

**A LESSON IN GRACE**  
**I. The Lesson Starts with Death**  
**II. The Defining Doctrine of Christ**  
**III. The Power To Save**  
2 Corinthians 12:7-10

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2021 | PRE-LENT

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## 2 Corinthians 12:7–10 (CSB)

<sup>7</sup> Therefore, so that I would not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to torment me so that I would not exalt myself. <sup>8</sup> Concerning this, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me. <sup>9</sup> But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.”

Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may reside in me. <sup>10</sup> So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Dear fellow redeemed: The Christian church is an invading force, like a small expeditionary force invading a hostile country. The conflict is a spiritual conflict, and so battle is done with words. Look at our other lessons. The Lord sends out His word to accomplish his saving will, and the devil sows deceit to undermine, cover, uproot, and draw people away from the word.

In Corinth, the Lord used the apostle Paul to proclaim the everlasting gospel, and through it the Holy Spirit brought people to faith. The devil countered (so to speak) through the depraved culture of Corinth. (Think of a platoon surrounded by the enemy.) But there was also the problem that some in the church didn’t believe that the gospel was enough in the face of such opposition.

They thought the solution was to “wage war according to the flesh,” to be more in tune with the popular culture, more impressive in their apparent piety, seemingly more learned and earnest, and, well, just more popular – “cooler.”

Much of our epistle lesson is Paul’s reply to these super – apostles. He had plenty to boast about, but he had to forcefully lit it out that, “***For although we live in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh, since the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but are powerful through God for the demolition of strongholds. We demolish arguments and every proud thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.***” (2 Corinthians 10:3–5, CSB) The real way to wage war in a world like ours is through the gospel. So he concludes this long session with a lesson in the gospel, ...

### A LESSON IN GRACE

#### I. The Lesson Starts with Death

#### II. The Defining Doctrine of Christ

#### III. The Power To Save

#### I. The Lesson Starts with Death

A lesson in grace is really a lesson in the Gospel, and the power to save, as Christ tells us through Paul’s words to the Romans, “***For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith.***” (Romans 1:16–17, CSB) ]

You may be a cool dude, according to the flesh, but that isn’t going to make Christians.

The gospel is the good news of God’s rescue of humanity from sin, death, and hell. But to grasp the gospel, we have to start with the reality of death.. Death is the penalty of sin. “... ***sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned.***” (Romans 5:12, CSB)

You die, and then what? Where are you going? What are you going to do? You would have a difficult time saying that is just the end, for in all human history the consensus is that there is something to come. Yes, there are materialists who say that the end is the end, but few of those even face death with that bankrupt belief intact. I have seen their fear.

Together with death comes the condemnation of our conscience which tell us that not only is death ahead of us, but there is judgment. The devil perverts the conscience wherever possible, especially today, where the refuge of even the worst criminal is that they are nice. It's true. I've known nice thieves, nice adulterers, nice blasphemers, nice liars, nice murderers, nice sexual deviants, nice grudge-bearers, nice haters, nice pedophiles, nice abusers, nice criminals. Really. You probably have too.

That's one attempt to deal with sin and death – self-righteousness.

But that doesn't cut it. God says through His psalmist, "***The boastful cannot stand in your sight; you hate all evildoers. You destroy those who tell lies; the Lord abhors violent and treacherous people.***" (Psalm 5:5–6, CSB) And remember, He is the One who decides what evildoers are, not you or me – because we are the evildoers, as it is written, "***There is certainly no one righteous on the earth who does good and never sins.***" (Ecclesiastes 7:20, CSB)

## **II. The Defining Doctrine of Christ**

Paul wasn't good enough to avoid the consequences of sin. He suffered, and he was doomed to die. He wanted the Corinthians to know this. Even now he needed his faith built up. Nothing in our flesh can do this. For he suffered, and he was dying in a dying world.

But he had hope, hope given to Him by Christ and he points to what Christ gave him as the true power to wage the spiritual war.<sup>7</sup> **Therefore, so that I would not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to torment me so that I would not exalt myself.**<sup>8</sup> **Concerning this, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me.**<sup>9</sup> **But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness."**

To those who are suffering, to those who are dying there is only one thing that is sufficient, only one thing that is enough, and that is the grace of Christ.

This refers to the unique doctrine of the Christian faith. Yes, God hates all who do wrong and, yes, God says to all who stand before Him without perfect holiness that they are doomed "***to the resurrection of condemnation.***" But that terrible justice was satisfied, for Christ has taken our place, both to live out a righteous life, and to bear Divine condemnation. To die. We call it the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement of Christ. "***He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.***" (2 Corinthians 5:21, CSB)

The good news of everything God did to satisfy His justice and bring us to heaven is the Gospel, it is truth revealed only in Scripture and proclaimed only by the Christian church.

This is the GRACE, the undeserved love of God for man, that Paul is talking about. It is the only source of hope. It is the only thing that is enough.

All the money in the world? Not enough, for money doesn't give life.

Freedom from suffering? Freedom from illness? Not enough. For still we grow old and die.

The respect and adulation of others? Good moral life, and churchly life, a righteous reputation? Not enough, for our righteousness is never enough.

To anyone who is dying, and that is you, to anyone who suffers, at times that is you, only one thing is enough, and that is the grace of God.

This is what Paul had to give to the Corinthians that the super-apostles did not. The grace of God.

### **III. The Power To Save**

We are in a situation much like Corinth. Immorality is defined down and down and down, so that the “sociological consensus” approves of what was considered unthinkable in the past, and worse, what is condemned by Scripture as an abomination. These people don’t just need condemnation, they need salvation.

With the warning of the law, the condemnation, God tears down the false hopes of the “nice” thieves, adulterers, blasphemers, liars, murderers, deviants, grudge-bearers, haters, pedophiles, abusers, and criminals to shatter their self-righteousness (or their despair).

And with the gospel we give them the only thing that is enough, “***the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes,***” (Romans 1:16, CSB) The Gospel, the message of grace, the only thing that is ***powerful through God for the demolition of strongholds. We demolish arguments and every proud thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.***”

For only the gospel has the power to create the faith that receives it, that believes it, that trusts in nothing but Christ and His grace.

We have great powers arrayed against us these days. In China, Christians are defined as anti-government and are put in re-education camps. Here in the US, former CIA director John Brennan warns against “religious extremists.”<sup>1</sup> If you think he doesn’t mean you, then look up the Southern Poverty Law Center, a far-left anti-Christian group that is used as the “standard” to define religious extremists. They include as hate groups benign Christian groups like Family Research Council, Alliance Defending Freedom (who helped us when we were prevented from ministering to Sam Thacker).

While there are some things we can do as citizens to preserve our liberty, “***the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh***” only the Grace of God is enough. Really, while the world stews, and we face suffering and even death itself and wonder what is the remedy, there is but one answer: Grace. Only the grace of God because of Christ is enough.

AMEN.

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<sup>1</sup> I know looking forward that the members of the Biden team who have been nominated or have been appointed, are now moving in laser-like fashion to try to uncover as much as they can about what looks very similar to insurgency movements that we’ve seen overseas, where they germinate in different parts of a country, and they gain strength, and it brings together an unholy alliance, frequently, of religious extremists, authoritarians, fascists, bigots, racists, nativists, even libertarians. ([https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2021/01/21/john\\_brennan\\_biden\\_admin\\_has\\_laser-like\\_focus\\_on\\_insurgency\\_movements\\_of\\_bigots\\_racists\\_libertarians.html](https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2021/01/21/john_brennan_biden_admin_has_laser-like_focus_on_insurgency_movements_of_bigots_racists_libertarians.html), accessed February 4, 2021.)