

2 CORINTHIANS LESSON 21

Chapter 12:6-12, The Gift of Affliction and Its Purpose

18 September 2023

In this epistle, Paul made many mentions of physical or emotional suffering in the life of a believer who is devoted to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ and the furtherance of the gospel:

- God comforts us in all our tribulations (1:3-4).
- We have the sentence of death in ourselves...trust God (1:9).
- Paul was **“persecuted but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus...”** (4:9-10).
- **“Death worketh in us”** (4:12).
- **“Our light affliction...”** (4:17-18).
- **“As sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich”** (6:10).
- **“Without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God...”** (7:5-6).
- **“The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God...”** (10:4).

*Note that in each case, God’s grace was sufficient and God’s power was available.

5-7 **“I will not glory, but in mine infirmities...And lest I should be exalted...”**

- **“I fear...as the serpent beguiled Eve...”** (2 Cor. 12:5).
- **“I will exalt my throne above the stars of God”** (Isa. 14:13). This was Lucifer’s downfall.
- **“Ye shall be as gods.”** (Gen. 3:5). The desire for exaltation brought about the fall of man.

“Lest I should be exalted above measure...there was given me a thorn in the flesh.” (Vs 7)

- Paul had received a wonderful gift of revelation, which could have tempted him to exalt himself or to be exalted by others.
- God gave Paul the gift of a physical infirmity to help temper the temptation to exalt himself and to save him from the same destruction that brought Satan down as well as mankind.
 - The thorn was a remedy for exaltation. This is physical pain, suffering, or discomfort.
 - Note that this was a gift, not a form of punishment. Sickness is not proof that God is displeased with you. He may be giving you a gift for your own good.

“The messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.”

- **Buffet:** “to beat or strike with the fists.” God allowed Satan to beat Paul physically to protect him from spiritual ruin.
 - We would not ask for such a gift, but our loving God knows what we need.

Vs 8 **“For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.”**

- Paul did the right thing. He sought God for relief from his pain. He asked God 3 times.
 - God said, “No.” He wanted Paul to benefit from his gift.

Vs 9 **“My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”**

- We face consequences in our life as a member of a fallen race under a curse.
- When the events in our life bring us tears, pain, sorrow, heartache, misunderstanding, or weakness, —we must remember to draw nigh to God and depend upon His strength, power, ability, might, and victory. We will always find God’s grace to be sufficient.

“Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

- Paul is not suggesting that you should glory BECAUSE you have an infirmity.
 - God does not expect you to jump for joy when you get an illness.
- He is telling you that you ought to continue to GLORY in the things of Christ even though you ARE going through some kind of infirmity.
 - Rather than quit on God or complain about your infirmity, continue to glory in God.
 - In doing so, you will find that Christ’s power rests upon you so you can carry on with a right spirit and so you can cope with your troubles.

Vs 10 “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches...”

- It’s just a fact. Christians will get sick; Christians will be mistreated.
 - Paul lets you know so you won’t panic when it happens to you. You don’t have to worry that your troubles are a result of God’s displeasure with you.

“...in necessities...”

- Many aspects of ministry are not necessarily spiritual, but they must be done, nonetheless.

“...in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

- The reason Paul could take pleasure in his persecutions and distresses is because he knew that physical weakness could make him stronger spiritually. (See 1 Pet. 4:1).
 - Fasting is a good way to prove this.
 - When you have no strength of your own, you rely more on God’s strength.

11-12 Paul reminds this church that he had demonstrated all the signs of an apostle.

- He was doing right and serving God, and yet he was enduring a lot of suffering, grief, infirmity, hardship, difficulty, etc.
- Hardship and difficulty is not a sign that God is punishing you.
 - These things are normal in a sin-cursed world.
 - Rely on God’s grace and power during those times. You will find it to be sufficient for you.