

an attitude of heart.

Conclusion Because Christ's strength is most plainly manifested in weakness, Paul was pleased to be weak (v. 10). It is "for Christ's sake" that he is well pleased in weakness. It is a paradox, but at such times of weakness, there can be no doubt as to the source of his strength. His own weakness makes him conscious of God's grace, not the inverse. This is not a mere endurance of problems, but a positive attitude of taking pleasure in them. Marvelous. Glory to the Lord.

THE BOOK OF SECOND CORINTHIANS

"The Sanctified Thorn"
2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Introduction

1. The Bible teaches that suffering is the lot for His people (2 Tim. 3:12). Suffering and salvation are corollaries (Phil. 1:29).
2. It is the cross of Christ which makes the tension between us and the world (Gal. 6:14). Being His brings the hatred of Satan (John 7:7). So Paul suffered because He was the Lord's.
3. Paul had many physical difficulties (2 Cor. 11:22-33). On one occasion he lay as dead (Acts 14:19). This may well have been the incident to which he makes reference (cf. vv. 1-6). He believes he went to paradise (v. 4). This word means "a royal garden." That implies fruit and flowers and may well be the reason associating these sort of things with heaven.
4. This unusual incident in Paul's life made him unique. The way in which God dealt with him following the experience is recorded here. This is how he explains it:

1. THE SUFFERING EXPERIENCED v. 7.

a. Its nature

It was absolutely real and not imaginary. It is referred to as a "thorn in the flesh." While this may be a splinter or a stake, the size is not the issue. The acuteness of the pain is the concern (Num. 33:55). No one knows what the thorn was. All is utter speculation. It appears clear, however, that it was a physical malady.

b. Its purpose

All humans are faced with the problem of pride. Some are troubled more than others. Hence, the Bible indicates that the thorn was sent for two reasons: 1) to lessen the possibility of pride and conceit; 2) to depress the greatness of the revelations. They were most

unusual! Other revelations were not kept secret (Acts 16:6-10), but this one was.

c. Its sources

The subject of the verb "give" must be God. God is involved in all of our ways (Psa. 31:5; 138:8). Even afflictions are His (Psa. 119:67, 71, 75). The New Testament upholds this view (Phil. 1:29) and the Old Testament does too (Job 1:6, 12). While this sort of approach to suffering is a mystery, it is nonetheless the Scriptural approach.

d. Its means

This should not be a surprise. Affliction is personified as a "messenger of Satan." Grammatically, this is in apposition to the "thorn." Satan does have angels or messengers (Rev. 12:7, 9). Here is one of these creatures bringing affliction. They are surely controlled by God (Job 1). Not all forms of sickness can be attributed to Satan or his angels (John 9:3). While the angel of Satan attacked him, Paul was called an angel of God (Gal. 4:14).

2. THE SUPPLICATION MADE v. 8.

a. It was definite

This is the import of the phrase "for this thing." The reference is to the thorn. Paul prayed specifically about this problem.

b. It was earnest

The verb "besought" is used in the Gospels of those who came to the Lord (cf. Matt. 8:5; 14:36). This should not be construed to mean that Paul considered Christ nothing more than a man. Rather, it points to his personal communications with the Lord in this prayer.

c. It was persistent

Mind you, the words "three times" must be taken literally. He felt this was enough without laboring the point. He concluded that God had other plans for him. This is how to pray: keep at it until the freedom

to pray is gone. God will release the heart from its burden.

3. THE SUFFICIENCY RECEIVED v. 9.

a. It was powerful

The grace of God was adequate for the need. The real emphasis is both on the personal pronoun and the provision of grace. God has all kinds of grace (1 Pet. 5:10). What God said to Israel is applicable here (Isa. 40:28-31). Remember: the verb "he said" is perfect tense.

b. It was personal

The personal pronouns are good: "he...me...my...thee." Each one of us has special needs. God's grace fills them all. What a glory to experience His grace.

c. It was present

While there is no copulative verb, it is required for translation. So it is true that my grace "is" sufficient. It is not a call of future help, but present supply (2 Kings 6:15-17).

d. It was plentiful

The word "sufficient" means just that. The grace never is expended. It is always moving from an unending supply. There is always more available.

e. It was practical

Strength is perfected (present tense) in weakness. Power is, therefore, more abundant as weakness increases. Christ's power and provision is made more evident as human weakness becomes more apparent. For this reason, Paul affirms that he would not ask more than the three times. Why? He had learned this supreme lesson: his weakness means God's strength! The verb "rest" means "tent." The verb is used of quartering soldiers. It is a bold metaphor. God's power would set up a tent over him, like the Shekinah glory. He would be overshadowed by that power in the midst of his weakness. Why pray for the removal of the thorn? Glory to God for such