

# Holding your balance



*"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.."*  
*Romans 8:18*

## Strength for today & bright hope for tomorrow

In some respects, the Christian life involves holding together pairs of opposites. This is captured in the words of the apostle Paul who said of himself:

**"...as sorrowful yet always rejoicing;  
as poor yet making many rich;  
as having nothing yet possessing everything."**

2 Corinthians 6:10

On the face of it, this might seem rather schizophrenic; but not really. Why is this necessary and how does it work?

Perhaps an illustration from our bodies might help; the principle of antagonistic muscles. Two muscles in our arms – the biceps and the triceps pull in opposite directions. Using both we can keep our arms firm and steady to hold or lift objects. If either were missing, our arms would flop around like jelly and be completely useless. It is this principle of opposite actions that provide strength.

The first tension that Paul mentions in this verse is *being sorrowful yet rejoicing*. We live in a broken world in which there is a great deal of injustice, suffering, violence and pain. The Biblical explanation

for this is that God and mankind, to whom he has given responsibility to care for his world, are separated resulting from human sinfulness. The rift is not just between God and man however, creation itself is broken. We have earthquakes and floods and yes, in our generation we have Covid-19 too. In another letter, Paul talks about creation groaning and we ourselves sharing in that groaning. The Psalms of lament capture this aspect of our human condition. So how can we be bright and bubbly with so much pain around? Well it is possible, of course to ignore the problems and to look the other way – a sort of ostrich response. Alternatively, we may just become desensitised to it perhaps through an overdose of media coverage. These are both unhelpful paths of denial. What the Bible points us to is not denial but a counterbalance.

Paul also says of himself, "Yet rejoicing." He was able to rejoice because God has a rescue and recovery plan. The Gospel is good news of forgiveness and reconciliation. It offers a route back to God and the opportunity to become part of His solution for the world he created and loves. This is where a kingdom perspective is so helpful. Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom. It has arrived and it is growing. And we can look forward to that glorious day when it will be consummated with the return of the King – Jesus. At that point, *every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord*. All things in heaven and on earth will be under his rule. The final chapters of the book of revelation point to this glorious hope. We can indeed rejoice that God is on the throne and outworking his purposes which will not fail!

As we hold these two perspectives in tension, we are able to find our place in God's plan. Both are firmly rooted in reality. Paul wrote that:

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But he didn't stop there. He added the words "*in us*." By this he meant his adopted children, his family, the church, the bride of Christ. A day is coming when God's glory will be revealed in us. Surely this is a thought to prevent us being overwhelmed by all the pain, injustice and suffering of the present.

**So how does this work in practice?**

In another letter, Paul wrote the following:

**“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works,  
which God prepared in advance for us to do. “**

Ephesians 2:10

God entrusts to us, his children the task of moving his purposes forward. We are all different. Each one of us is uniquely placed to do things that nobody else can do. We have different gifts and abilities. We have different life-experiences. We live in different places and have different opportunities. We have different resources. We have different spheres of service. We are God’s handiwork. And God has prepared things for us to do. Our task is to keep our eyes open and allow God to shine his light on these things and to be ready to respond when we recognise them. When that happens, we trust God for his help and do the best we can.

Two more practical points. Firstly, we can all look around and see people who are more capable of knowledgeable than we are. We should not be put off or intimidated by this. God uses us as we are. Jesus took a small lunch of loaves and fishes, enough to feed one hungry boy and multiplied it to feed thousands. This is a picture of God taking our small efforts and using them far above our imagining. We should not allow ourselves to cop-out like the man in the parable who had only one coin (talent).

Secondly, God gives more responsibility to those who use what they are given. So, there is a sense that in the Christian life we can grow and take on more. But we begin with the small things. Those who are faithful with small things will be given more.

Holding in tension realistic appreciations of both the serious condition of the world in which we live and the future hope of the triumph of God’s purposes – fortifies us. It literally strengthens our arms by providing two compelling sources of motivation to take seriously our responsibility and to be sensitive and alert to play our part in what God is bring about. It also provides us with the comfort and certainty we need to press on when the going is tough.

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