

## Paul's Thorn

*"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. 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."*

**2 Corinthians 12:7-9**



**T**his scripture, in my opinion, is one of the most misunderstood scriptures in the Bible among Christians. How is it misunderstood? The prevalent thinking is that Paul had a physical ailment of some kind. Some say he had eye trouble; others say he was sick. It really doesn't matter what kind of sickness, it's just believed he had some physical limitation.

People always bring this scripture up when they are suffering from some kind of illness. They have prayed to God to heal them, but they remain sick. They believe sometimes God says yes to healing and other times He says no to healing. They refer to Paul's thorn in the flesh saying something like this: 'after all, God said no to Paul and he asked Him three times.' This couldn't be further from the truth.

First of all, God doesn't say NO to what He already said YES to! First Peter 2:24 says: "...by whose stripes ye were healed." He says YES to healing, so this passage could not be talking about God saying NO to healing because He has healed everyone! He wants everyone well and whole. So even if Paul's thorn was sickness, it doesn't line up with what God says about healing anyway. But it is not talking about any kind of sickness.

I misunderstood it myself at one time, but my eyes were opened years ago when I learned to be careful not to take any scripture out of its context.

It's obvious in Chapters 10, 11, and 12, the Apostle Paul was dealing with critics. He had a lot of opposition and began defending himself. He defended himself only because this is what they understood. This was not boasting on Paul's part. He got down on their level because he was pushed to the limit by his opponents. He spoke foolishly (like a lost person - 11:21)

Paul says in 11:7: "Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely?" In other words, he couldn't understand why people would come out against him while he was preaching the gospel to them without taking any money. In fact, that's why he didn't take money from them - to stop his critics, because there were many false prophets who were taking their money. Paul was selfless and they still criticized him.

In verses 23-27 Paul continues to tell the Corinthians of all he had suffered for them; how he was imprisoned,

beaten, weary, hungry, thirsty, cold and naked, stoned, shipwrecked, in danger of robbers, the Jews and unbelievers. Paul was boasting of his sufferings for the cause of Christ and NOT because of his accomplishments, as the false prophets were doing. He knew it was all Jesus working through him and that God was to get the glory because of that. *“Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.”* (2 Corinthians 12:5)

It's obvious up to this point that Paul had a tremendous amount of persecution. Why was he being persecuted? Because he was preaching the true Gospel. *“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”* (2 Timothy 3:12)

Paul's thorn in the flesh was not sickness; it was persecution. Three times in the Old Testament the term “thorn in the flesh” was used and three times it referred to people as persecutors. In Numbers 33:55, Joshua 23:13, and Judges 2:3 God was warning His people that if they left any of the inhabitants alive, then they would become “thorns” in their sides.

Paul's thorn in the flesh was a messenger of Satan. The demons stirred up the people against Paul. Why? Because Paul was being exalted BY THE PEOPLE! Many were amazed at his teachings and were getting saved. He was becoming very popular and the devil took notice. He was NOT exalting himself as many believe. It was never his intention to exalt himself. In fact, if we back up to verse 6, here is what Paul says: “For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that heareth of me.”

Paul was saying that he would love to share the revelations he received from the Lord, but he wouldn't do it because he didn't want man to exalt him in any way. He wanted only God to be exalted. Paul was not puffed up about these revelations; in fact, verse 5 says this: *“Of such a one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.”*

While studying this, I was shocked as I read several other Bible versions, such as the Amplified, NIV, NAS, NLT, and The Message. All these versions say blatantly that he was given this thorn to “keep him from becoming conceited” or to “keep him from becoming proud” or so that Paul wouldn't get “a big head” etc. Check it out for yourself. Now I understand why this wrong teaching is being taught in our churches. The KJV is accurate, but again, must be kept in its context!

Some think that it was sickness because of the word “infirmities,” but Paul used that word in association with his hardships. In Chapter 11, after he describes all his hardships, of which there was no sickness, he calls them infirmities.

Ask yourself this question: Why would God call Paul on the road to Damascus, have him filled with the Holy Spirit, tell him that he was called to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15) and then keep him sick so he couldn't do it? Really? How do we see God?

The devil was trying to steal Paul's assignment. He doesn't want any of us to fulfill the call on our life. John 10:10 says the devil steals, but God gives abundant life!

**A**bundant life is a life full of purpose and meaning, and that's what the devil wanted to steal from Paul. So now that we understand Paul's thorn was not sickness, let's look at 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."*

Paul was asking God to stop his persecutors! Paraphrased, God said this to him: Paul, you aren't redeemed from persecution, but you have My grace to deal with it! Simple.

Paul says something interesting in verse 10: *"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."* Paul is saying when Paul is weak, then Paul is strong. How could he be weak and strong at the same time? Paul's flesh was weak, but his spirit man, where Christ and all His fullness dwells, resides inside of him and all the strength that would ever be needed is right there. God was telling Paul to take his authority and use his power (grace) to rebuke the god of this world off of his persecutors (2 Cor. 4:4) and then speak to the mountain coming against him. (Mark 11:23)

The bottom line is God wants you well, not sick. Sadly, most Christians choose to believe that Paul's thorn was sickness and that God refused to heal him so they can rationalize why they are not getting well. The truth is we have been given power and authority over all sickness and disease, but many are too passive to be bothered using it. So this becomes a convenient theology for them, but unfortunately, it's not biblical. What IS biblical is that "All things are under our feet!" (Ephesians 1:22) Amen!