

2 Corinthians 12:1–10 (NKJV)

- ¹ It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord:
- ² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven.
- ³ And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—
- ⁴ how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.
- ⁵ Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities.
- ⁶ For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me.
- ⁷ And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.
- ⁸ Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.
- ⁹ And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
- ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

A Vision and A Thorn **2 Corinthians 12:1-10**

INTRO:

Paul continues his defense against the attacks of the false apostles. He boasted in **Chapter 11** about his sufferings for the Lord Jesus Christ. In **Chapter 12**, he wrote about an experience he had and the consequences of that experience which we would have never known about had Paul hadn't been forced to boast about himself. He wrote about the revelation he experienced and the thorn he received.

I. Paul's Vision (v. 1-6)

II. Paul's Thorn (v. 7-10)

I. Paul's Vision (v. 1-6)

2 Corinthians 12:1-6 *"It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me."*

A. Paul no longer boasted about his suffering for the Lord Jesus Christ and His Gospel. At **12:1**, Paul shifts to speak of something in which these false apostles probably excelled. He wrote about a revelatory experience he had.

vs. 1-2 *"It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven."*

Paul is very careful how he wrote this. Notice he described this *"man in Christ"* in the third person. It sounds like this was someone other than the Apostle Paul.

However, we know it was Paul because he said in **verse 7**,

"And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure."

This must be Paul because he is the one who is in danger of becoming exalted by these great revelations.

B. This was a historical event. It took place fourteen years before Paul wrote about it. Yet, he did not know whether he was in the flesh or in the spirit when this happened. He just knew, *"how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter."* (v.4)

C. This is significant in that Paul actually saw what heaven was like. He saw God's paradise, planned for those who are His. Heaven is a real place. We know that because the Bible tells us it is, we also know this because the Apostle Paul was there. He wrote to us two things about His experience. First, it was an experience which could not be spoken about. The Greek word expresses ***“something that cannot be expressed, since it is beyond human powers.”*** (BDAG). This means what Paul saw did not fit into any categories we can comprehend. Second, He wrote it was not lawful for him to utter. Now think about these false apostles who claimed such kind of experiences.

D. Paul was very careful how he boasted about such things because,
v.6 ***“For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me”***

Paul knew magnifying himself would be at the expense of Christ's glory.

II. Paul's Thorn (v.7-10)

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 ***“And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, [in order] that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”***

A. To keep Paul properly grounded God allowed Satan to give Paul a thorn in the flesh.

v.7 ***“And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.”***

Who is responsible for Paul's thorn? First, we learn that Satan was a source. It was a messenger from Satan to beat up on Paul every day. Yet, we learn it was ultimately God who gave it to him. We read the purpose of this gift was so Paul would not get too proud. Satan is not concerned with our becoming proud. God is. We know this too, because Paul three times pleaded with the Lord to remove it. He did this because he knew the Lord put it there. Job's experience and Paul's are similar in this way.

B. The Lord's response to Paul is instructive. First, to those who claim the Lord never says no to His people's prayer need to see here the Lord said, ***“No,”*** to Paul.

The Lord did not remove Paul's thorn in the flesh. Instead He gave him something better. He gave him grace to get through.

v.9 *“And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’”*

C. What was this grace? The word grace signifies some undeserved favor the Lord gives. This unearned favor takes many forms. It may be money from an unanticipated source to pay for something. Or it can be a peace of spirit in a difficult situation. I do not know what exactly that grace was God gave Paul, but whatever it was it provided strength to Paul when he needed it most.

D. *“Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, [in order] that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”* (verses 9b-10)

1. The list of Paul's infirmities is four fold. Sometimes God called Paul and calls us to endure ***“reproaches.”*** Have you ever been insulted for being a believer? God gives strength to get us through this.

2. Second, is ***“needs.”*** This is ***“hardships,”*** for example, the times we have to travel through a trial.

3. Third, Paul received enablement from the Lord to deal with ***“persecutions.”*** Paul had disgruntled Jews and Gentiles who hated his guts and tried to kill him. God got him through.

4. Finally, he could endure ***“calamities.”*** This was times when it seemed the world was falling apart. God gave Paul handles to hold onto to make it through.

What We Need to Learn from This.

1. The Lord is vitally concerned we are not exalted above measure or that we do not exalt ourselves. D. A. Carson observed that if God was so concerned that an Apostle not get a big head that He gave him a thorn in the flesh, what will he do to keep us normal Christians humble?

2. His grace is always more than sufficient for us. Spurgeon talked about this in his sermon on this text.

“In the last reading which I will give, I shall lay the emphasis upon the first and the last words: ***“My grace is sufficient for thee.”*** I have often read in Scripture of the holy laughter of Abraham, when he fell upon his face and laughed; but I do not know that I ever experienced that laughter

till a few evenings ago, when this text came home to me with such sacred power as literally to cause me to laugh. I had been looking it through, looking at its original meaning, and trying to fathom it, till at last I got hold of it this way: “*My* grace,” says Jesus, “is sufficient for *thee*,” and it looked almost as if it were meant to ridicule my unbelief: for surely the grace of such a one as my Lord Jesus is indeed sufficient for so insignificant a being as I am. It seemed to me as if some tiny fish, being very thirsty, was troubled with fear of drinking the river dry, and Father Thames said to him, “Poor little fish, my stream is sufficient for thee.” I should think it is, and inconceivably more. My Lord seems to say to me, “Poor little creature that thou art, remember what grace there is in me, and believe that it is all thine. Surely it is sufficient for thee.” I replied, “Ah, my Lord, it is indeed.” Put one mouse down in all the granaries of Egypt when they were fullest after seven years of plenty, and imagine that one mouse complaining that it might die of famine. “Cheer up,” says Pharaoh, “poor mouse, my granaries are sufficient for thee.” Imagine a man standing on a mountain, and saying, “I breathe so many cubic feet of air in a year; I am afraid that I shall ultimately inhale all the oxygen which surrounds the globe.” Surely the earth on which the man would stand might reply, “My atmosphere is sufficient for thee.” I should think it; let him fill his lungs as full as ever he can, he will never breathe all the oxygen, nor will the fish drink up all the river, nor the mouse eat up all the stores in the granaries of Egypt. Does it not make unbelief seem altogether ridiculous, so that you laugh it out of the house, and say, “Never come this way any more, for with a mediatorial fulness to go to, with such a Redeemer to rest in, how dare I for a moment think that my wants cannot be supplied.” Our great Lord feeds all the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, and the cattle on the hills, and guides the stars, and upholds all things by the power of his hand, how then can we be straitened for supplies, or be destitute of help? If our needs were a thousand times larger than they are they would not approach the vastness of his power to provide. The Father hath committed all things into his hand. Doubt him no more. Listen, and let him speak to thee: “*My* grace is sufficient for thee. What if thou hast little grace, yet *I* have much: it is *my* grace thou hast to look to, not thine own, and *my* grace will surely be sufficient for thee.”

Do we believe God’s grace is more than sufficient for us?

Hymn #56 *Day by Day*