

# Paul chose weakness because of strength

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**By Dave Havir**

BIG SANDY, Texas—All people have moments of weakness. We wish we could handle situations better in our family, on our jobs and in every area of our lives.

Oftentimes our actions of weakness come from negative circumstances. Some of those circumstances that create weakness are a lack of innate ability, a lack of preparation, a lack of discipline, a lack of vision or a lack of courage.

Let's face it. Our moments of weakness are oftentimes well earned. We are weak.

But aren't believers expected to be different? Aren't believers supposed to be new creations?

## **Interesting concept**

Paul mentioned an interesting phrase in his second letter to the congregation in Corinth. The phrase is found in 2 Corinthians 12:10. He wrote: When I am weak, then I am strong.

That's an interesting concept.

According to Paul, weakness is not always a choice due to negative circumstances. Apparently weakness can be a choice based upon strength.

What makes this discussion so relevant is the believer's battle to stay away from two extremes. Notice the following.

- One extreme in human behavior is the approach of a believer thinking too highly of himself.

- The other extreme is the approach of the believer debasing himself in a self-defeating way. This emotional condition usually convinces the believer that he is behaving with true humility.

When a believer finds the balance between these two extremes, he has found true humility.

It is obvious that thinking too highly of oneself is not true humility. What is not so obvious to many is the charade of debasing oneself in a self-defeating way. A believer with this condition is often not trying to maliciously fool others, because the problem is that he has already fooled himself.

### **Not a doormat**

Before we read the context of 2 Corinthians 12:10, let's notice another example of the apostle Paul to prove that he was not a doormat.

In Acts 23:1 Paul spoke boldly before the council. The high priest instructed someone to hit Paul in the mouth (verse 2).

Paul heard the words, but he did not realize that it was the high priest speaking. Therefore Paul responded with some sharp criticism (verse 3).

Someone standing nearby asked Paul a question (verse 4): "Will you revile God's high priest?"

Which paraphrase of Paul's answer (verse 5) most accurately reflects what he said?

- a. I shouldn't have said those words to anyone.
- b. I shouldn't have said them to the high priest.

Apparently Paul had no problem with saying the sharp criticism. He stated that he should not have said those strong words to the high priest.

Paul was not a doormat.

### **Context of letter**

To understand the context of 2 Corinthians 12:10, we need to go back to 2 Corinthians 11:1. The following scriptures will be quoted from the Moffatt translation.

■ From 2 Corinthians 11:1: "I wish you would put up with a little folly from me."

■ From verse 4: "You put up with it all right, when some interloper preaches a second Jesus (not the Jesus I preached), or when you are treated to a Spirit different from the Spirit you once received, and to a different gospel from what I gave you! Why not put up with me?"

■ From verse 5: "I hold I am not one whit inferior to these precious 'apostles'!"

■ From verses 16-18: "I repeat, no one is to think me a fool; but even so, pray bear with me, fool as I am, that I may have my little boast as well as others! (What I am now going to say is not inspired by the Lord: I am in the role of a 'fool,' now, on this business of boasting. Since many boast on the score of the flesh, I will do the same.)"

■ From 2 Corinthians 12:1: "There is nothing to be gained by this sort of thing, but, as I am obliged to boast, I will go to visions and revelations of the Lord."

■ From verses 5-6: "Of an experience like that I am prepared to boast, but not of myself personally—not except as regards my weaknesses. (If I did care to boast of other things, I would be no 'fool,' for I would have a true tale to tell; however, I abstain from that—I want no one to take me for more than he can see in me or make out from me.)"

Paul then mentioned the thorn in the flesh from the Lord to keep him humble (verse 7). Paul asked God three times to remove the thorn in the flesh (verse 8).

■ Concerning Paul's request for the thorn in the flesh to be removed from him, Paul recorded the Lord answering this way in verse 9: "He told me, 'It is enough for you to have my grace: it is in weakness that my power is fully felt.' "

■ Then came Paul's reaction to the Lord's answer in verses 9-10: "So I am proud to boast of all my weakness, and thus to have the power of Christ resting on my life. It makes me content, for Christ's sake, with weakness, insults, trouble, persecution, and calamity; for I am strong just when I am weak."

### **Power of Christ**

Choosing weakness because of strength: That sounds like Paul was following the example of our Savior.

■ Christ "made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7).

■ From that time Jesus began to show His disciples how He must go to Jerusalem; suffer many things from the elders, chief priests and scribes; be killed; and be raised again the third day (Matthew 16:21).

■ Jesus told His disciples that He willingly laid down His life for the sheep (John 10:17-18).

### **Back to Paul**

Before we conclude, let's go back to 2 Corinthians 12:10 and read the next verse (again from the Moffatt).

In verse 11 Paul wrote: "Now this is playing the fool! But you forced me to it, instead of coming forward yourselves and vouching for me. That was what I deserved; for, 'nobody' as I am, I am not one whit inferior to these precious 'apostles.' "

Although Paul recognized the weaknesses of others, he also recognized his own weaknesses.

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