
Doug Hood's Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

September 18, 2016

Strength Out of Weakness

READ: 2 Corinthians 12:10 (Common English Bible)

"Therefore, I'm all right with weaknesses, insults, disasters, harassments, and stressful situations for the sake of Christ, because when I'm weak, then I'm strong."

MEDITATE:

Now this, of course, is a paradox – the notion that when we are weak, then we are strong. It is an assertion that appears to be contradictory or opposed to common sense. Rationally, we are either one or the other. We can't be both at the same moment in time. Yet, this is precisely the assertion that the apostle Paul makes to the Christian church located in Corinth. Such an absurd idea would not be worthy of our attention had it not come from the hand of Paul. But here it is! And the early church has declared these words to be the inspired Word of our Lord. So a closer look is demanded.

Any responsible study of this claim must begin where Paul begins, with the circumstance that drew from Paul this great paradox. He identifies the origin of this thought as a discomfort of "a thorn in my body" that Paul implores God, on three occasions, to remove. Remember, Paul was a man, who sought with considerable vigor, to destroy the Christian faith. Now, with equal vigor, Paul is advancing the faith he once sought to stamp-out. But there is some difficulty, some physical handicap located in his body, that weakens his effort. Paul never identifies the nature of the handicap. The only information Paul feels is relevant is that this difficulty is slowing him down from effectively preaching Jesus Christ. So he implores of God to remove the handicap.

What is puzzling, at first glance, is God's refusal to honor Paul's plea. Appealing once again to the rational, wouldn't God want Paul to be as strong as possible for the preaching ministry of Jesus Christ? That is certainly the thought process of Paul. So Paul asks for extraordinary strength for the preaching of an extraordinary Gospel. What Paul discovers, however, is that in the mathematical equation of God's Kingdom, if Paul preached only from his strength, any power of Jesus Christ would be hidden. All people would see is Paul's strength.

Paul's discovery becomes our discovery. Each of us has some weakness. The weakness may be physical, emotional, or social. The weakness may be some irrational fear or brokenness in our lives. And I quite imagine that each of us has prayed the prayer of Paul; has prayed that the weakness be removed. But imagine the logical result if we were made strong in all things – we would have no need for God. At least that would be the notion that would grow upon our consciousness. The tragic result of such thinking would be moving further from God, rather than closer. The truth of the matter is that we will always be incomplete without God. And it is only when we, in our weakness, lean into the power of God, that we become the recipients of God's strength.

