

STRENGTH THROUGH WEAKNESS

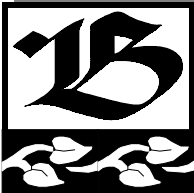
2 Corinthians 4:7 - 12

There is a saying that goes, "Your greatest strength can become your greatest weakness." While this saying is often true, consider reversing the statement to say, "Your greatest weakness can become your greatest strength." The society in which we live would never consider a weakness to be a strength, but this is precisely what the Bible does. Isn't it just like God to make weakness the means of strength?

I. A mighty treasure in an earthen Vessel 4:7

II. Power manifested in times of weakness 4:8-12

WHAT DOES IT SAY?



ut we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from

God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. ¹² So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

What are some characteristics of earthen vessels?
(see Psalm 2:9; Isaiah 29:16; 30:4; Rom. 9:20)

"By speaking of earthen vessels he signifies the infirmity of human nature, which can do nothing unless it has received strength from God; and God proclaims Himself to His own praise through those that are weak, in order that the glory may be given to Him, not to man who is formed from clay."

Ambrose,
4th century theologian

How did Paul cope in the midst of his sufferings? (Compare 2 Cor. 12:7-10)

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Why do you think that the power of Christ so often rests with people who are seemingly weak?
Read **1 Cor. 1:27-29** for a classic expression of this concept.

What is the "death" that Paul is referring to here in verse 12, and how does it produce life in someone else? (see 1 Cor. 4:11; 2 Cor. 6:5,9; 11:23-25; Gal. 6:17)

"So also for the Christian the breaking up of the outward man, the daily dying to self, allows the divine life and glory within to burst forth and drive back the powers of darkness, to the praise of almighty God."

Philip Hughes

“Apart from God we are nothing but humble earthen pots - and sometimes cracked pots, at that! Of course, there are all kinds of grades of clay. Some people are like fine china - they crack easily. While they have a very fine texture, it is nothing more than a form of clay. Others are more like sun-dried mud and crumble at the first rap. Some are tough and resilient by nature, and others are pliable and easily molded. But all are clay. Underneath, we are all ordinary people.

But the Christian is more than an empty vessel. We have something within - or better, Someone within. We have a treasure in the earthen vessel. And not only a treasure - a transcendent power! That is humanity as God intended it to be.”

Ray Stedman, Authentic Christianity

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

In your own words, summarize the main point of this passage.



LIFE RESPONSE

How is God asking you to put this into action in your life this week?



Write down two areas of your life where you are, or have been “weak”. Have you seen God’s power work in these areas?

Sometimes Christians are encouraged to hide their weaknesses, to act as though they have no problems. Why do you think that is?

How does this passage, especially verse 7, speak to that attitude?