

2 Corinthians 1 (9) – To Make Us Rely On God

In this particular situation, when Paul assessed his affliction, he came to the conclusion that he was going to die. This *sentence of death* is not referring to something that a court of law had imposed on Paul. It was something he *felt* within. He had passed the death sentence on himself. But his race wasn't over yet. Now by the time he wrote his last letter, 2 Timothy, Paul knew his time on earth was done. He said *the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith* (2 Timothy 4:6-7). But with the episode he is recalling here in 2 Corinthians, he was thinking he was going to die before his work was finished. And then he realized why God was allowing this depth of despair. It was so he had nothing left to cling to but God alone. Only then would his example be made complete. And he tells us about it here.

But that was to make us rely not on ourselves – Paul came to realize why he was put in this position, and why he was pressured to feel this way. It was so that he would learn not to put his trust in himself. Paul had been in many severe situations before, where he had learned to trust in God. And yet, here he was, having to be taught again that he should not trust in himself but in the Lord. None of us, no matter how long we have been a believer, no matter how well we steward the gifts that God has given us, no matter how holy our manner of living, and not even an apostle, no Christian is exempt from the suffering that is designed to keep us humble. God's purpose is not just to get us to trust him, but to get us not to trust ourselves. He teaches humility, he crushes autonomy, by the use of extremity. Why does God let you suffer? To bring you to the end of yourself and your pride, to make you look elsewhere. And you have to keep learning this lesson. George Hutcheson – We are indeed very sparing of ourselves in trouble, and do soon begin to think that we are low and tried enough, and therefore would be delivered; but our wise Lord seeth that we need more.

to make us rely not on ourselves but on God – To decrease in self-reliance and increase in God-reliance, this is the lesson that all Christians are always involved in. Why does God let you suffer? To make sure that you can't depend on you so that you will depend on him. Dependence on God is your real strength. Listen to what Paul says later in this same letter, in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 – God said to him, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* So Paul said, *Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Relying on God, and not on yourself. This doesn't mean that God doesn't want you to use the means at your disposal. Relying on God is not a license to be lazy. God still wants you to make an effort, to be disciplined, and to be a good steward of your resources. Depending on God doesn't exempt you from time and commitment to your responsibilities. And relying on God is not a reason to be reckless. Faith is not about carelessly, deliberately, or unnecessarily putting yourself in harm's way. Make the proper preparations. Take the proper precautions. Don't act like a fool and call it faith. Relying on God is not a reason to be reckless, or a license to be lazy.

Relying on God means dying to self-trust and more fully trusting God. You are telling God your troubles, praising God for who he is, and asking God to help you as you depend on him as your real hope. You might feel like you're definitely going to die, and you just might, and eventually we all will. But even if and when I do die, I am still in the loving hand of God.

Rely on God, not yourself. During this season, I pray that you are learning that, and I pray that more and more of us are doing that. But I want to dig down further into this truth. Because you may be fully depending on God as the source of your comfort and deliverance, trusting in him and not yourself. But you may not be relying on God when it comes to others. You see, you can be thinking yes, I know that God is with me. I trust that I'm in God's care, even if it means death. But then you start thinking what about them, whoever the them is. You're letting God be God for you, but you aren't letting God be God for them. And you have to keep reminding yourself that even if I'm not here, the Lord will be with them too. Even if God were to take me home, and away from them, I'll be leaving my loved ones in the most capable hands of the universe, which are God's. You have to trust yourself in God's hands. And you have to trust your loved ones in God's hands, too. In times like these, when God allows you to be limited in what you can do, you don't have any other choice. But really, now, it's always that way. And times of crisis can be God's way of reminding you that you are not the Messiah, and you can't be. But you are his agent. And you are on his mission. And your mission is to tell people about Jesus, and to model a faithful trust in your Lord for your own life, and your own soul. But also, to model a faithful trust in the Lord for the lives and souls of your loved ones. Rely on God who raises the dead.

on God who raises the dead – Many people have great confidence in their own abilities in life. But no one can be confident in their own ability when it comes to death. You can't rely on yourself. You're trusting something, even if you think that this life is all there is. All of us, including you, are trusting in something about what happens after you die. But Christians know what will happen to them. They can be supremely confident in that, because Jesus rose from the dead. And as 1 Corinthians 6:14 says, *God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power.* As 2 Corinthians 4:14 says, *he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.* But even though the resurrection of all believers in Jesus to eternal life is a future event, the reality and power of that is not just some future hope. It is for this life as well, to be felt by the suffering Christian. Paul felt the sentence of death, but then he felt the power of eternal life. In the depths of his most extreme experience, Paul found his supreme confidence in God.

Why does God let you suffer? God allows you to be vulnerable so that you can know, and so others can see, where your true strength lies. It is the ultimate power of God that you trust in. Extreme experiences turn academic doctrines into living examples. My life is in the hand of God. J.I. Packer – Dying well is one of the good works to which Christians are called, and Christ will enable us who serve him to die well, however gruesome the physical process itself.

You don't have to be afraid of dying from the coronavirus, and you don't have to be afraid of dying from anything else. Why? Because Jesus died and rose from the dead, and he changed our wonder and worry about death into a doorway of hope and happiness. I will eternally be with him. My strength isn't found in myself. I'm not relying on myself, but on God who raises the dead. Times like these remind me that there are many things that I can't control and many things that are stronger than me. But I know that God is stronger than all of them. He is in complete control, and he will make everything turn out for my good. Even the thing that's totally out of everyone's control, and stronger than anyone, and that's death. God will make that work to your good. Christians are in the hands of a loving God. So, be brave, but don't be brave because you're strong. That's just pride. Be brave because you're humble, and vulnerable, and yet you can be fully confident because you are fully dependent on the strongest thing in the universe, and that's Jesus.