do anything right.

And so what do you do then? Well, what we're called to do is in Romans 12, Paul says, do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The only thing that can win trust and clarify misunderstandings in those situations, the only way that you can break through an enemy's heart is consistently, repeatedly, thoughtfully doing good to them.

And you don't do it. And that's what you see Paul doing here, trying to win them over after another time with them. But you don't do it there with some sort of slavish guilt or slavish fear.

[14 : 44] You do it from this position of, I'm free. I'm not. I'm not their slave. I'm not weak. I'm strong.

And you do it from freedom and strength and love. And that's what Paul is doing here. He's not groveling for their approval. He's not groveling for their acceptance, afraid of what they're going to think of him.

Instead, he still wants to love them and do good to them. And you see, he's not going to come there on that third visit holding an election where who's the most popular and I'm desperate to be the most popular.

No, he's going to do them good no matter what it costs. But my question and really the question that we started with is where did Paul get the strength to do that? here's a situation, here's a relationship that is painful and difficult.

Where does Paul get the strength to do that? And here's the surprising answer. you can see it in chapter 12, verse 4, or chapter 13, verse 4. For to be sure, he, that's Christ Jesus, he was crucified in weakness and yet he lives by God's power.

[16 : 00] Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you. I've said this repeatedly in the series on the attributes of God, that we run into the attributes of God not in the abstract but in our need.

So it's not hidden and contained within himself but available for our need. Now here Paul is in the middle of this very difficult situation and what is he looking to?

What is he saying? You know what? I can do this. I can keep going. I can keep persevering. I can keep loving. I can keep from retreating in fear when there's so much blood and poison in the water.

Well, it wasn't Paul's weakness that was going to define the relationship. It wasn't going to be his fear. It wasn't going to be his sin or their sin. It was going to be Christ's resurrection power.

Christ's resurrection power. So where did Paul get the strength to go on loving the Corinthians? Where can we get the love and the strength to go on loving those difficult situations?

[17:19] It's Christ's living power. I want to break this down into just several steps and several ingredients to see how Paul thought about this and how we need to be thinking about this.

First you see that he saw Christ this was his the way he was addressing this the way he was thinking about it he saw Christ as powerfully present in the situation powerfully present with those very people that he was having such difficult time with and that's where he begins in the in verse 3 the second half he chapter 3 or chapter 13 verse 3 he is not weak in dealing with you but is powerful among you so Paul wasn't looking at the Corinthians like it was him versus them or he's all alone it's just me and them and they're don't trust me they misunderstand me no he didn't see he saw Christ as powerfully present he's not dead and distant he's powerful and present so Paul looked and he knew and he counted on

Christ is actively powerfully present in them with them they weren't somehow immune or disconnected from his power from Christ's power he was there and he was powerful among them and in the context what Paul is specifically talking about is Christ's ability and power to deal and confront sin to deal and to confront sin so who can deal with sin in people's lives Christ can he can who can deal with the sin of those people that we are struggling to love and care for Christ can because he is powerful and he is present because he is alive so remember we can think of some examples remember Nadab and Abihu

Aaron's sons they offered strange fire to the Lord they were recklessly arrogantly ignorantly going into the tabernacle they are going to worship God their own way and this attitude they were setting this terrible example for God's people in general that oh you can just do whatever you want and was God helpless no he struck them down immediately he wasn't helpless he was there he was on the spot looking in and he had power to deal with it Miriam and Aaron Moses' sister and brother again they rise up against Moses and so here now this is like the worst of all toxic relationships because not only is it family it's leadership it's the community it's the church and they're recklessly sinning against God and the threat was just going to spread but God was able he was present and powerful to deal with Miriam and with

Aaron Miriam was struck with leprosy and the sign of rejection she had to go outside of the camp for seven days as a sign to God's people that Moses was his prophet his one you can think of David he arrogantly counting the fighting men and people were saying why are you doing this you don't need to do this when other people are telling you you don't need to do this and David went on ahead and did it until God finally said I'm going to give you three options three years of famine three months of plague or three days of falling into my hands excuse me it was three years of famine three months of fleeing before your enemies or three days of plague and God dealt with David's sin he pulled him up short he humbled David but you don't like those are all sort of dramatic amazing drastic examples you don't have to go back to the

[21 : 47] Old Testament to see this the Corinthians they didn't even have to go and look into their Bibles to see that Christ was powerfully present with them to find this some sort of Old Testament example some of the Corinthians had been abusing and misusing the Lord's Supper they'd been abusing misusing the Lord's Supper they were reckless against their brothers and sisters they were dishonoring God they were dishonoring their brothers and sisters and Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 says that is why many among you are weak and sick and a number of you have fallen asleep Christ had been powerfully present in the Corinthian church now Paul saw it and he counted on it and what do we need in these difficult relationships we need to see what Paul saw we need to believe what Paul believed we need to count on and lean into what Paul counted on and leaned into that Christ isn't absent he's not dead he's not distant he is powerful and he is present with the very people that we are pleading with or trying to live with now sometimes it's judgment sometimes it's judgment and punishment but sometimes he brings that judgment and punishment to the person's conscience before he brings it into their life and what

I mean by that is he wakes them up to their sin Christ is able to shine a light into that person's heart and make them see things differently to make them feel things differently to bring conviction where there had been no conviction before and so they start to see things differently and that's Christ's power at work he's the light of the world and he shines into the darkness that as much as much Christ being powerfully present as all the punishment we need to see what John saw in Revelation 1-3 remember the candlesticks and Christ is powerfully present walking among the candlesticks living and active he says I am the living one he's alive to judge to help to support to warn to correct he's alive to do all those things now if we come here and you come here and you come into the church and all you see are the problems and the people you really have missed the greatest hope giving truth of all that Christ is here and he is powerfully here he is alive and active here and you aren't alone it's not you versus them it's not you versus their stubborn sin when Paul says overcome evil with good we shouldn't think it's just us versus them

Christ is alive powerfully present well that's the first ingredient and here's the second ingredient this is this was so I mean that's true but Paul even goes further than that and he saw himself joined to Christ and this is what we need to see that we're not it's not just Christ powerfully present but I am joined to him and so verse 4 chapter 13 4 Paul uncovers and he lays bare his own way of thinking he says this is he just shows us this is how I'm going through this this is how I'm addressing this this is how I'm thinking about this and how did he think about these things and how do we need to think about these things well how did he see his life well it wasn't just him alone it's that I'm in Christ verse 4 he was crucified in weakness yet he lives by

God's power so Jesus fully experienced the weakness of what it means to be a human he experienced the weakness of what it's like to be in bad relationships where you're not trusted where you're misunderstood that wasn't some sort of foreign concept to him that was really at the very heart of what it was like for Jesus to be in the world his brothers don't believe him his own people don't accept him the stone the builders rejected the people that should have the men that should have been the ones heralding his coming!

because they had spent their lives studying this scripture and they're the ones that professed their love for the word of God these men these teachers who should have done the Messiah when they met him they opposed him the people that could have been his greatest allies ended up being his greatest enemies and they killed him that's how broken the relationship was he could do nothing right he could say nothing right remember John what is it 11 he raises Lazarus from the dead and the little postscript is well now the leader saw it and they wanted to kill him you can't do anything right but that's not where it ended he lives by God's power so he was declared with power to be the son of God by his!

[27 : 34] resurrection from the dead Romans 1 so resurrection power came out of this human weakness came afterward resurrection power overcame human weakness and that's Christ's life weakness and power and the important thing for us and the important thing for Paul was that wasn't just something that happened to Jesus that just wasn't the shape of Jesus life that's the shape of my life you see how Paul connects it connects himself to Christ united to Christ so does Paul experience weakness likewise he says in verse 4 likewise we are weak in him we experience all this kind of weakness too but does Paul experience power yet by God's power we will live with him to serve you that resurrection power that was in Jesus Christ is now living in

Paul it's joined to Jesus and through the Holy Spirit it's overflowing into Paul's life and so yes there's the weakness but there is also the resurrection power so you can read Romans 6 we died with Christ but now we're alive with him we died to sin just like Christ died to sin he rose to live a new life free from all that power of sin and we because we are joined to him we are raised to live a new life to God and so I'm alive in him we sing alive in him my living head that's how we need to see ourselves alive in him my living head I'm the the vine or the branch stuck into the vine and his life his resurrection life overflows into me now what does Paul say what am I going to do with this resurrection power I'm going to serve you I'm going to serve you that

I might serve that I might love that I might endure that I might confront what does service look like it's loving it's enduring it's confronting and that's what Paul is doing here he's confronting them loving people serving serving real legitimate serving not groveling not being afraid but going into a relationship saying I am going to love and serve this person sometimes it looks like confronting them confronting them and that's hard it's hard to know which is harder to be confronted or do the confronting!

They're hard in their own ways but isn't it easy to shirk it off when it's your job now you're the one that needs to go and do it it's so much easier to shirk it off to have some sort of easy piece but that is to ignore Christ's power that's to believe I'm not alive in him he's not alive in me it's just me it's to ignore his resurrection power for and but you see Paul confronting in love because he's saying my life is in Christ and Christ is alive powerfully alive loving serving people means bearing with people Paul is bearing!

he's carrying these people on his heart and it's heavy and it's hard he's persevering Paul hung in there he didn't write them off after two times that's one of the tricky things about putting together 1st Corinthians 2nd Corinthians all the different trips and plans because Paul is in the middle of this dynamic fluid situation and sometimes he's going and then he decides he writes letters because he's really working with them and you know if you're trying to really work with people and it's really hard the situation changes and you say I need to do this differently well here's Paul he's living with him he's bearing with him and it's hard but the whole time Paul isn't giving up he's not writing them off he's not getting rid of them he's not saying well they can have their super apostles no he's he wants to win them to Christ he wants them safe and strong he wants them perfected he feels about them the way you feel about your child your children you're going to do anything you're going to keep going and going as far as you can but you're never going to want to see them you want to see them grow love them but

[32 : 25] Paul leaned into that and so I guess if what I'm saying and those kind of relationships are something you can relate to echoing in your heart and you say I have names and I have faces that I can put on that let me just say hang in there lean into Christ when you're tired and weary you have a risen living savior to get life and help and comfort and strength from so lean into him loving serving people means staying gentle and humble under provocation gentle and humble under provocation doesn't mean being a doormat there's that fine line between I'm going to be strong but I'm going to be humble and gentle and you see Paul's not going to be a doormat when

I come to you I'm afraid I'm going to have to show you my power I don't really want to exercise my authority in that kind of way I really don't but he's not ruling it out they're not going to walk on him and over him but at the same time he is gentle and humble through this whole all this provocation and so where do you get that kind of strength when the gears are really grinding when there's a lot of pain in the relationship it's so easy to become harsh and impatient and angry to just lose it but can I tell you that's like a blinker on your dashboard saying you're not trusting in his resurrection power you're taking your eyes off of Jesus you're starting to live in your own strength but when I have his life his!

power I can do what he did and beautifully blend strength and gentleness together I don't have to fight and claw like my life is at stake because brothers and sisters our lives are not at stake Christ is your life you're alive in him and so you don't have to be overcome by evil but you can overcome evil with good so Christ resurrection power it's not just out there it's not just in the past it's in him and you are in him it's your life it's happened to you so live in it and keep serving and keep loving those hard to live with people and just finally do you see that this is good news because there is a living savior there's a living savior and he's powerfully present for you what was the hope of reconciliation for

Paul and the Corinthians well it was that Jesus would be working in both of their lives and the Corinthians lives especially to save them from their sin to bring them to their senses and even though most of them were Christians I think but to do it again to bring them to their senses again to save them from their sin again well what was going to be the hope for the reconciliation that Jesus Christ was present and that he would move and work in their lives there's still a savior that's living and so maybe your life is marked just by this great distance between you and God and who can bring these two parties together where where can reconciliation happen well there's a living savior and so you can come in weakness and helplessness that's not a problem for you for him because he has plenty of strength and you say

I'm dead well that's okay he's alive I sinned too much well he's been righteous enough he's a perfect savior he's present he's everything you need and he's here to save so you can look to him and be saved let's pray our Lord Jesus we thank you that you are powerfully present here with us thank you that you are with us when we go home and when we're at work you truly are our Emmanuel God with us so I pray that you would teach us to lean into you to rely upon you to not hold these doctrines in just an academic way but to hold them in a vital real trusting living way pray that you would help us and strengthen us pull us away from ourselves and fasten our eyes once again on

[37 : 44] Jesus our risen Savior pray this in Jesus name amen