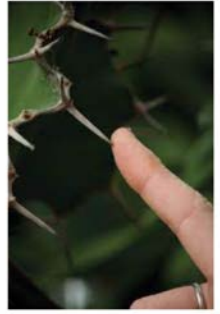


REDEEMER

Power *in* weakness

2 CORINTHIANS

Thorn in the flesh



2 Corinthians 12:1-10

- Part of Paul's Fool Speech
- Subversive Boasting
- On Visions and Revelations


2 Corinthians 12:1-10:

I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.


...

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. ...


On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses— though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. ...



So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. ...



Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ...



For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

- 2 Corinthians 12:1-10



Thorn in the flesh

- a. What it means
- b. What to watch out for
- c. What it does
- d. What to do/How to respond



Thorn in the flesh

a. What it means



The word "Thorn":

- Used only here in the NT
- In the Greek NT (Numbers 33:55; Ez 28:24; Hosea 2:6)
- "...Denotes that which frustrates and causes trouble in the lives of the afflicted." - Colin Kruse

Thorn:

- 1) Ongoing, not just one time struggle
- 2) Incredibly painful and hard.

Verse 8: "Three times *I pleaded* with the Lord about this, that it should leave me."

3 potential ways to understand

- 1) Physical
- 2) Persecution
- 3) Spiritual/Sin Struggle

Thorn in the flesh

a. What it means

b. What to watch out for: Satan's harrassment

Verse 7: So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, **a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me**, to keep me from becoming conceited.

What we learn from this verse:


1) Paul's thorn is sent from God's hand ("a thorn was given to me in the flesh").

God who is sovereign and good may allow thorns to come about in our lives. Why? In love, God uses redemptive pain to protect us from destructive pain.


What we learn from this verse:

2) Paul's thorn that is sent from God's hand is delivered by a Satanic messenger.


*- Whereas God allows and sends thorns, Satan pierces us with this thorn.
- Whereas God allows and sends thorns for redemptive reasons, Satan uses them for destructive reasons.*




Jon Bloom: "Satan pierces us with a thorn from God? Yes. Does this trouble us? Does it trouble us that it didn't trouble Paul? Paul feels no need to qualify or explain how God can give his child a redemptive gift of pain through an evil means. Why? Because this phenomenon occurs throughout the Bible. ...




Paul knows his Old Testament like the back of his hand, and it has truths like this woven throughout it: 'you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good' (Genesis 50:20). And he knows that the most redemptive gift of pain in history, the death of Christ the Lord, was given to us through the vilest means. ...



Jon Bloom: "Our redemptive thorns also may be delivered by a satanic messenger. But we can know this: it will only be one more way that God 'disarms the rulers and authorities and puts them to open shame' (Colossians 2:15). ...




Our God is so powerful and so wise that he can work all things – including our satanically delivered thorns – for our good (Romans 8:28). Trust in this kind of sovereignty is what fuels our joyful, confident contentedness while experiencing the weakness and weariness of our affliction."
- Jon Bloom



Satan's Harrassment: what might it look like:

John 8:44: ...When he (the devil) lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and **the father of lies**.



John Mark Comer: "Ideas have power only when we believe them. We hear all sorts of ideas every day, some brilliant, others ridiculous; but they have zero effect on us unless we begin to trust them as an accurate map to reality."

- *If I am close to God, I shouldn't be suffering this much.*

- *God must either be punishing me or has rejected me.*

Responding to Satan's harrassment:

2 Corinthians 10:5: "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ..."

- *If I am close to God, I shouldn't be suffering this much.*

- *God must either be punishing me or has rejected me.*

TAKING THESE THOUGHTS CAPTIVE TO THE OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST

Thorn in the flesh

a. What it means

b. What to watch out for

c. What it does: humbles you

Verse 7: **So to keep me from becoming conceited** because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, **to keep me from becoming conceited.**

CS Lewis: "The vice I am talking of is *Pride or Self-Conceit*: and the virtue opposite to it, in Christian morals, is called *Humility*...According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is *Pride*. ...

Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil. Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind."

- C. S. Lewis

Thorn in the flesh

- a. What it means
- b. What to watch out for
- c. What it does
- d. What to do/How to respond**


Verse 9a: But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Verse 9a: Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."




Verses 9b-10: Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ **may rest** upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am **content** with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. **For when I am weak, then I am strong."**


Closing Prayer by Scotty Smith




Heavenly Father, thank you for promising to give us all the grace we need, no matter the circumstance, crisis, or crucible. You gave Paul "sufficient grace" for his "thorn in the flesh"—though he really wanted you to remove his thorn.




Thank you for his model of honesty in struggle, boldness in prayer, and submission to your heart, hand, and timetable. Help us, as well, also believe you are doing all things well, even when you don't do all things easy.




For our "thorns in the flesh": Grant us grace to accept the inconvenient, limiting, painful things going on in our bodies. Until you give us our resurrection bodies, keep our hearts renewed in the gospel, as our "outer man" wears out. Free us to boast in, rather than simply bemoan our weaknesses. Make Jesus more near and dear to us. Increase our mercy for fellow sufferers.



For our "burrs in the saddle": Father, some of us are dealing with irritating people and aggravating circumstances. Whether on the job, or in our homes, if you're not going to change the situations, then change us. Give us bigger hearts and thicker skins, wisdom from above and grace on the ground.



For our "punches in the gut": Some of us are reeling from fresh disappointments, betrayals, or losses. Thank you for being a Father of compassion and God of all comfort. Father, help us catch our breath, gain perspective, and experience your calming, centering presence.



For our "arrows to the heart": Nothing hurts as much as relational pain. Father, grant us the grace we need to love well in messy, complex situations. Keep us from repaying hurt for hurt. May faith, not fear; kindness, not spite mark us as we move forward. You gave Jesus to us and for us. Certainly, we can trust you for everything else we really need. So very Amen we pray, in Jesus' tender & triumphant name.