

## PAULS THORN IN HIS SIDE 1.

The church by and large, or christians in general, have rejected healing. Although most christians believe that God can heal, and even sometimes people do get healed, nevertheless although we may accept healing on a random basis, yet to come out with a statement that healing is in God's will for you, that it is part of the atonement, it is not just for some people, it is for every person. As a whole the body of Christ would reject that. Now when I say the body of Christ, there are churches that are doing a marvelous job, but a large segment of the church is falling short in this area. A powerful verse along the line, that God wants everybody well, is 3rd John chapter 1 verse 2.

3rd John 1:2.

-Here begineth the reading of God's holy word.

Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

-Here endeth the reading of God's holy Word.

The text says "I wish above all things, not some things, but all things; that you might prosper and be in good health". That is not the attitude of the basic christian today. Instead they have actually embraced sickness, thinking that in some cases it is something good that God has sent or allows.

An incorrect scripture interpretation, which is a major obstacle to the wrong thinking that God is the one who wants and even puts sickness on us, is the interpretation of Paul's teaching about his thorn in the flesh, which I want to address now. Nevertheless, these traditions and doctrines of men are so ingrained in our thinking that you cannot even mention Paul's thorn in the flesh, without people immediately beginning to think the wrong things about it. It is going to take me a little while to counter this and come against it, but I do not believe that the bible teaches that God gave Paul some eye problem, and that God would not heal Paul because God wanted Paul to stay sick in order to humble him. Therefore, God sometimes puts sickness on us in order to teach us something. This is the traditional religious interpretation. I believe that the reason why people teach that is because it is a convenient theology. You have to want to believe it to find it in scripture, because the scripture makes it very clear that Paul's thorn in the flesh was not from God, rather it was a messenger of Satan. Sickness and disease is a tool of the devil. God does not have to use the tools of the devil to teach us. He uses his word.

Let me first say this, if you did not already have a bias and prejudice, if this had not been taught against so much, I do not believe that people could get from these scriptures what religion has taught.

Nevertheless, once it is taught, and once it is mentioned over and over, you cannot even mention Paul's thorn in the flush without people getting this misconception.

I would like for you to open up your heart and when you read this scripture read it like you have never red it before. Let the scripture speak to you instead of tradition speaking to you. 2 Corinthians 12:6-10.

2 Corinthians 12:6-10.

-Here begineth the reading of God's holy word.

6 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 he heareth of me.

7 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.

8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

9 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.

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.

-Here endeth the reading of God's holy Word.

Verse 7 says clearly, this thorn in the flesh was given to Paul by a messenger of Satan to buffet Paul, not a messenger of God. Nevertheless, despite what the scripture says, religion has turned this around and said that this was from God, that God willed it. What part of the messenger of Satan is not understood. The word for messenger is the exact same greek word that is translated angel. This is talking about a demonic angel came and afflicted Paul and buffeted him. The word buffeted means to strike over repeatedly. For example the waves buffet the shore. They hit and recede, and come back and hit again. This is talking about Paul was just hit with this messenger of Satan, over and over.

Now there are some things here that on the surface when you look at it they might make you think that this came from God, but it very clearly says that it was the messenger of Satan and that should trump anything else. Here is one of those things that make people think that this is from God. He says lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh. Therefore, the purpose of this thorn in the flesh was to debase Paul. People just automatically assume that God is the only one that wants to debase anybody. Here we conclude that Satan would never want to lower anyone in prestige position or rank, that God is the one who is always doing this. Well there is a wrong type of exaltation or pride, and God resists the proud.

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Nevertheless, there is a Godly type of exaltation. If you read over in Joshua chapter one, the Lord told Joshua, every place that you set the sole of your feet, I am going to be with you. The same promises I made to Moses, I am going to make to you. Then he told Joshua, I am going to exalt you in the eyes of the Israelites, so that they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses. So God talked about exalting Joshua. There is a Godly type of exaltation. It also says over in 1 Peter 5, "humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he might exalt you in due time. It was this Godly type of exaltation that Satan buffeted Paul against. Satan came against Paul to keep him from being magnified, that is glorified in the sight of people. Paul went in and saw people healed and miracles, and the people fell down and began to worship him or exalt him because they saw the power of God operating in him. Satan continuously attacked Paul in order to stop people from honoring Paul.

Let us take a moment to examine each verse of 1 Corinthians 12:6-10. Please bear with me for a moment. Going through the text utilizing a verse by verse analysis, I will probably repeat some things that I have already said, nevertheless I feel that the previous introduction was necessary. Often times when I teach, I use what might be referred to as, shock therapy. I paint myself in-to such a corner, that people begin to pay really close attention to see how I am going to get myself out of the corner. This is me crawling out of the corner, and this is you paying really close attention and as James Brown might have said and watching me do God's thing. (Speak in tongues - And don't forbid them to speak).

2 Corinthians 12:6.

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 he heareth of me.

Paul had just said that the only thing he would glory in was the sufferings he had endured for Christ. Here, he was saying, "Even if I wanted to boast about my accomplishments, I would not be lying or exaggerating like a fool. Everything I would brag about would be the truth." Paul could have silenced all his critics with his credentials, but he refused to do so, lest someone think too highly of him.

Paul wanted the Corinthians to respect him and acknowledge his apostolic authority, but he didn't want them worshiping him. Paul's desire was not to draw attention to himself; rather, his ultimate goal was that Christ should be glorified.

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Let us look at:

2 Corinthians 12:7.

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.

Paul's use of the word "exalted" here has caused many people to assume God was the author of this "thorn in the flesh." The reasoning is that, "being exalted" is pride, and certainly, God is the one who would counter pride. However, the Scriptures speak of a godly type of exalting that has nothing to do with pride. There is a promise to those who humble themselves that God will exalt them (1 Peter 5:6). Other scriptures speak of God exalting His true believers (Psalms 37:34, 92:10; and Matthew 23:12). The Lord exalted, or magnified, Joshua in the sight of the Israelites so that they would respect him and follow his leadership (Joshua 3:7 and 4:14).

This exaltation is not speaking of Paul having a pride problem that God had to deal with through affliction. This exaltation is speaking about Paul being so respected and honored in the sight of people that Satan had to do something to make him and his Gospel less attractive. He did that through persecution. The devil gave Paul a "thorn in the flesh" to keep him from being exalted in the eyes of people.

Paul made it very clear that this "thorn in the flesh" came because of the abundance of revelations he had received. So, those who are claiming to have a thorn like Paul's would also have to have a similar number of revelations. Paul's revelations produced about one-half of the New Testament scriptures and one of the greatest missionary thrusts the church has ever had. Until they receive revelations that are proportional to Paul's, they shouldn't hide behind Paul's thorn in the flesh.

The phrase "thorn in the flesh" was not original with Paul. It was an Old Testament term that referred to the negative influence ungodly people had on righteous people. In Numbers 33:55, Moses said, "But 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". Joshua 23:13 says, "Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you". Judges 2:3 says, "Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you". Paul drew on Old Testament terminology to refer to the persecution he had suffered.

There has been much debate about what Paul's thorn in the flesh was. Most people believe it was sickness sent from God to keep Paul humble. That is not the case. Paul's thorn in the flesh was persecution that came from the devil, to make people think twice about accepting the Gospel, because of the persecution that accompanied it.

One of the reasons people think Paul's thorn was sickness is because of the use of the word "infirmities" in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. They presume "infirmities" is referring to some type of sickness. However, the word "infirmities" in context is referring to persecution.

In 2 Corinthians 11:23-30, Paul listed the things that he called his infirmities. None of these included sickness. His infirmities were the hardships that he suffered because of the preaching of the Gospel. In the next verse, he confirmed this again by listing five things that he suffered joyfully. None of them were sickness.

Paul made it very clear in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 that Satan was the author of this thorn, not God. The reason God didn't take Paul's thorn away was not because He wanted to afflict Paul; it was because believers are not redeemed from persecution. Paul later stated this in 2 Timothy 3:12: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

If the Lord stopped all persecution against His followers, Saul would have died before he became the Apostle Paul. Paul was one of the leaders of the persecution against Christians. The Lord didn't redeem Stephen from persecution but used it to glorify Himself and prick the heart of the future Apostle Paul. Therefore, the Lord has not redeemed us from persecution. He even loves those who persecute us just as He loved those who persecuted Him. He desires their conversion, not their judgment.

The Greek word that was translated "messenger" here means "angel". This word is specifying a demonic angel that was assigned to Paul by the devil.

Paul made it very clear that this was a messenger of Satan, not of God. However, the false belief that the devil can only do what God allows him to do (see Romans 8:28) has led many people to change Paul's clear statement and place the responsibility on God for Paul's thorn in the flesh. That is not the case. God is not the author of people's problems.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines the word "buffet" as "to hit or beat, especially repeatedly." This is describing the work of this messenger of Satan as being a repeated action. Paul suffered persecution everywhere he went (Acts 20:23). If Paul's thorn was a sickness, it would have to have been repeatedly given and retracted to carry the full meaning of this word "buffet." But the Scripture clearly states that it was not a disease but the messenger of Satan sent it to repeatedly strike against Paul. Paul spoke of these attacks as being reproaches, persecutions, and distresses for the sake of Christ in 2 Corinthians 12:10.

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Let us Now look at:  
2 Corinthians 12:8.

-Here begineth the reading of God's holy word.  
2 Corinthians 12:8

For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

-Here endeth the reading of God's holy word.

It's possible that Paul made this request three times, modeled after Jesus beseeching His Father three times to accomplish salvation some other way.

If you accept the idea that Paul's thorn was persecution that came from a demonic angel, then you might wonder why he would pray three times to have this removed. It is possible that Paul accepted persecution as an inevitable part of the Christian life but wasn't sure he had to put up with a demonic spirit that incited this persecution. The Lord told him that God's grace would be sufficient and that He would use these persecutions to display His strength in Paul. Once Paul saw this, he actually took pleasure in the persecutions he suffered, knowing that God would get the ultimate glory.

It is interesting to note that Paul made special mention of the fact that he prayed about this thorn in the flesh three times. Average Christians today would have no way of knowing how many times they have prayed over situations. Typically, they pray incessantly over the same request. That was not Paul's way of praying. Apparently, praying three times over one thing was unusual for Paul.

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Let us Now look at:  
2 Corinthians 12:9.

-Here begineth the reading of God's holy word.

2 Corinthians 12:9.

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.

-Here endeth the reading of God's holy word.

One of the main reasons many people interpret Paul's thorn in the flesh as a sickness is because of the use of the word "infirmities." Yet the word "infirmity" is not limited to sickness. The word literally means "lack or inadequacy." It was used that way in Romans 8:26 when it referred to not knowing how to pray as we should. The NIV translates this word as "weakness" not sickness.

The Lord didn't remove Paul's thorn, because Jesus didn't redeem believers from persecution. If Paul's thorn had been sickness or poverty, then he could have prayed and received deliverance. But in persecution, the Lord doesn't deliver believers; He strengthens them to be able to bear all things, thereby bringing glory to Himself and conviction to their persecutors.

This is not speaking of physical weakness or character flaws. The Lord was telling Paul that when he gave up, then the Lord took over. Anytime we cease trusting in ourselves and trust in God, the Lord shows His strength. It is when we lean on our own abilities that we get in trouble.

Paul had more reason to trust in himself than his critics did. He had the better track record. But Paul learned the lesson of not trusting in himself. He counted all his accomplishments as manure, and he became totally dependent upon Christ living through him. He learned to be weak in himself so that Christ could be strong in him.

The Lord's power delivers us from things such as sin, sickness, and poverty. That is not to say that we Christians never sin, never get sick, or never have financial problems. But the Lord's power is always

available to bring us victory over all these things. However, concerning persecution and the many day-to-day problems that we encounter, the Lord hasn't provided deliverance from these. Rather, He has given us the strength to endure. We have to have the motivation to change the things that we can change, the strength of Christ to persevere through the things we can't, and wisdom to know the difference.

As explained in 2 Corinthians 11:30 this word "infirmity" can refer to sickness or frailty, but it can also mean "a failing or defect in a person's character", (American Heritage Dictionary). In this context, it is easy to see that Paul was not referring to sickness but rather to persecution. This becomes very important in discerning Paul's "thorn in the flesh".

The word "infirmity" here is not referring to sickness. The context of this verse makes this very evident. In 2 Corinthians 11:23-30, Paul listed the things that he called his infirmities. None of these included sickness. His infirmities were the hardships that he suffered because of the preaching of the Gospel. In verse 10, he confirmed this again by listing five things that he suffered joyfully. None of them were sickness. Further examples of Paul's persecutions and infirmities are given in Acts.

Paul was not just glorying in suffering, as some masochists do today. The reason he took pleasure in suffering was because he knew the Lord's strength would be manifest in his weakness and the Lord would use this to bring glory to His name.

An example of this is found in Acts 14:19-21. Paul was stoned and left for dead at Lystra. If he wasn't dead, he was so close to it that those who wanted to kill him thought he was dead and left. "Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city". The next day he traveled (probably walked) at least twenty miles to Derbe. This wasn't bad for a man who had been killed the day before.

It had to be God's strength that enabled Paul to travel the day after his stoning. There were probably cuts, bruises, and swollen parts of his body that testified to what he had been through, yet he didn't miss a day of ministering for the Lord. Certainly, this was an even stronger witness of God's power to those he ministered to in Derbe. God's strength overcame Paul's weakness.

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Let us Now look at:  
2 Corinthians 12:10.

-Here begineth the reading of God's holy word.  
2 Corinthians 12:9-10.

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.

-Here endeth the reading of God's holy word.

Even though Paul asked three times for the infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses to be removed, God's reply was that His strength, that is, God's grace, would strengthen Paul to continue in victory regardless of the circumstances of life. Paul's statement that he would gladly glory in his infirmities, that is, his weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon him was a mindset that he developed of a continuing faith and dependence upon the Lord regardless of the circumstances

that he faced. A parallel passage could be Philippians 4:11-13 where Paul concluded that his Christian life was lived through the strengthening power of Jesus Christ.

Paul listed five things that he took pleasure in suffering: infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses. Four of these things (excluding infirmities) are clearly referring to hardships that Paul endured as a result of preaching the Gospel. Therefore, it would be inconsistent to interpret "infirmities" as some type of sickness when all the other things listed here refer to things inflicted by people. The word "infirmities" is referring to lack or inadequacies caused through people.

There is a big difference between suffering for Christ's sake and just suffering. Some teach that all suffering is therapeutic, but that is not so. Peter said, "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Peter 4:15-16). Suffering persecution and hardships related with preaching the Gospel is what Paul was speaking of here.

God's strength is infinitely superior to ours, physically, mentally, and emotionally. Therefore, one of our biggest liabilities is trust in ourselves. When we are recognizing our comparative weakness and trusting in God, then we are truly strong.