

Paul's Thorn

Many of us have been taught that Paul's thorn in the flesh was a sickness that God inflicted on Paul. Some of us have passively accepted sickness as the will of God for our lives based on this interpretation. **Yet, scripture clearly identifies this thorn as a messenger of Satan sent to torment him.** *"And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me – to keep me from exalting myself."* (II Corinthians 12:7 NASV)

I envision Paul as a strong willed, get-the-job done man who could very easily have tried to go full steam ahead ministering out of his own strength. He had a great mission to accomplish and needed to move as the Lord led, not as Paul led himself. He was forced into a greater dependence on the Lord because of this unnamed weakness. **Eventually he reached the conclusion that the thorn in his fresh was a hindrance that God allowed to buffet him to keep him from exalting himself.**

Thorns

In scripture the word thorn always refers to people or to a literal thorn. Numbers 33:55, Joshua 23:13, Judges 2:3 and Ezekiel 28:24 support the concept of people. Mark 4:7 and Matthew 27:29 indicate actual thorns.

If we accept it as fact that the thorn was a sickness then this can hinder us from stepping forth in faith to seek healing. This religious idea has caused many to suffer needlessly. If we accept that the thorn is an evil force sent to buffet then we have the armour of God¹ to use as our defense. We are told to girdle ourselves with truth; walk in peace; take up the shield of faith with which to quench all the fiery darts of the enemy; put on the helmet of salvation; the breastplate of righteous; and take up the sword of the Spirit; which is the world of God. **We are to use the authority and spiritual weapons granted to us so that we can withstand evil forces.**

God the Father's heart for sickness is revealed in the ministry of Jesus. He never told anyone to go and suffer longer. He healed all the afflicted except in his own home town where there was unbelief. In fact, scripture states that *"healing is the children's bread."* (Matthew 15:26)

I do not in any way mean to put guilt on anyone suffering sickness but I do want to encourage these to search the scripture for passages related to healing. Ask the Holy Spirit for revelation related to your situation. The brochure *God's Healing Hand*² clarifies that God uses various avenues for healing.

Some have speculated that the thorn was Paul's eyesight but scripture records in Acts 9:18 that while in Damascus Ananias laid hands on him and **he received his sight. Nowhere does scripture indicate this blessing was rescinded.** In Galatians 6:11 Paul states he wrote with large letters, however, writing only in capital letters an inch or so high was the practice in that day.

Messenger of Satan

The Greek word for messenger means one sent to bring greetings. This word is used in Matthew 11:10, Mark 1:2, Luke 7:24, 27, 9:52, James 2:25. These all refer to messengers bearing tidings. **Paul was sent a messenger of Satan.**

Anyone serving the Lord will meet

opposition. Satan will make sure you are buffeted by someone or something. We may see the opposition as originating through people but we can rest assured Satan, the enemy of our souls, is behind the conflict pouring fuel on the situation. He attempts to get us to focus on ourselves and on the offenses of others resulting in broken relationships. **This in turn disrupts our fellowship with the Lord rendering us spiritually weak and ineffective.**

In II Timothy 3:12 Paul reminds us, *"And indeed, all those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."*

Infirmity

In II Corinthians 12:9 NIV the word infirmity is used in referring to Paul's thorn. This usage is confusing to some of us. In many English translations from the Greek, including the NAS, the word weakness is used instead of infirmity. **A more objective translation from the Greek denotes weakness as being unable to produce results in one's own strength.**

The weakness Paul endured became the occasion for a revelation of God – He proved sufficient in the midst of Paul's weakness. The Greek word for sufficient

suggests the idea of raising a barrier or warding off. *“And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness’ most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”* (II Corinthians 12:9 NASV)

Paul determined that no character refining test would cause him to cease serving God. He declared that he would rather boast about his weaknesses, that the power of Christ might dwell on him. He said, *“Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, than I am strong.”* (II Corinthians 12:10 NASV).

When Paul could not do something, he drew on the anointing of God to know what to do and how to do it. We may not see ourself as Paul but each of us who has believed on, and received Christ as our Lord and Savior, has the power of God residing in our spirits in the form of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) We are in Christ and He is in us. **We have a mighty power source upon which to draw.** We do not have the strength apart from the Holy Spirit to stand against assaults. It is only by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit that we can be victorious in the challenges of life. It is important to note that our human idea of victory may not be the same as God’s. **Our view is limited. We do not see the end of a situation nor do we**

always have the ability to discern the Lord’s purposes in a given situation.

Often in looking back I have been able to see how my view point in a situation was short sighted. I did not take into account the growth and glory I would see God bring out of a difficult situation.

Reflections

When Satan shows up to harass us God’s grace is sufficient but we must exercise our God given authority. James 4:7 tells us to *“resist the devil and he will flee”* from us. This implies some action on our part referred to earlier such as putting on the armour of God in order to stand against the evil force.

A lady confided in me that she had recurring periods in her life when she was plagued with impure thoughts toward men. She was not exposing herself to situations that would trigger this. Victory would come for a while and then in the most unexpected situation the thought would pop up again. I believe this is an example of a thorn in the flesh. Each of us has our own areas of weakness that can defeat us or they can be used of the Lord to draw us closer to Him as we cry out to Him. *“And He has said to me. My grace is*

sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” (II Corinthians 12:9 NASV)

Philippians 4:13 declares, *“You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.”*

Paul proclaimed in Romans 8:37 *“But in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”* This truth echoes down through the ages and is a great encourager to us who live in a different era. **Let us determine to encourage ourselves with this promise from scripture.**

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