

What is this “Paul’s thorn in the flesh” thing?

This is one of those subjects that has been completely misunderstood and misapplied. This primary because it has been taken out of context.

Some believers have accepted the works of Satan (sickness, stealing, killing, and destruction, failure, misery) in the disguise of Paul’s thorn in the flesh and/or hiding behind Paul’s thorn in the flesh.

2 Corinthians 12:1-10 (KJV) “It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, **there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.** For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

1) "Exalted above measure"

2 Corinthians 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

Some have used the word "exalted" to mean that it was God would put this thorn in the flesh on Paul to counter his pride. The word "exalted" can also mean a positive or the godly exaltation, a godly type of exalting that has nothing to do with pride such as what 1 Peter 5:6 says.

Actually, this word "exalted" is not speaking about to be proud and self-exalting. It means lifted up higher or above other things.

a) "And the LORD said unto Joshua, this day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee."—Joshua 3:7

b) On that day the LORD magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life." — Joshua 4:14

i) Here we see the word "magnify" being used which means the same as the word "exalt" in 2 Corinthians 12:7

ii) This is also among other scriptures affirms that there is godly kind of exaltation or magnification.

iii) Psalms 37:34, Psalms 92:10; Matthew 23:12.

2) "Through abundance of revelations"

2 Corinthians 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

a) Paul was operating at a higher level of revelations and as a result of these revelations that he was receiving from God people were being reached and the kingdom advanced. Guess who was not happy about it?

b) Galatians 1:12 For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught *it*, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

c) Paul's revelations came from God, not from Satan, so it would be contradictory for the same God who gave him these revelations that were plenty and were transforming his life and many people's lives to then turn around and put something on him to hinder the very revelations. It can only be the work of the enemy that does that.

i) Note: Because this thorn in the flesh was serving the purpose of hindering him from receiving more revelations from God, and it cannot be God who is behind it, limiting of revelation to Paul.

o This makes it very clear that this "Thorn in the flesh" was not from God. God was not the author of this "Thorn in the flesh" and for someone to suggest that he would have to make these verses say that.

ii) Do you think you have "Paul's thorn in the flesh?"

Then you must have the **same level and abundance of revelations which produced a third of the New Testament or STOP** hiding behind the thorn in the flesh for you do not have the same level of revelations as Paul.

Paul was getting influence, advancing the kingdom, respected, and honored by the people because of the abundance of the revelations he was receiving from God so, Satan persecuted him heavily in order to make the gospel less attractive to the people.

3) "There was given to me"

2 Corinthians 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

Here is the heart of this passage that very few people have understood.

"There was given me.." I was given.."— **By Who?**

Many people have concluded it is "*God who gave Paul this thorn in the flesh,*" because they have a wrong foundation of the nature and character of God.

a) They believe God is in control of everything.

i) Genesis 1:28 (God limited Himself when He involved us—We have a part to play, and He does have part to play. Everything is not dependent upon Him.

ii) Deuteronomy 30:9

b) They believe God allows everything.

i) We saw that He does not. 1 Corinthians 10:13 – We live in a fallen world that we messed up. God is not the one that allows bad things to happen, WHY? Because their existence was not His doing or allowing. He had no part in it.

- ii) Man, Devil, and Sin—led to the fallen world. God does not remove us from the fallen world but gives us the grace, power, and authority (Luke 10:19) and joy to overcome any situation.
- iii) Because God has given us freewill, power and authority over the devil. We are the stewards of the earth.
- c) They do not know the full life of Jesus and how He displayed heart of God and helped us understand the Father better.
 - i) Acts 10:38
 - ii) John 10:10
 - iii) James 4:7
 - iv) James 1:16-17
 - v) Luke 9:53-56

Note: This does not say nor teach that “God gave Paul this thorn in the flesh.”

4) A thorn in the flesh

2 Corinthians 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

The term “**Thorn in the flesh**” is not very descriptive of what this is referring to. It more like a **cliché**. Paul had a habit of using certain clichés or **jargons** such as “*ye would have plucked*

out your own eyes, and have given them to me" (Galatians 4:15). Obviously, Paul was not asking the Galatians to take out their physical eyes for him.

- a) Numbers 33:55 "But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell." (Underline mine).
- b) Joshua 23:13 "Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you" (Underline mine).
- c) Judges 2:3 "Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you." (Underline mine).
 - i) Paul used these terminologies (**pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and thorns in your eyes**) to refer to the persecution he had suffered. In this case, he called it "Thorn in the flesh" which is identical to other terminologies used in scripture.
- d) There has been much debate about what Paul's thorn in the flesh was — Some people believe it was sickness or disease sent from God to keep Paul humble. Nothing can be further from the truth. These passages reveal what it was. We do not have to speculate.

- i) This was not sent from God, and it does not say that.

5) The messenger of Satan

2 Corinthians 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

- a) By WHO? Look at the next part of this verse. It tells us WHO! *the messenger of Satan to buffet me.*
- b) God would not be the one to give Paul all these revelations and then turn around and buffet him.
- c) Paul was getting influence, advancing the kingdom, respected, and honored by the people because of the abundance of the revelations he was receiving from God so, persecuted him heavily in order to make the gospel less unattractive to the people.
 - i) That was the devil—from satan.
- d) There was a demonic or evil spirit that followed Paul causing hardships and stirring up persecutions. 2 Corinthians 11:23-30 details Paul's hardships, sufferings or persecutions (thorns in the flesh):

- o In labours more abundant,

- o In stripes above measure,

- In prisons more frequent,
- In deaths oft.
- Of the Jews, five times received I forty stripes save one.
- Thrice was I beaten with rods,
- once was I stoned,
- thrice I suffered shipwreck,
- a night and a day I have been in the deep;
- In journeyings often,
- In perils of waters,
- In cold and nakedness.
- Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily,
- the care of all the churches.
- In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept
- In perils of robbers,
- In perils by mine own countrymen,
- In perils by the heathen,
- In perils in the city,
- In perils in the wilderness,
- v perils in the sea,
- In perils among false brethren;
- In weariness and painfulness,
- In watchings often,
- In hunger and thirst,
- In fastings often,
- the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me:
- And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.

"If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities."

- i) God does not do the work of the devil (John 10:10). God doesn't deal with nor use the devil for anything. God is not the author of people's problems. It is an error to think that He does.

- ii) This messenger of satan was not the messenger of GOD! It clearly says the messenger of **SATAN**.

6) Buffet me

2 Corinthians 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

Buffet **does not** mean "to bless."

This thorn in the flesh was not a good thing and according to James 1:16-17, it was not a good gift and therefore did not come from God.

Another word used in these verses is the word "**buffet**" as "*to hit or beat*", especially repeatedly which would mean that this is a repeated action.

*Mark 14:65 And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to **buffet** him, and to say unto him, Prophecy: and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands.*

*Matthew 26:67 Then did they spit in his face, and **buffeted** him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands,*

*1 Corinthians 4:11 Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are **buffeted**, and have no certain dwelling place;*

1 Peter 2:20 For what glory is it, if, when ye be **buffeted** for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and **suffer** for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

The word buffet or buffeted is used in all other scriptures to speak about **persecution**. We know very well that it is not the Lord that persecutes us. It is the enemy.

- a) 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Paul was buffeted with infirmities. The word "infirmities" which many have taken to mean sickness, however, if we are to look at the context, it comes down to mean **persecution**, not sickness.
- b) According to Strong's concordance, the word "*infirmities*" means "*feebleness*" which could be a result of the persecution.
 - i) The New International Version of the Bible (NIV) translates the word "infirmities" as "weakness", not sickness.
 - ii) Paul's thorn in the flesh was persecution that came from the devil ("there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me"), to make others reject the Gospel for fear of persecution that came because of it.

7) Sought the Lord thrice

2 Corinthians 12:8 For this thing I **besought the Lord thrice**, that it might depart from me.

Here Paul reveals that he sought the Lord to have this removed and it was not. This thing the Lord could not remove the same way He does not remove problems in the world. He

gives us power and authority to stop and remove them ourselves and in other cases as in these scriptures, He gives Paul sufficient grace. This grace was his power to overcome this thorn in the flesh that God did not give him, but the enemy.

- a) For the things that God has not delivered us from such as persecution, He has given us the strength or grace to endure (2 Corinthians 12:9).

God gave Jesus the strength to endure the cross but did not deliver Him from the cross. His death was essential to our freedom. The bigger picture required Him to die. He was not redeemed from persecution which finally led Him to die on the cross.

- i) He prayed three times (Matthew 26:44) as Paul prayed in 2 Corinthians 12:8
 - o "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me."
- b) Through the persecution of Stephen, Paul was convicted and converted as a result.

The Lord did not remove the persecution, or else Paul wouldn't have seen the light of salvation soon enough.

8) My grace is sufficient for thee

2 Corinthians 12:9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

a) When Paul could not get his prayers granted, God told Him that His **grace was sufficient for him**.

i) Notice that the Lord did not **give** Him grace. He already had it and He simply reminded him of its availability to him for him to tap into.

b) We know from 1 John 5:14 *"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:"* – because his request was not granted, it did not meet the requirements of this verse.

9) My strength is made perfect in weakness

2 Corinthians 12:9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10) Glory in infirmities

2 Corinthians 12:9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Notice that Paul speaks of the thorn in the flesh and then speaks of infirmities and then adds on (in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake)

11) Persecutions

2 Corinthians 12:10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

The heart of the thorn in the flesh is the persecutions Paul went through constantly while preaching the gospel and advancing the Kingdom of God.

These have been listed one by one in 2 Corinthians 11:23-31 in point 5.

12) Christ's sake:

2 Corinthians 12:10 "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

a) Paul lists all the hardships and mentions that they were all for Christ's sake. This can only be true if they were persecutions as a result of preaching the gospel or else, they could not have been for "Christ's sake."

b) In infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses here in these verses refer to **hardship/persecutions** that Paul endured as a result of preaching the Gospel.

i) 1 Peter 2:20-21 For what glory *is it*, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer *for it*, ye take it patiently, this *is*

acceptable with God. 21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:

ii) 1 Peter 4:12-16 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. 14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy *are ye*; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or *as* a thief, or *as* an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. 16 Yet if *any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

iii) The above passages reveal a suffering that comes from doing well or living godly (2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 2:20-21; 1 Peter 4:12-16).

- **Example:** If you eat, you have to use the washroom. Using the washroom comes with eating. NO way around it. You can't pray yourself out of it. You may find better and improved restrooms, but you have to go or else don't eat.

iv) In this fallen world we live in, God does not take away problems, sufferings, and hardships, rather the solutions to these problems in the world is not **removing them**

(world is fully corrupted) and or **removing us**. In due time, there will be a new earth and new heaven.

- Relationship with the Lord,
- Being filled with the Holy Ghost,
- Renewing our minds,
- Knowing our identity,
- Our authority in Christ.

Because of the above, we are the ones to change things, not God. God

Looking to His prayers, we see more of this:

- a) John 16:33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."
- b) John 17:15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.

So, when Paul prayed that God remove this thorn in the flesh (hardships—persecutions), which actually came as a result of living godly and preaching the gospel, but his three times request was not granted, rather God **told** him that His grace was sufficient for him.

Because these persecutions were a result of preaching the gospel and living a godly life, if God were to remove them—**Paul would have had to stop preaching the gospel and living a godly life.**

This would be a contradiction to the great commission and the will of God for a believer to live godly. Rather God gives us the *authority* over them, *delivers* us, and/or gives us the *grace* and *strength* to endure and overcome whatever the enemy throws them at us.

Infirmities

- a) If this was a sickness or disease that some have tried to establish, we have been redeemed and have been given power and authority over from sickness, diseases but not **persecution** which also explains why this persecution/hardships i.e. infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses in this case — **“Thorn in the flesh,”** could not be taken away because it was a result of preaching the gospel.
 - i) To not have persecution, we would have not to preach the gospel or live godly which is clearly not God’s will.
 - ii) 2 Timothy 3:12 “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”

- Persecution is just one of the results of living a godly life and/or preaching the gospel.

- b) In 2 Corinthians 12:10, Paul spoke of these attacks as being reproaches, persecutions, and distresses for the sake of Christ, not some kind of sickness, disease or disability.

The "Thorn in the flesh" referred to here was persecution from the messenger of Satan as a result of the revelation received from God that played a major role in advancing the Gospel.

Paul took pleasure and glory (2 Corinthians 12:10) in his persecutions because God's grace was sufficient for him, and God's strength was made perfect in his weakness. Paul had a cause to rejoice.