

Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

I. Introduction

A. As Paul defended his apostleship for the sake of the Corinthian brethren, he noted some things about what he called “a thorn in the flesh.” Consider some things Scripture teaches related to this. **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**

II. What Was It?

A. The context indicates that Paul's thorn in the flesh was some trial(s) or hardship(s) he faced. Much discussion concerning Paul's thorn in the flesh relates to what *specific* hardship(s) it was. While one might wonder things such as this, nothing in the context or elsewhere in Scripture gives us a definitive answer to this. God's Word tells us everything we *need* to know, but He does not reveal to us everything we might *want* to know. **Deuteronomy 29:29; 2 Peter 1:3**

III. “The Messenger of Satan”...

A. One thing that *is* revealed about Paul's thorn in the flesh is that it was “the messenger of Satan.” Though Paul viewed his thorn in the flesh in many ways as a *positive* thing, it is evident that Satan was working through this in efforts to lead Paul into sin. **2 Corinthians 12:7; Ephesians 6:16**

IV. ...Yet Given for Good

A. On the other hand, this thorn in the flesh is said to have been given to Paul lest he “should be exalted above measure.” This indicates that God caused, or at least *permitted*, Paul to have this thorn in the flesh in order to *help* him. What Satan sought to use *against* Paul, God used for Paul's *benefit*. **2 Corinthians 12:7**

B. This reminds us that while trials are often viewed as purely negative, they can help us recognize our dependence on God and draw nearer to Him if we respond rightly. **Romans 5:3-4**

V. Paul's Choice

A. While Satan and God were both working through Paul's thorn in the flesh, it was *Paul's* choice which to yield to. Satan *cannot* force us to sin, and God *will* not force us to do right. Paul *chose* to respond to his thorn in the flesh as God desired. He chose to turn what could have been a stumbling block into something positive. **James 4:7; 2 Corinthians 12:9**

VI. Accepting God's Will

A. Part of Paul's choice to respond rightly to his thorn in the flesh was his choice to accept *God's will* for him to have it. While it was not wrong for Paul to pray for his thorn in the flesh to be removed, God's decision to leave him with it was rightly accepted. **2 Corinthians 12:8-10**

B. This exemplifies a key principle about prayer. We must trust God to know what is best, and not lose faith or be discontented when He answers any prayer differently from how we expect. **Luke 22:42**

VII. The Lord's “Grace is Sufficient”

A. As Paul's thorn in the flesh exemplifies, God often chooses to help us *through* trials rather than *out of* them. God assures us the opportunity to choose to do right no matter how difficult this path may seem. God supplies the strength needed to endure “thorns in the flesh” for those who submit to Him. **2 Corinthians 12:9a; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Ephesians 6:10**

VIII. Conclusion

A. When faced with infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses, it is helpful to remember Paul's thorn in the flesh. While trials can lead us to stumble (if we allow them), they can also help us be humble and draw nearer to God. **2 Corinthians 12:7**