

TRIUMPH IN SUFFERING

“Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” —2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

Paul wrote his second letter to the Corinthians in response to personal attacks against him by the church he had founded in Corinth. During his absence, they had begun to challenge his authority, suspect his motives and question whether or not his ministry was valid. In fact, they had accused him of not being a genuine apostle at all. Their reasoning was that an apostle should not need to suffer. It would be humiliating to go through the hurts and pains, grief and sicknesses of other people, and their belief was that part of godliness should transcend suffering.

Corinth was in Greece and in ancient Greek culture they had developed a huge admiration for success, and loved the idea of heroes, idols and celebrities, so one learned how to project a high-powered image of confidence, eloquence and achievement. This mentality had crept into the church and had created the concept that if you were going to be a leader in Christendom, then you would have to portray the image of being successful and confident. The problem was Paul was not impressive. “For some say, ‘His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive and his speaking amounts to nothing’” (2 Corinthians 10:10). Paul calls these people ‘pseudo-apostles’, but as the church saw it, they were the true professionals, exhibiting strength and confidence.

Paul’s model was not Greek or Corinthian culture, but Jesus Christ, also persecuted and rejected. Paul says, “I have aligned myself with a man of sorrows who was rejected by others”, and he speaks of the sufferings of

Christ flowing into our lives. Paul affirms troubles and sufferings not only as part of life, but far from being disqualifications, they are actually credentials for apostleship. Rather than being exempt from sufferings, Paul explains we are equipped to go into them, and because of them, we come to know God in a much deeper way than we otherwise would. Instead of being embarrassed or apologetic, he is triumphant and says, “I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ’s power may rest on me” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Our natural instinct is to think that suffering destroys and, of course, it can and it does. But when we adopt Paul’s disposition towards our sufferings and depend upon Christ, that destructive force can become a creative force. Suffering is actually productive, and God’s Spirit in us will give us a different perspective in which the wounds of our lives can become the ministry of our lives.

PRAYER: Dear Lord Jesus, I pray that You turn my sufferings into a means of accomplishing your purpose, and I thank You, Lord, for being my strength in them.

TO REFLECT UPON: Have I experienced God’s blessing in turning my suffering into becoming a productive force in my life?