

## Paul's Thorn In The Flesh

2 Corinthians 12: 1-10

**It is not unusual for the child of God to experience the "third heaven" and a "thorn" in the very same heartbeat.** And it is not at all unusual for a believer, in his walk with the Lord, to at one moment be in a heavenly experience, and the next moment find himself attacked by the devil. Peter tells us in 1 Peter 4:12, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to test you, as though some strange thing happened unto you."

**As Paul relates this experience, he relates one of the most tremendous truths that a Christian can ever grasp.** You see, the apostle Paul discovered a fantastic revelation, and that is that you and I come to learn God through experience. That is, we will never know what the Word of God really means to us if it is not allowed to *work* in our lives. **This is why I have said, God never wastes time, and He never wastes experiences.** And every experience that God allows us to go through is intended to be a "study course" in discovering the truth about God, and the truth about ourselves. And I tell you something; sometimes you and I will get greater revelations from "thorns" than we will from "third heavens."

**Paul was caught up into the "third heaven," and that must have been quite an experience.** He said, "I saw some things there that I can't even talk about. It's not even lawful for me to write them down. You wouldn't believe it if I told you, and I'm not permitted to tell you anyway. But what I saw there was unbelievable." And yet, the greatest revelation came to Paul, not from that "third heaven" experience, but from that "thorn in the flesh" experience!

**Paul made a fantastic discovery.** And I want you to notice what it is, as seen in verses 8-9, "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for

thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Paul prayed three times that God would remove this "thorn." **Now, if there was ever anybody that ought to have his prayers answered, it ought to be the apostle Paul.** And here he prayed three times for the thorn to be removed, and God answered him every time with the same response, "My grace is sufficient for thee." **Have you ever noticed how God doesn't change His mind?** The Greek text indicates that God *said* one thing, and that thing *stood*. The literal translation of verse 9 is this, "And he said unto me, and it stands said, My grace is sufficient for thee." God said, "I have something better for you than removing the thorn. I have something better, and it is my grace."

Look very carefully at verse 9, "My grace is sufficient for thee," now get this, "for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Literally, "My strength is made perfect in your weakness." And that revelation was so fantastic that the apostle Paul changed his entire attitude towards the "thorn" and said, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Paul discovered that God said, "When you are weak, then is my strength brought to its completion, is my strength perfected, brought to its full use, only when you are weak."

**Therefore, I want to establish the biblical principle.** It is a very important principle, and it is simply this - that when I am weak, then I am strong. Listen, God does not use us in spite of our weakness, He uses us because of our weakness.

Most of us have this idea, as we talk to lost people, "You have so much ability. You have so much talent. You have so much to offer to the Lord. Man, if you would just give your life to God, there is so much you could do for God." What we are saying is, "God would really be getting a good deal if He could just get you." And we speak of some defeated, carnal, Christian, that is out of the will of God, "Man that person has so much ability, so much talent. If he would just give his life over completely to the Lord, what he couldn't do for Jesus." **That is exactly**

**contrary to the spirit Of the Scriptures! God does not use a man in spite of his weakness; He uses a man because of his weakness! Many of us feel like God is just limping along with the best He can get!**

I want you to read a passage of scripture found in 1 Corinthians 1:25-29, "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence." **Now, three times in those verses it says that God deliberately chooses the "weak" things of the world.** It is not a matter of God simply taking what He can get and limping along the best He can with the poor material that He has. He says that He deliberately passes over the "wise" and the "noble," and the "strong," and chooses the "weak" things. **Why?** So "that no flesh can glory in His presence."

You say, "Does this mean, then, that if a person has a lot of ability, and a lot of talent, that God can 't use them?" Well, yes, God can use them if they are willing to die to that ability, and that talent, and to count them as "junk," as seen in Philippians 3:4-9, "Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath reasons for which he must trust the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching righteousness which is the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yet doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse (waste, junk), that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that

which is through the faith Of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." Because they believe that their ability, and their talent qualifies them for service! **I want to tell you something, I know more Christians, today, that are not being used because of their abundant ability! Do you know why?**

**Next, I want you to establish the biblical process.** Somebody says, "I want to be used by God." Have you ever prayed that prayer? Have you ever prayed, "Lord make me usable?" **Well, do you know how God makes us usable?** If we are going to be usable, God says we are going to have to be **"weak."** Not just weak, but weak and know it! So, let's examine the process by which God reveals to us our weakness.

Look at verse 7, where Paul says, "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelation, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." **To see the truth of this scripture, we must learn the truth about Paul's "thorn" was.** To do that we must allow the Word of God to speak for itself!

For instance, in Numbers 33:55, Moses told the children of Israel, before they entered the Land of Canaan, "If ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell." Eight years later Joshua speaks concerning the heathen nations in Canaan, "they shall be scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes." And, then, David warned that "the sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns." Without exception, in all these cases, the **"thorns"** are personalities.

**Look again at verse 7, where Paul tells us what the "thorn" was.** He says it was "the messenger of Satan to buffet me." The Greek word for "messenger" is the word "angelos," or as translated by others,

"the angel of the devil," or "Satan's angel," etc. This Greek word "angelos" appears 188 times in the Bible, and is translated "angel" 181 times, and "messenger" the other seven times. In all 188 times in the entire Bible, it is in every case a *person* and not a *thing* - without a solitary exception.

Paul not only tells us that his "thorn" was an "angel of Satan," he also tells us what the angel came to do: "to buffet me." Wuest translates verse 7 this way, "...there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to the end that he might constantly maltreat me lest I be exalted overmuch." Weymouth translates verse 7 this way, "...there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, Satan's angel dealing blow after blow." The Greek word translated "buffet" means "repeated blows." In other words, Satan had assigned one of his demon-angels to battle Paul day and night!

**To see this truth a little more clear we need to once again go to the Greek.** Paul uses the personal pronoun "him" when speaking of his "thorn." Weymouth translates verse 8, "As for this, three times I besought the Lord to rid me of *him*." There can be no doubt that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was a personality and that personality was an angel of the devil.

"But" you ask, "what does that have to do with us?" The answer is simple, every child of God needs to realize that we are in a battle against the forces of Satan, as seen in Ephesians 6:12, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." If we are going to live the victorious Christian life, and exercise authority over Satan, then we must realize that that authority comes from Jesus Christ Himself, and not in anything that we can produce on our own!

Look once more at verse 7, "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of revelations." That word "exalted" is

the Greek word "to exalt oneself exceedingly." In other words, Paul had a problem with pride because of his training, talent, and ability.

**Listen to me very carefully; the greatest enemy to your Christian life is your pride.** And the thing that will disqualify you for service, and from being used of God, the thing that will quench the Spirit in your life, and that will nullify your praying, more than any other thing in your life is your own pride! And nothing exalts us like success! **And Paul learned that great lesson because of his constant battle with Satan!** Why? Because his victory only came through his faith in Christ!

**The last thing I want you to see is the provision.** The Lord said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Do you know what the most important word in that verse is? The little word "is." He doesn't say, "My grace *will be* sufficient." He doesn't say, "My grace *can be* sufficient for thee." He says, "My grace *is* sufficient for the."

**What does that mean to us today?** Simply this, when your life comes under the attacks of Satan, when you get into a place of weakness, when you are in a circumstance, that means that you don't have to beg and plead for God to give you grace, because you already know that God is in control of the situation! This truth is seen in Philippians 1:6-7, "Being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ; Even as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace." Child of God, when God is in control, you have the assurance of Romans 8: 28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them who are the called according to his purpose." All of that simply means that we can say, "Lord, by faith I activate and apply the grace that you have already given me. Thank you, Lord, that your grace *is* sufficient." You just simply enter into the provision that God has made for you, because His "grace *is* sufficient."

**Child of God, the Lord wants to use you today, but He can only use us when we get ourselves out of the way.** Remember, **He does not give us strength - He is our strength.** He does not give us victory – He is our victory. He cannot be your life without being *all you need*, for "in him dwells all of the godhead bodily, and you are complete in Him."