



GUIDELINES DAILY COMMENTARY ON LIVING WITH DR. HAROLD J. SALA

Subject: Weakness

Release date: August 11, 2016

DELIGHTING IN TROUBLE

That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:10

Recently my daughter asked me if I had heard of a certain theologian who was better known in the 70s than today. "Yes," I told her, "he has one of the most brilliant minds of any evangelical alive today. But he is very eccentric, quirky, and never seems to stay in any one place very long."

I couldn't help thinking that this would have also been a pretty good description of a rabbi turned apologist for the faith in the second half of the first century. We know Him as the Apostle Paul—probably the greatest credential that Christ's Gospel ever produced.

Like the individual about whom my daughter inquired, Paul never stayed very long in one place unless he was in chains. He was absolutely brilliant and would have made his mark in history had he never had that blinding encounter with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus; but, yes—he was also eccentric, even a bit quirky.

Take for example what he wrote to the Corinthians, who loved philosophy and sensuality: "I delight in weakness, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties." OK, you say, "That is different." Personally I prefer strength, compliments, a smooth road, and a no-problem agenda when I travel. Was Paul rather "different" or did this man know something that we desperately need to know today in a broken world where terrorists think nothing of giving their lives to kill a few dozen people whom they do not know—considered infidels—or you may be sued by someone who drives around counting the number of handicapped parking places in your parking lot and thinks you don't have enough of them.

Furthermore, Paul added these words, "For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10). That's paradoxical—how can you be strong when you are weak? What is he trying to tell them and us today?

When you take time to read the 12th chapter of Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians you begin to see a picture emerge of a man who was beset by weaknesses—perhaps physical but also adversarial. He had enemies—plenty of them. At the same time he describes this weakness (he called it a thorn in the flesh) as "a messenger of Satan" sent to torment Him.

And Paul's difficulties drove Him to God. Three times he asked God to remove this thorn. Three times God said, "No, Paul. I have something better—my grace and favor that works through your weakness allowing you to become strong in those areas where you are weak and very, very human."

So Paul says he will boast gladly in his weaknesses so that Christ's power will be manifest in his body. The word that Paul uses, translated "weaknesses," was the word commonly used for physical affliction or sickness, but it was also used to contrast your strength with someone who was far more powerful than you, or to describe a position of inferiority to someone else's strength.

Now a picture emerges that is one which looks like the reflection of life today in the mirror of experience. OK, admit it. Often we look at life and we feel overwhelmed by the firepower of our enemies that would like to wipe you out. So what do you do, stand there and yell at Goliath to go away? He won't. He's the messenger of Satan that would destroy you. Or do you cry out, "God, I'm weak; give me your strength"? And when you do, you become a recipient of God's grace—His unmerited favor and help—so you can overcome the enemies that would defeat you. Don't try to take on the Goliaths outside your gate by yourself. The only way your weakness can defeat the enemy's strength is through God's help. Never forget it.

Resource reading: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10