

2 Corinthians

“Winning Through Weakness”

III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10

D. 10:1-13:10 Winning Through Weakness

2 Corinth. 12:7-10

“Splinters for saints”

I. Intro.

II. Vs. 7 A thorn in the flesh

III. Vs. 8-9a A Spiritual Principal

IV. Vs. 9b-10 Pitching His tent among the weak

I. Intro.

It will not be the revelation that caught Paul up that he will boast, but of the pain which brought him low, in the thorn that he will gladly speak. What we know of this “thorn” is limited but it appears that it was both debilitation and humiliating. What a remarkable rebuke to the false teachers who worshipped health and wealth and viewed affliction and weakness as an absence of God’s blessings. In God’s plan of redemption, there had to be weakness (crucifixion) before there was power (resurrection). And this spiritual principal is true in our sanctification as well, we are told that “*His strength is made perfect in our weakness*”. The trouble with arrogant Christians is that they feel that Christ belongs to them rather than they belong to Christ. Remember Christian “Every kite must have a string attached and anchored upon the earth that it may not only enjoy the view of the heavens but the safety of the earth as well!”

II. Vs. 7 A thorn in the flesh

Vs. 7 Paul already told us what he would brag about in 11:30 when he said, “*If I must boast, I would rather boast about the things that show how weak I am.*” In fact the one thing that he did speak of concerning the revelation of Jesus when he was caught up into Paradise was that it brought with it an irritating agony in his life which he calls a “*thorn in the flesh*”. As you study this passage everybody seems to have an opinion with regards to just what this “*thorn in the flesh*” was:

- Some feel the thorn in Paul’s life was **bad eyesight**: They come to this conclusion because of two passages in Galatians. First in 4:15 Paul writes that the church there was willing to “*pluck out your own eyes and given them to me.*” Then in 6:11 Paul writes, “*You see with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand.*” I have little doubt that Paul had eye problems and perhaps one that not only bothered his sight but wasn’t very attractive for others as well. But I not certain that this is what Paul am referring too.
- Some feel that he had a **speech impediment**: Because he mentions having difficulty uttering things as he wanted to. I think that is a stretch.

Here is what we know:

- a. **It was in the flesh**: As such it was most likely something physical as the word “thorn” can mean “*splinter, stake, or thorn*”, (many like to point out that it is the word used to describe the stake that holds up a Bedouin’s tent in a wind storm).

- b. **It was continual**: The word buffet is a rare word and comes from a word that means a fist and in the Greek is in the continual which means a continual striking not just one punch.
- c. **It came from a “messenger of Satan” but was allowed by the Lord**: Satan is the instrument the Lord used similar to the case of Job, when Satan has to appear before the Lord to get permission to afflict Job. Satan's purpose was to destroy and harass Paul, to make life miserable for him, but God's purpose was to strengthen him, to humble him and to keep him usable in his hands.
- d. **It was seen as a gift**: In verse 7 Paul refers to it as a gift that caused God's strength to be perfected.

III. Vs. 8-9a A Spiritual Principal

Vs. 8-9a Though we aren't certain specifically what the “*thorn in the flesh*” was we do know Paul did not like it as he went to the Lord about it three times. The request of Paul was that this messenger of Satan with his thorn be removed for good. As earnest in his prayer as Paul was God had a better plan than removing the thorn as the thorn had a purpose that made it useful to the Master. Some of us are too busy telling God what He ought to do about our situation which in turn renders us incapable of hearing what He wants to do. It is because of this that we become certain that the only thing to do about our situation is to remove it altogether. The Lord did not say, “My grace **will prove** to be sufficient” or “My grace **will be enough to get you through.**” No the Lord told Paul, “*I allowed the pressure to be such on this thorn so that you will understand that each moment there is ample provision for your every need, because no matter the thorn God's grace is able to exceed the need.*”

Paul's **human weakness made the way for more of Christ's power and grace!**

There is a spiritual principal here that we need to get a grip on dear saints: "***The spiritual principal is that His strength is made perfect in our weakness***"! That is to say that **God's power continually increases as our weakness grows.** That is as much a spiritual principal as gravity is in the natural realm, the "*Paradox of Power*". So what do you think God will be doing with us based upon this spiritual reality of: "***Human weakness makes way for more of Christ's power and grace***"? Well He will be involved in those things that cause us to realize we are weak! So let me ask you personally, "*What is it that makes you feel weak?*" If you are feeling weak that means that though you may be under attack you are also being led this way so that you will have far more of God's strength and grace! Now the opposite of this spiritual principal is also true and that is: "***Human arrogance and pride makes for less or none of Christ's power and grace***". Listen carefully "**It is far more important to God to keep us humble than it is to keep us comfortable**". God allows us to feel weak to keep us from that which would render us useless in the work of spreading his Kingdom. The most dangerous thing each of us faces daily is "*spiritual pride*".

IV. Vs. 9b-10 Pitching His tent among the weak

Vs. 9b-10 Paul uses a very interesting phrase here in the later part of verse 9 where he writes "*that the power of Christ may rest upon me*" as it is the same word used in John 1:14 of Jesus that describes Exodus 40:34 of the tabernacle. In other words the all-powerful Jesus "*itches His tent*" with His people in their weakness. **We are often led to believe that God pitches His tent with the famous and powerful, those who are popular**

and are on center stage in life but not so. Jesus pitches His tent with the weak and unknown, the suffering shut-in, the anonymous, quiet servant! There is no virtue in suffering if it is for any other reason other than for “Christ’s sake”! There in Paul utters the “*Paradox of Power*” “*For when I am weak then I am strong!*” So Paul comes to two decisions based upon this “spiritual principal”:

1. Vs. 9b **First he would never permit himself to brag about what he was doing:**

Mac Davis the country crooner once wrote the lyrics to the song: “*It’s Hard to be Humble*” writing, “*Oh Lord it’s hard to be humble when you’re perfect in every way. I can’t wait to look in the mirror cause I get better looking each day. Oh Lord it’s hard to be humble but I’m doing the best that I can.*” If Paul found himself wanting to brag about something he was doing he would find some area of weakness and speak of that instead. Paul was going to take precautions so that he would not succumb to the temptation to be proud. Now he didn’t view this as other people’s responsibility to keep him there. Paul wasn’t looking for folks to put him down! In 1 Cor 15:31 Paul says “*I die daily*” he doesn’t say, “*You slay me*”! There are people who feel it’s their business in life to keep somebody humble by never encouraging them, never being nice because they are afraid it will “*go to their heads*”. You cannot keep somebody humble by putting them down it’s the responsibility of each individual to face this problem in their own life. Paul says, “*I’m going to remind myself of who I really am by boasting only in my weaknesses, my failures, the times when I don’t do very well. That is what I want to boast about.*”

2. Vs. 10 **Second, Paul says whenever trouble comes, I'm not going to gripe, complain or feel sorry for myself:** Paul wanted to recognize that this “thorn” was the best thing for God to work in his life because, “*When I am weak, then I am strong.*” Dear ones when is the devil beaten in our lives? Well, based upon this “*spiritual truth*” **NOT** when we feel great and confident, when it looks like wonderful things are happening, and everything is going well. No, the devil is being defeated when we are under attack feeling weak and helpless. When we don't know what to do; when in our weakness we come before the Lord and plead with him for strength to go on one more day, for grace to help us stand. Saint's that's when we are winning, that's when the Kingdom of God is being spread.

In Chron. 26:16 we are told of Uzziah and his downfall as it reads “He became powerful, his pride led to his downfall.” Oh how many times this phrase has been repeated in mankind's history. In every place there has been a thorn satan will seek to distort the reason for it as sure as the Lord will seek sanctify the reason for it. Henrietta Mears once said “*I believe my greatest spiritual asset throughout my entire life has been my failing sight, for it has kept me absolutely dependent upon God.*” God doesn't need our perceived strengths, He wants our weaknesses, our sufferings, our inadequacies, our disabilities, our failures and fears. And if we will boast in those things His power will pitch it's tent among us.