

The Book of 2 Corinthians

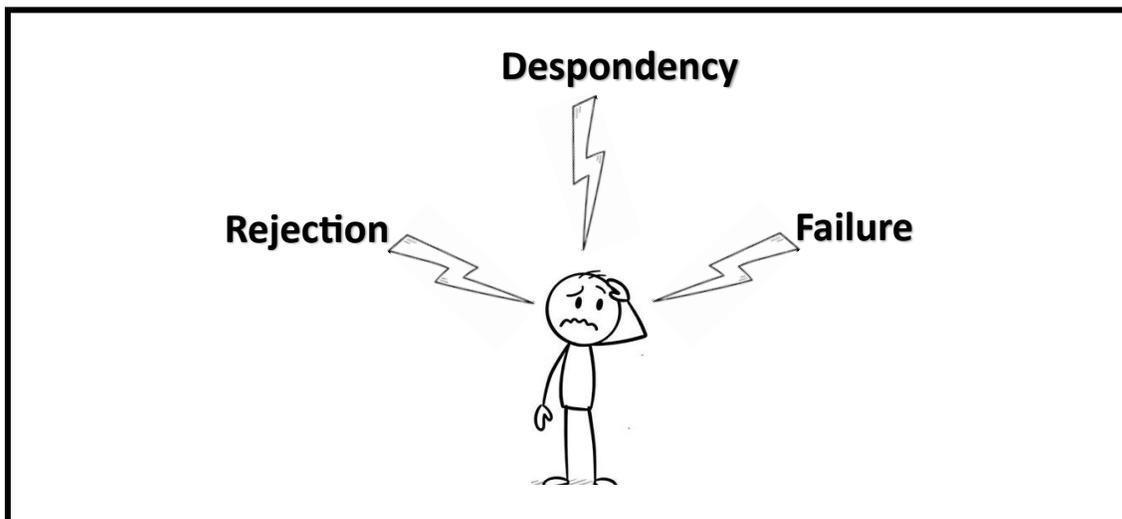
2 Corinthians 2:14-17

Session 20: Our Triumph in Christ, part 1

We are studying 2 Corinthians chapter 2. Today's session brings us to the last verses in the chapter.

Verses 14-17 describe the overall “comfort” that Paul operates upon, and the “salvation” which he enjoys from the effects of the sufferings of Christ (SoC). What are some of those effects? (Feelings of rejection, despondency, failure, etc.).

SoC Effects



Paul was certainly rejected by the church at Corinth. That rejection could lead to despondency in Paul. He could start feeling like he was a failure. This is exactly what Satan wanted to achieve through these attacks against Paul.

Why? Because at the very least, Satan is hoping to silence Paul from time-to-time. The fact that this happened with Paul is evident by his constant request for the saints to pray for him that he would preach the gospel, or speak the mystery “as I ought to speak.” We looked at that in our last session. But what Satan is really after is that Paul would become so disheartened that he would quit his ministry, stop preaching, and quit his sonship life.

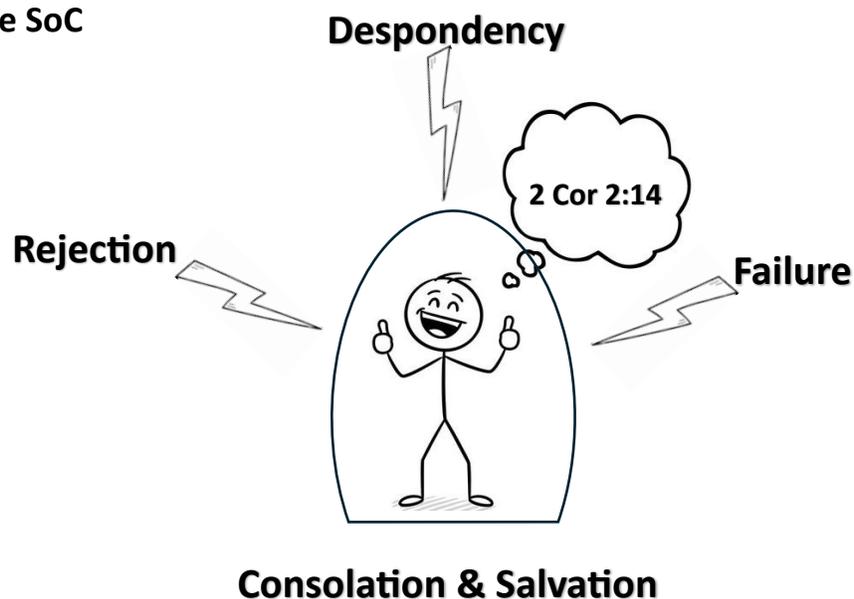
When we experience the SoC, Satan is hoping to do the same with us. Satan hopes to either silence us from time-to-time by intimidating us by those who oppose our doctrine or message so that we are afraid to bring up the gospel or talk about the mystery. This can happen at a family gathering or with friends. But what he is really after is to make life so difficult for you that you will quit your sonship life, that you will drop out of this church and stop learning the doctrine.

If you go back to the old way you used to live as a Christian, he is fine with that. Start praying the way you used to pray, he is fine with that. If you quit everything spiritual altogether, he is fine with that too. Anything but sonship will do.

But, there is a remedy for the effects of the SoC found in 2 Corinthians 2:14-17. This is the doctrine, which Paul employed when he encountered the SoC so that the attacks against him did not cause him to be silent or quit. In fact, quite the opposite took place in Paul. Instead of wearing him down, Paul was able to use these things to strengthen his inner man and become spiritually stronger after the attacks than he was before. (If you are thinking about this in terms of Romans 8, what would you call this? More than a conqueror!)

Paul had doctrine, which actually comforted him and saved him from the effects of the sufferings of Christ.

Effects of the SoC



Wouldn't you like to have the same consolation and salvation that Paul enjoyed when these things happened to him? You can, if you learn and apply the doctrine here in 2 Corinthians, because this is the reason Paul wrote this letter, so we can endure the same sufferings by the consolation and salvation which he enjoyed.

Remember 1 Corinthians 1:3-6?

2 Corinthians 1:3 Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; ⁴ Who **comforteth us in all our tribulation**, that we may be able to **comfort them which are in any trouble**, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. ⁵ For as **the sufferings of Christ abound in us**, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. ⁶ And whether we be afflicted, ***it is for your consolation and salvation***, which is effectual in the **enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer**: or whether we be comforted, *it is for your consolation and salvation*.

You can put the whole book of **2 Corinthians into 3 phrases**:

1) Paul's Sufferings (our ensample)

Did you know that Paul suffered the things he suffered so that he could serve as an ensample of how to handle those sufferings?

2) How he endured

Verses 14-17 give us the doctrinal remedy that Paul used to keep from being affected by the sufferings of Christ.

3) So can we

That same remedy that worked for Paul will work for us.

In chapter 2, these attacks are against Paul's personal integrity, coming from believers within the Corinthian assembly, the church which Paul himself formed at Corinth. Let's start by reading the passage.

2 Corinthians 2:14 Now thanks *be* unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. ¹⁵ For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that

are saved, and in them that perish: ¹⁶ To the one *we are* the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who *is* sufficient for these things? ¹⁷ For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.

Now that we have seen the entire passage, let's focus for a moment on verse 14. What I am after here is clarity about what is being said and what is not being said.

2 Corinthians 2:14 Now thanks *be* unto God, which **always causeth us to triumph** in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.

Let me give us some principles that will keep us from misinterpreting the verse. When verse 14 says that God "always causeth us to triumph," Paul is not talking about God changing his outward circumstances so that he is triumphant in the outcome of his ministry endeavors.

Paul may be successful in his attempts to minister to people, or he may not. Either way, these are not what the "triumph" is about. The "triumph" Paul refers to takes place within us; it is not describing what happens in our outward circumstances. The triumph is spiritual in nature, not physical.

This is an over-arching truth when it comes to what God is actively doing in this dispensation of grace. His work is spiritual in nature and it takes place in the inner man. And that inner man work (godly edifying) does two major things: 1) it renews our mind (by transforming us into the image of God's Son, so that Christ can literally live His life in and through us), and 2) that inner-man work becomes the basis/driver of our outward conduct and behavior.

All of our behavior is the product of something that is in our thinking. We may have that thinking so ingrained within us that we don't pause and think about it, but even the things we do by habit are the product of something we once thought.

Godliness works the same way. Godly thinking is what produces godly actions. And in order for the thinking to be godly, it must come from God through His word, or more specifically, through the doctrine contained in Paul's epistles.

The category 2 attacks against Paul are real, and they take place in the real world. They may come directly from men, or they come from the Adversary through men, but it makes no difference. Either way, we are able to “triumph” over these attacks. Today’s lesson will show us how to do that.

Second Corinthians 2:14; like Romans 8:28 and Philippians 4:13 are spiritual truths that are meant to be a reality for us as we are going through outward physical circumstances. For example, the “triumphing” of 2 Corinthians 2:14 is spiritual in nature, but it is in response to some real attacks against Paul.

Now, let’s take a quick look at Romans 8:28 to drive home the truth that God’s work today is not in our physical circumstances, but in our inner man.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.

In Romans 8:28, the “things” which are working together for our good are physical circumstances, but the “good” which is being produced is a spiritual good in our inner man, not a physical result. Do you understand what is being said here?

Every situation that happens to us, everything we go through, even if it is an attack of the Adversary, even if it is the sufferings of this present time; all of the things which happen to us have the ability to “work together for good.” That does not mean the physical event itself will be “good,” it means the spiritual work God produces in us as we go through those trials will be good because even the bad things that happen to us are meant to benefit us spiritually.

Even our suffering, when we respond to it in a godly way, will benefit us spiritually by conforming us to the image of Christ.

The caveat here is that this “good” happens for, “them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” What is God’s purpose? It is given to us in the next verse.

Romans 8:29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate **to be conformed to the image of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

That is a process that begins while we are here on this earth, as we are transformed by Paul's doctrine working in us. And how are we transformed? We are transformed first in our minds.

Romans 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but **be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind**, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

What is my point in going back to Romans 8:28? To give an example that the work God is doing during this dispensation of grace (DoG) is a spiritual work in our inner man, not an arranging of circumstances.

For our next example, let's talk about Philippians 4:13.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

As a young preacher-boy who pulled this verse out of its context, this used to be my favorite verse. But when I learned to keep verses within their context, it no longer said what I thought it was saying. And honestly, I was kind of bummed out.

Like so many today, I thought this verse meant that whatever I wanted to do, God would help me accomplish it as long as I was doing it for Him (through Christ). So, let's read the context.

Philippians 4:10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, *therewith* to be content. ¹² I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. ¹³ I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

¹⁴ Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.

The Philippians used to send Paul financial support so he could do the work he was doing full time, but there came a time when they were not able to support

him. After a time, they were once again able to contribute to Paul's support and this is what Paul is referring to in verse 10.

Philippians 4:10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last **your care of me hath flourished again**; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.

Paul is saying that he is rejoicing in the Lord now that they are able to once again support his ministry. He knows they were concerned (careful) about supporting him all along, even during the time they were unable to contribute.

But why is Paul rejoicing? Because he received an offering? Yes and no. Take a look at verse 11.

Philippians 4:11 **Not that I speak in respect of want:** for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, *therewith* to be content.

Without the Philippians' support, Paul was doing without, but the reason Paul was rejoicing when their giving resumed was not primarily because he would no longer have to do without ("not in respect of want"). Paul's primary rejoicing was not that his lack of necessities was remedied, but that the doctrine was working in the Philippians which was evidenced by their giving.

No, Paul was not looking to suffer want, so he was grateful for their generosity toward him, but his greater joy was in seeing the doctrine working in them. Why? Because he learned, "in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

What state was Paul in when the Philippians were unable to give? He was in a state of "want." He was doing without. Look at how he describes it in the next verse.

Philippians 4:12 I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

Paul knew what it was like to suffer hunger, to suffer need, and he knew what it was like to be full and to have plenty. And with either one, he was content. How could this be? Because Paul was not focused on the physical, on the visible, but

on the spiritual, on things which are invisible. But we'll cover this in detail when we get to the book of Philippians.

Notice that when Paul was doing without basics like food, God did not supernaturally send him food as God sent ravens to feed the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 17. God did not miraculously spread manna on the ground each morning for Paul as He did for the people of Israel in the wilderness. God did not multiply the last of Paul's rations each day as He did with the meal and cruse of oil for Elijah. God allowed Paul to do without because the work of God in the DoG is not the miraculous arrangement of outward circumstances, but the transformation of the inner man. For Paul, this meant that he learned to be content when he had nothing, and thankful when he had something.

As we study through Paul's epistles and learn that in this DoG, God is not working behind the scenes to arrange the physical circumstances of our lives, at first this may not seem to be good news. Almost everyone would rather have God miraculously intervening in their lives so that things will work out the way they want. God limiting His work to our inner man does not sound that thrilling. What we don't realize is that the inner man work is much more valuable than the outer man work for several reasons.

For God to be constantly arranging the things around you is the business of dealing with children. For God to be constantly working on you is the business of dealing with adults. And when you trusted Christ as your Savior, God began his workmanship in you as a spiritual adult who would mature and "grow up into him in all things" (Ephesians 4:15).

If you are a parent, let me ask you a question: If I told you that there was a way for your children to be happy every single day, even during times of difficulty, how much would you want that for your children? If I told you there is a way for you to be happy every day, in spite of what may be happening in the world, would you want that for yourself? If you answered "yes" to either of those questions, I am glad to say that this can be true for you, and for your children (and I say children because they are the ones we have the most influence over, but it could also be

true for your siblings or even your friends). And do you know how this can be true? By allowing God, through His Spirit, to transform you in your inner man.

We talk about how important it is to be conformed to the image of Christ, and rightly so, as this is the primary thing that God is accomplishing in us; but what we don't mention is that a by-product of having the life of Christ made manifest in us, a by-product of being transformed by God's word is that you can be happy even when times are difficult. Most people want to be happy, even though a lot of people are not happy.

One of the ways the doctrine produces happiness in us is by producing an attitude of thankfulness. It has been said that thankfulness is the mother of happiness, and I think there is some truth in that.

Even for people who are not saved, if they will develop two traits, they will become a much happier person. What are those two traits? They are contentment and thankfulness. When your children are young; before they are saved you should instill these two virtues in them. This will set your children up for a lifetime of happiness, and it lays a foundation upon which godly contentment will be built once they are saved.

After they are saved, they can learn to be thankful for and content in the spiritual work that God wants to do in their inner man, and they can learn to value that more than the physical things of life.

Until a person learns to be content with what they have (and I mean godly contentment which is produced by God's word working in us), and until a person cultivates an attitude of thankfulness for the things they do have, they are not going to be a happy person. Otherwise, however much they have, it will not be enough. And they will be driven to try to find happiness in all the wrong places.

Our problem in this country is not that we have plenty or more than we need; the problem is not being grateful or content. People think that not having very much is the problem, but that's not it: the problem is not having the ability to be content with such things as we have.

I know this sounds strange in today's culture here in America, but this is the wisdom the Bible teaches us. I have known people who were rich and miserable, and people who were poor and happy. The old saying, money can't buy happiness is true. Take a look at the wisdom Paul dispenses in his first letter to Timothy.

1 Timothy 6:6 But **godliness with contentment is great gain.** ⁷ For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out.

Let me finish up what I want to say about this issue of happiness: being unhappy is easy, which is why so many people are unhappy. Happiness takes work, the work of being truly thankful and the work to develop the ability to be content. And guess where this work needs to take place – it's in our mind! That is where you develop an attitude of thankfulness and contentment. And guess what has the power to renew your mind? You guessed it, God's word, and more specifically, the doctrine sitting in Romans through Philemon.

Another thing and I really ought to do a whole lesson on this; don't fall into the trap of confusing happiness with other things, such as success. Having success is not the same thing as being happy.

Also, do not confuse fun for happiness. Fun is something you do, happy is something you are. People think that if they have fun, if they do things they enjoy, if they do things that are pleasurable, they will be happy, but that is not always the case. Fun is instantaneous and fleeting. As soon as the roller coaster ride is over, so is the fun. But happiness is a state of being that continues long after the fun is over.

Now, let me warn you of something that will spoil any chance you have to be happy: seeing yourself as a victim. This really does deserve some time, but not here, not now. What I will say is that if you find yourself thinking, I could be happy if it wasn't for my boss; I could be happy if I made more money; I could be happy if..., and you fill in the blank: if this is what you are doing, then you are going about this all wrong, and you will not arrive at happiness. Why? Because you are making the mistake of thinking that happiness comes from external sources. Happiness comes from inside you.

And here is an important point; we think of happiness as an emotion when really, it is a decision. Yes, it takes work, but anyone can be happy if they want to be. The recipe is right here in the Bible.

Of course, there is a worldly recipe for happiness which I think every lost person ought to follow. I believe that being happy, or at least giving the impression that you are happy is a moral obligation for everyone, and if you understood why I say that, you would agree with me.

But the bar for saved people is much higher. And our recipe for happiness is found in the Bible and it comes by the effectual working of the doctrine in us.

Okay, here is the last thing: people, who are happy, have meaning and purpose to their lives. Why is that? Because happiness is a by-product of living a life of purpose.

For example, an unsaved man may be happy because he has found purpose in his work, and an unsaved mother can find purpose in her children.

But for adopted sons and daughters, we find our purpose in God, and every other relationship flows out of and is regulated by that singular purpose. The bar of happiness for a saved person is higher than for an unsaved person.

Do you think the apostle Paul was a happy person? I do. As such, I do not think that Paul went around griping and complaining about what was happening to him; about the people who made his life difficult, or about his circumstances. Happy people do not like to be around complainers; people who constantly moan and groan about how bad things are, focusing on what is going wrong. Learn to be content that is what Paul did.

Philippians 4:11 Not that I speak in respect of want: **for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, *therewith* to be content.**

The next time you hear yourself complaining, ask yourself, "Is this what an adopted son does to glorify his heavenly Father? Is my complaining an indicator of the doctrine working in me? Is this how Christ lives His life in me? Am I putting

the power of God's grace on display for the world to see in me? Is my complaining edifying to the people who hear me?"

And for anyone watching this recording who is thinking I am advocating for not working to improve ourselves or our situation, I am not. That is the pendulum swing to the other extreme. Neither pendulum swing is godly. If you can fix your problem, then do that. If you cannot, then employ the doctrine and stop griping.

Our apostle had such a renewed mind that he could be content even when he was hungry. I want us to see that no matter if Paul doesn't have the means to feed himself, or to take care of his needs, he is still content. It is with this in view that he writes verse 13.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

What are the things Paul can do "through Christ?" He just told us; he can be full, and he can be hungry. He can have plenty, and he can suffer need. These are the "all things" which Paul can do. Therefore, verse 13 is not at all about a guarantee of good fortune, or promotion, or financial security, or position of power, or any such things. This is not the verse that tells you, If you want to be President of the U.S. one day, you can do "all things through Christ." That is not what this verse is saying.

Paul is talking, in all of these places, about something spiritual that takes place in us in the midst of physical things. And so it is with 2 Corinthians 2:14.

2 Corinthians 2:14 **Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ,** and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.

The triumph is spiritual; it is in our inner man. This is not a guarantee of money or jobs or promotions or any kind of worldly success. In this dispensation of grace, God does not promise us anything in the physical realm, nothing. Not health, or prosperity or a long life or a trouble-free existence or anything else.

This is what we need to understand so we too can always triumph when we encounter difficulties, infirmities, adversity and the attacks of the policy of evil.

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The Most Important Decision