GRACE, LOVE, and FELLOWSHIP

 A Study of 2nd Corinthians

**2nd Corinthians 12:9-10** “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in *my infirmities*, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. **10**Therefore *I take pleasure in infirmities*, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. *For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*

Each of us has weaknesses in our lives, they keep us humble, and cause us to rely heavily upon Him and not our own strength. But we must have faith that God can accomplish *everything* He has planned for us in spite of our weakness! For when we are weak, He is strong.

**Second Corinthians Thirteen**

Paul’s final remarks to the Corinthian church whom he has encouraged and corrected throughout both letters. He told them in the last chapter that Titus and another brother visited them on his behalf and have reported back to him. He is about to visit them himself. Hos hope is that through the stern correction in his letters about the ongoing sin they have allowed to continue in the church will be enough to lead them to repentance so that he does not have to deal harshly with them face-to-face.

**2nd Corinthians 13:1**This will be my third visit to you. “Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”

(He is quoting Deut. 19:15 which was part of the law that instructed how to litigate offenses. It must be by two or three witnesses.)

**2nd Corinthians 13:2-3“**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, **3**since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me.”

Some in the church have been doubting Paul’s authority, He reminds them of the power of God that is manifest in him, and they are not to confuse his meekness for weakness.

**2nd Corinthians 13:3b-4** “He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you. **4**For to be sure, he was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by God’s power. Likewise, we are weak in him, yet by God’s power we will live with him in our dealing with you.”

This is a continuation of the theme; “His strength is made perfect in weakness”, and “when we are weak, He is strong”. Jesus may have appeared weak to the onlookers when his body was nailed to the cross, yet that was the most powerful thing any person has ever done in history of the universe.

**Hebrew 2:14** “by his death he *broke* the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— and *freed* those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”

*The cross broke not only the power of death, but also broke the power of the one who holds the power of death.*

**1st Corinthians 1:18** “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

Paul continues with a challenge for each person to examine themselves.

**2nd Corinthians 13:5-6“**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? **6**And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test.”

He tells them *“examine yourselves”.* In other words, he wants each person to be honest with themselves about their own faith. This is not to condemn them and try to prove that they don’t belong, on the contrary, he wants them to make sure that their faith is genuine and that they truly have Christ living within them.

[ I saw a video recently of a Sky Diving Trainer. He said the first and most important step of going out on a dive, before you step onto the plane, is to examine your gear, and do a full “gear check”. No one doubts the importance of doing a full thorough, completely honest check of all the vital equipment you will need for a successful skydive.

It’s even more important for your faith in God, do you fully believe?, have you fully declared that He is you Lord? I don’t ask you that to condemn you if you haven’t, but to show you that it’s very important that you do.]

**2nd Corinthians 13:7-8“**Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong—not so that people will see that we have stood the test but so that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. **8**For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.”

One of the works of the Holy Spirit is to be our “Truth Detector”. Jesus told us that the Spirit of truth will be with us and in us.;

**John 14:16 “**And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— **17**the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will bein you.”

This is why Paul told us**; *“****For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.”* The world cannot accept this because they are not of the Spirit, but of the Devil. Jesus calls him the “Father of Lies” in John 8:44, which is the complete opposite of the “Spirit of Truth”.

The Spirit of Truth within us will not allow us to; believe, speak, or declare lies without convict us from within. “*we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.”*

[Example; If I told you that we are actually in Hawaii, not Hazlet, that today is Friday, not Sunday, and that I am actually a woman and not a man, you would not believe me because it’s not true.

If I pressured you or shamed you into believing these things for my sake, and declaring them as truth, you couldn’t do it in good conscience because the Spirit of Truth within you would tell you that it’s wrong. This is especially true if I start preaching a “false gospel”, the Holy Spirit will let you know right away that it is incorrect.]

*(Please don’t say “Aloha, Shabbat Shalom, Sister!” this was just an example.) : )*

“*we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.”*

The Holy Spirit keeps us bound to the truth when we allow Him to lead us, when we don’t, we are always prone to error.

The Spirit of truth leads us into all truth so that when we go the wrong way and find ourselves on the wrong path, we can be corrected, made right and fully restored.

**2nd Corinthians 13:9-10“**We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is that *you may be fully restored*. **10**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.”*

It saddens me how often I hear of Christian Leaders using their authority to *tear people down*, instead of *building them up*. Paul is very clear here and in other passages that his desire for the people he had authority over who were overcome gross sin, was for them to be completely restored, not to cast them away.

This is why he writes*; “our prayer is that you may be fully restored… the authority the Lord gave me [is] for ‘building you up’, NOT for ‘tearing you down’.”*

Remember what he said about the man in 1st Corinthians 5 that was involved in a sin *“of a kind that even pagans do not tolerate”?*  Yes, he was cast out of the church for a time, but it was never meant to be permanently and forever.

In fact He wrote in 2nd Corinthians;

**2nd Corinthians 2:6-8** “The punishment imposed on him by the majority is sufficient for him. So instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.”

A church discipline plan should always include a forgiveness and restoration plan.

[ Every once in a while I hear someone tell me that they are so made at their friend or family member, that they decided they will never speak to them again!

I always feel like saying; *“that’s a little harsh, how about 3-years, and if they’re still a jerk, make it 5 or 10 years, but at least have some limit to it.”* The goal should always be for restoration, maybe it won’t happen right away, but hopefully someday, not never.]

This is a mistake that many churches make. They have a short list of unforgivable sins, that even if a person repents with godly sorrow and; “Produces fruit in keeping with repentance.” (Matt. 3:8), they are shunned and never restored into fellowship with the body.

Paul is very clear that the goal is restoration, not condemnation.

***Galatians 6:1*** “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.”

*If someone is caught in a sin* - “overtaken in any trespass”, or “overcome by some sin”…

*“You who live by the Spirit”* - means those who are spiritual and display the fruits of the Spirit. (“Love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, gentleness, meekness, goodness, and self-control.)

*Spirit should restore that person gently.* – The goal is restoration, not in a harsh and condemning manner, but with the gentleness of the Spirit.

That’s why it says, *“you who live by the Spirit”* should restore that person gently”.

Those who “*don’t live by the Spirit”*, should certainly NOT be part of this in any way. They will cause more harm than good.

Final Greetings:

**2nd Corinthians 13:11-14“**Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

His final greeting tells us exactly what he wants for this beloved church. He wants them to rejoice (celebrate their joy), and focus on being restored to peace and unity. He knows that if they do this they will experience the most wonderful thing that happens this side of heaven, that is that the very presence of the “God of Love & Peace” will be with them.

It’s important to know that the word “strive” in verse 11 means that it takes effort to bring this about. We need to work hard towards restoration, encouragement, one-mindedness, and peace. It does *not* just happen automatically.

This is why he tells the Ephesians;

**Eph. 4:3** “Make every *effort* to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Are we making every effort to get keep the unity of the Spirit in our body. We do this by *“taking every thought captive”* (2nd Cor. 10:5), and

*“Letting your conversation be always full of grace”* (Col. 4:6)

We must realize that the “Unity of the Spirit” is among our highest goals, it’s what Jesus emphasized three times as He prayed for us on His final night before the cross.

Closing:

**2nd Corinthians 13:12-14**end **“**Greet one another with a holy kiss.”

[Turn and kiss everyone around you…(just kidding).]

**“13**All God’s people here send their greetings.”

These are the believers who he is among in Macedonia (Thessalonians, Philippians). He shows us here how important it is to have unity among churches, not just within the church.

**“14**May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”<>

He closes his letter, (the book of 2nd Corinthians) with these three sentiments that he wishes for the church;

*May the;*

* **The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,**
* **The Love of God,**
* **The Fellowship of the Holy Spirit**

*be with you all!*

These are the things I wish for our church and for everyone on my life.

The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ – The grace by which we are saved, and the grace that is sufficient to sustain us in every hardship or trial we face.

The love of God – The Love that He demonstrated by sending Jesus to die for us, The sacrificial, unconditional, never-ending Love that is not predicated upon how deserving we are to receive His love, but how astonishingly willing He is to offer His love.

The fellowship of the Holy Spirit – The presence of the Holy Spirit to teach us, guide us, empower us, comfort us, and lead us into all truth.

All these were available to that early church in Corinth, we do not have a later letter from Paul about the condition of the Corinthian church, but we do know that he visited them as he said he would prior to his journey back to Jerusalem where he was arrested. Our hope is that when he did arrive for his final visit in Corinth, it was just as he had hoped.

I also hope that our church experiences these same blessings and favor of the Lord in our time.

That we would;

***Rejoice!***

***Strive for full restoration,***

***encourage one another,***

***be of one mind, live in peace.***

***And that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,***

***and the love of God,***

***and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit***

***would be with us all!***