

PAUL'S THORN IN THE FLESH

by William Vigue

William Vigue's examination of various interpretations of Paul's thorn in the flesh, arguing it was opposition to ministry rather than illness, and defending divine healing.

13 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 001- Introduction
2. 01 - The Many Viewpoints of Paul's Thorn
3. 02 - Paul's Thorn is a Metaphor
4. 03 - Visions and Revelations of the Lord
5. 04 - The Messenger of Satan
6. 05 - The Purpose of Paul's Thorn
7. 06 - Paul's Weakness
8. 07 - Strength Made Perfect in Weakness
9. 08 - Lest I Be Exalted Above Measure
10. 09 - God Exalts The Humble and Cast the Proud Aside
11. 10 - Paul's Revelation of Grace
12. 11 - Gods Grace is Sufficient
13. 12 - Additional Comments and Questions

001- Introduction

Paul's Thorn in the Flesh An Exhaustive Commentary Includes Briefs from Scholars, Theologians, Lexicons & Classic Books By William Vigue "Meat of the Word Ministries"

Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

Introduction

Like a snow skier we choose what trail to take down the mountain. We have choices that lead us down the path of our belief system. One's perspective about the Will of God is greatly molded from the influences surrounding us. Denominational lines generally guide the direction of views. Therefore, the theological path in which one chooses to view Paul's "thorn in the flesh" is often cast in stone. He who reads this will be challenged to transcend denominational lines in a sincere search for truth. How one interprets Paul's "thorn in the flesh" greatly influences their understanding of many other scriptures which speak among other things about divine healing, answered prayer and perseverance in ministry. As expressed by Paul to the Corinthians, (1 Corinthians 12:1-3) there are views in Christendom more rooted in speculation than sound truth! The Apostle Paul said we have weapons that are "not carnal but mighty through God." He added that we are to use those weapons in a specific fight to; "the pull down strong holds, down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God". One translation says to; "destroy speculations". Another translation says we are to "demolish arguments and every pretension".

There are many questions. What was the message and who was the messenger?" Paul called it, "a messenger of Satan". Some contend that since the message was "allowed", regardless of how it came, it was a message from God, who merely used Satan as the messenger. I suggest that contradicts the wisdom of scripture.

"He that sends a message by the hand of a fool cuts off the feet, and drinks damage (violence)."
Proverbs 26:6

Satan is a cutter and the master fool. I question the suggestion that God would send a message to his servant through the master of fools? The result of such a thing cuts into our progress and brings forth a cruel injustice called damage or violence to one's faith to receive healing.

Misrepresenting "Paul's thorn in the flesh" can cut people off from faith in receiving divine healing and cut into their prayers for a miracle. I think it also cuts people off from thinking deeper on the things concerning the Kingdom of God. Misunderstanding any portion of scripture is produced by one of two things. Either we are not taking the time to investigate the subject or God is still keeping us in the dark. I doubt the latter. Let us therefore, not fail to search out a matter by thinking God doesn't want us to understand. This book examines Paul's "thorn in the flesh" thoroughly and offers a fresh insight into the subject. Let it provoke you to think!

01 - The Many Viewpoints of Paul's Thorn

Chapter 1 The Many Viewpoints of Paul's Thorn For many, the viewpoint of "Paul's Thorn in the Flesh" is a major stumbling block. Those seeking God for healing or reaching for any of the promises of God will continually be probed by satanic strategies that are designed to cause them confusion.

Let someone begin to hope in Gods will to heal them and often someone will bring up Paul's thorn. It works almost as an antidote against faith. In other words, many explain Paul's thorn in a way that weakens ones faith in divine healing. However, it should be explained so as to strengthen your faith, not overthrow it. People, eager to find a reason to believe in the miraculous, commonly have a countering word of doubt fired at their thought processes. Jesus, in the parable of the sower tells us this; "And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts". (Mark 4:15) It comes in various forms but as Jesus said, the devil attempts to take away the Word of truth. Contentions that God does not heal any more, or that it is not always God's Will to heal the sick are plentiful. Promise seekers, if infected with reasons to doubt Gods promises, will have their faith in the promise, overwhelmed. Sadly, many Christians are conditioned to think their sickness is like Paul's Thorn. Accordingly, the effect is the introduction of doubt. The end result is sufficient to keep some from receiving the promise of healing.

It is for this reason that I want to present to you the variety of views about Paul's thorn. Some are more illogical and worse than others. Others are reasonable but questionable. Listen to this illustration by Smith Wigglesworth, a man of God greatly used in a divine healing ministry back in the 1920's - 1940's. He recognized the danger misunderstanding Paul's thorn.

"Where people are in sickness you find frequently that they are dense about the Bible. They usually know three verses though. They know about Paul's thorn in the flesh, and that Paul told Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach's sake, and that Paul left someone sick somewhere; they forgot his name and don't remember the name of the place and don't know where the chapter is. Most people think they have a thorn in the flesh. The chief thing in dealing with a person who is sick is to ascertain their exact position. As you are ministering under the Spirit's power the Lord will let you see just that which will be more helpful and most faith-inspiring to them."

"I visited women who had been suffering for many years. She was all twisted with rheumatism and had been two years in bed. I asked her, what makes you lie here?" She said, "I've come to the conclusion that I have a thorn in the flesh." I said, "To what wonderful degree of righteousness have you attained that you have a thorn in the flesh? Have you had such an abundance of divine revelations that there is danger of your being exalted above measure?" She said, "I believe it is the Lord who is causing me to suffer." I said, "You believe it is the Lord's will for you to suffer, and you are trying to get out of it as quickly as you can. There are doctor's bottles all over the place. Get out of your hiding place and confess you are a sinner. If you'll get rid of your self righteousness, God will do something for you. Drop the idea that you are so holy that God has got to afflict you."

Sin is the cause of your sickness and not righteousness. Disease is not caused by righteousness, but by sin."

Wigglesworth reasoned there is enough sickness in this world without implementing God as the minister of it. Healing is a promise of scripture. It is Gods will. Let you faith be encouraged in knowing God's mercy is superior to mans self righteousness. Like Wigglesworth, I want to see people delivered from sickness and disease. Dealing with this issue will make some angry because their viewpoint is challenged. Nevertheless, it will help many innocent people clear their soul of doubts that have ruined many in their quest for diving healing. The Traditional "Opinions"

It seems that with each new Bible version the church is moving toward a weaker translation of the scriptures. Some suggest the problem is based on the attempt to be politically correct or to host a translation that fits a preference of theology. Others see it as a good effort to make the Word of God more understandable to our culture and society. Paraphrases have increased in popularity. However, while it is a commendable effort to put the Bible in simple terms for easier reading, a paraphrased Bible is still a watered down version of the featured truths of scripture. Paraphrases are not translations. Some portions are mere interpretation. However, if the original intent of scripture is ill used by inserting popular opinion over accurate translation, that paraphrase ceases to be a translation. This has happened in the case of Paul's thorn. Many of the deeper truths in God's Word are lost as a result. What follows is the loss of effectiveness.

Someone might say, "If you read it in the Bible who can question it." However, some Bibles are known to take great liberty in there translation. Thus, it is not strange today to pick up a Bible and read that: "Paul had such revelations that God needed to keep him from becoming conceited. Therefore God gave Paul a thorn, a physical illness in his body." This statement found in the New International Version is not an accurate translation of the manuscripts. It is an opinion of the so called scholars that put that version together. So try to look beyond one interpretation and consider other translations.

Such opinions have evolved slowly into a concept of fact in the mind of some. Still, it is nothing more than one opinion of many. Most commentators acknowledge that there are many "opinions" but no certainty of fact. In truth, the identification of this thorn has troubled scholars for centuries. There is a list of various opinions, which I present here.

Some kind of nervous disorder (including epilepsy),

An unconverted wife

A speech impediment.

Agony over the Jewish rejection of the gospel,

The Roman Catholic writers think that it denotes some form of impiety.

Tertullian believed it was some kind of pain, such as an ear or head infection.

Luther, Calvin, and other early Reformers interpret the expression as a temptation to unbelief.

In the medieval period it was suggested as a sexual temptation, possibly homosexual.

Others suggested a chronic eye disease which God used to keep Paul humble.

Chrysostom argued that it was opposition to Paul's ministry (based on the meaning of "Satan" as "adversary").

One thing is certain; scholars acknowledge there are other opinions. The tendency however, is for people to interpret the thorn to fit a problem relative to their times. For instance in Medieval Times sexual temptation was a serious issue that theologians struggled to explain. Thus, the voices of that era's, reasoned the thorn was that problem. Believers in the past as well as believers now frequently speculate on Paul's thorn to fit their present need, crisis, doctrine and problem. For instance, one minister confessed to me he had poor study habits and called it "his weakness". He associated it as a thorn in his flesh like Paul had. Ultimately he concluded that his lack of interest in studying the scriptures was the Will of God. My friend, what we want to avoid, is using Paul's thorn as an excuse for not persevering toward the promises of God. In respect to the uncertainty of the thorn, Adam Clarke's Commentary makes some interesting observations:

"Whatever it was, it was (G3588) *tee* (G4561) *sarki* , in the flesh, i. e. of an outward kind. It was neither sin nor sinfulness, for this could not be given him to prevent his being exalted above measure; for sin never had and never can have this tendency. What this thorn in the flesh might be has given birth to a multitude of conjectures. . . It is almost impossible to mistake the apostle's meaning and reference. JESUS CHRIST sent Paul to proclaim his truth, and found a church at Corinth. SATAN, the adversary of God's truth, sent a man to preach lies at the same place, and turn the church of God into his own synagogue; and by his teaching lies and calumnies the apostle was severely buffeted. We need seek no other sense for these expressions. Many, however, think that the apostle had really some bodily infirmity that rendered him contemptible, and was the means of obstructing the success of his ministry; and that the false apostle availed himself of this to set Paul at nought, and to hold him out to ridicule. I have shown this, elsewhere, to be very unlikely."

Once again, many modern day translations leave the impression that Paul's thorn was a sickness. This is not the case with the ancestral history of most church denominations. They were less dogmatic. Some, like the Pentecostal movement, had many opponents to the notion that the thorn was a sickness. The early church held a clear view of divine healing and Paul's thorn. We will examine their understanding. Based on the context and the whole council of God, I agree with Chrysostom. The thorn was repeated "opposition to Paul's ministry".

Remarks of Others Reflecting On Traditional Views The following quotes are from various scholars, theologians, preachers and Christian writers who took issue with what some have taught about Paul's thorn. These first three points are quotes taken from the Electronic Bible Software, "Quick Book Library" under the book titled "The Hard sayings of the Bible".

1) "There are some things that we can definitely say about the thorn. First, it was evil. It is described as a "messenger of Satan", not as an angel of God. This means that it comes from the Evil One with evil intent. Whether adversaries or disease, the thorn was evil."

2) "The thorn caused some type of weakness. Paul says, "That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

3) "In 2 Corinthians 10-13 the basic topic is Paul's opponents. The whole section refers to the interlopers who are oppressing his beloved Corinthian church and at the same time criticizing Paul for not having had the courage to be equally oppressive."

Here are several other points of observations from the "Hard Sayings of the Bible". A review of these views will prepare you to follow my line of thought. a) "Paul parallels this thorn with a "weakness" in which he will glory. While the term "weakness" (Greek *astheneia*) can refer to illness (Galatians 4:13; 1 Timothy 5:23), in its seven occurrences in the Corinthian letters (and in both its occurrences in Romans) it refers to moral, spiritual or social weakness." b) "In 2 Corinthians 12:10 he lists weakness in a list which includes "insults, hardships, persecutions, difficulties", but no terms for illness". c) "Thus, I conclude that the evidence from both the Old Testament background and the actual use of the term in Paul points to the thorn as being the opponents who dogged Paul's tracks throughout his mission, confusing churches every time he left one church to plant another." d) "If Paul was tempted to feel proud, how proud would he feel when even his strongest churches and best converts proved to be subvertable by newcomers?"

Consider this classic book was written by a Rev F. F. Bosworth titled; "Christ The Healer". Rev. Bosworth was a respected Bible teacher to his generation. His diligence and faithful service to uphold divine healing as a chief gospel truth is worth mentioning. God rewarded him with an endowment of the Holy Spirit and Gifts of Healings. His evangelistic meetings attracted gatherings of standing room in some of the largest auditoriums of his times. More than 12,000 people in single alter calls came seeking salvation. Mr. Bosworth's message was a full gospel message of the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit. His compassion for the sick was tremendous. Bosworth saw thousands wonderfully and miraculously healed as faith entered their heart through his teachings. In his book, Bosworth designated a whole chapter to "Paul's Thorn". He was not afraid to speak against traditional strongholds. I quote here from a collection of his sermons, printed first in 1924. Key phrases were emboldened by me. Please read mindfully.

From; "Christ The Healer", by F. F. Bosworth.

"One of the most prevalent objections raised today against the ministry of healing is Paul's 'thorn in the flesh.'" One traditional idea has led to another. The widespread teaching that God is the Author of disease, and that some of the most devout of His children He has desired shall remain sick, and glorify Him by exhibiting fortitude and patience, no doubt has led to the idea that Paul had a sickness that God refused to heal. We do not believe that any one who would take the time to read that God has to say on the subject of healing could ever form such an opinion...it is merely a matter of study and investigation."

Here is another excerpt from F. F. Bosworth's book.

"Paul's Thorn an Angel of Satan"

F. F. Bosworth

"Paul not only tells us that his thorn was an angel of Satan, but he also tells us what the angel came to do: "to buffet me". Now the word buffet means "blow after blow," as when the waves buffeted the boat, and as when they "buffeted" Christ! Since buffeting means repeated blows, if Paul's buffeting was a disease, it would have had to have been many diseases or the same

disease many times repeated, to be called buffeting."...We could not use the personal pronouns "he" and "him" when speaking of ophthalmis, or any other disease, because there is no sex to ophthalmia. Suppose I should ask a man how his cancer was, what would you think if you heard him reply, "Him is lots worse, and I am suffering terribly". Now since Paul distinctly states that his thorn was the angel of Satan sent to buffet him - a demon spirit sent from Satan to make trouble for him wherever he went - why should we say it was something else?"

02 - Paul's Thorn is a Metaphor

Chapter 2 Paul's Thorn is a Metaphor

Paul's usage of a thorn in the flesh is a metaphor taken from the Old Testament. A metaphor is; "the application of a word or phrase to an object or concept it does not literally denote, suggesting comparison to that object or concept".

Paul was a scholar of the Old Testament. He described himself as "A Hebrew of the Hebrews" [Php 3:5]. Paul was a devoted student of the scriptures long before his conversion. Scholars claim that as a youth he surpassed most of his contemporaries, displaying an enthusiasm for the religious traditions and a zeal for the Jewish law. Born in Tarsus, Paul was raised in Jerusalem under the tutelage of a great Jewish teacher Gamaliel. Gamaliel was "the most illustrious rabbi of his day". [Acts 5:34].

Accordingly, Paul was thoroughly familiar with the Old Testament metaphors. As the chief writer of the New Testament epistles, he used such metaphors to establish his understanding of Jewish faith and how it agrees with this new message of Christ. For instance, he spoke of the "hardened heart" (Romans 9:18). That was in reference to the Egyptian Pharaoh who enslaved the Jews and resisted God's command to "let my people go". The comparison was a warning for us not to be stubborn and resist God's will. Paul used salt as a metaphor in respect to our conversations. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." (Colossians 4:6)

Virtually, every in-depth commentary on Paul's thorn in the flesh points out that a thorn, in scripture, is used as a metaphor. Jesus used "thorns" to illustrate annoying hindrances in the Parable of the Sower. Jesus also used "thorns" to illustrate how the "cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches and the lust of other things choke the Word" in our heart and thus reducing our fruitfulness.

Paul's Thorn was an Adversary To understand what Paul meant when he referred to his calamities as a "thorn in the flesh"; we need to let the Bible interpret itself. He was a master of the Old Testament so I suggest the following text is what Paul was reflecting on when making reference to a thorn..

"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." (Numbers 33:55) This text reveals a challenge to Israel and warned of the consequence for compromise. God had given the Israelites assurance that the land was theirs, but as we see here, He also gave a charge for Israel to faithfully execute his will. They would need to take possession of the land with unconditional resolve. Possession of the land would mean warfare and a series of battles, both militarily and in conscience. Responsibility to deal brutally and fully with Israel's enemies was God's will. Israel, to a man, was commanded to dispossess the inhabitants and not let any remain. God conveying that any permitted to remain

would be like a nagging “thorn in their sides”. This was a metaphor then and is a metaphor for us today. Every sin we tolerate or allow in our lives will hinder us in our path toward serving God.

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset [us], and let us run with patience the race that is set before us...” (Hebrews 12:1)

While it is known that sin will interrupt our life, evil adversaries are also illustrated as “thorns” that upset our spiritual pursuit. There are other Bible references that use the metaphor “thorn in your flesh”. (Compare Ezekiel 2:6; Ezekiel 28:24; Micah 7:4). Here are two more Bible references that add further support to my point that the thorn dealing with .

"Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: 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." (Joshua 23:12-13)

"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." (Judges 2:3) The penetration of a thorn is called a sliver. It has a nagging, aching pain. Until we remove it, there remains an annoying pain. Using that thought, God warned Israel that the Canaanites would be a constant annoyance if they let them remain. The responsibility to remove the “thorns” was Israel’s, not Gods. Israel’s history shows that they failed at times to uproot their enemies. The consequence for tolerating the influence of evil is continual trouble, ongoing hindrances steady opposition. The Israelites often failed to fulfill God command. Letting their enemies remain was a real “pain”. In all these passages, God spoke to Israel metaphorically. God promised the land as their inheritance. Yet Israel still had the responsibility to possess it. Israel had constant trouble with other nations because they failed to obey God fully. God specifically informed the Israelites He would not do for them what He gave them the responsibility to do. God had given the Israelites a great revelation of His will - possess the land. The Context for Paul’s Use of this Metaphor

Read the whole context of 2 Corinthians, chapters 10-13. Paul lists a series of hardships and the opposition that troubled his ministry outreach. Using a familiar metaphor from the Old Testament he attempts to explain those constant troubles. Although Paul was masterful and courageous in his perseverance, the constant buffeting became so disheartening and annoying that it finally got his attention and upon reflection, he identified it as a Bible thorn. Not only that, but before he finally petitioned the Lord to remove it, he also identified it as “the messenger of Satan”. He did not say, did not think nor did he become confused in blaming God for causing these trouble. (James 1:13)

It is the Christians responsibility to apply ourselves to the Word of God in reflection and soul searching, not merely sit and wait until the spirit does something. Paul was a student of scripture and was diligent in developing his understanding of God. Christ’s blessings do not simply fall on us. We are not promised a life of ease with no trouble from the devil. We are told Satan is our adversary.

Let us not forget why God appeared to Paul. There was a very a specific purpose. I will go into this much further later but for now remember the specific mission God called Paul to.

“But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.” (Acts 26:16-18)

God worked with Paul continually. God inspired and empowered Paul by giving him visions and revelations. It was the Lords will that Paul witness to others what God revealed to him. Paul's mission was to dispossess the darkness over people by bringing to them light. The Lord promised He would be with Paul. Paul learned that even in moments of human weakness, he had to continually engage, trusting that God would support him whenever necessary with supernatural strength. As the light of God's comes to each individual, they are commanded to walk in that light. Paul had “visions and revelations” which enabled him. When it came to the messenger of Satan, at first Paul was still in the dark. Therefore, he asked God to do something about it. I suggest one of the reasons Jesus did not respond to Paul's initial plea was that He was waiting on Paul to think through his request. Jesus finally pointed Paul to His grace, giving him a new revelation. He did not refuse Paul. He guided Paul to the light of His grace. Paul then understood that he was replenished with God's strength when his weakness (or lack of ability) prevailed. The Thorn “In The Flesh”

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

There is one thing everyone seems to agree on, the thorn was a message sent to Paul. After that, the interpretations run wild. Possibly the problem that leads so many into a diversity of interpretations begins with the phrase “in the flesh”. Those three words have convinced some people that regardless of what it was, it had to be a physical affliction. I would agree under the condition that Paul meant physical body when he used the word flesh. However, that is not the case. If it was a bodily ailment that Paul meant to convey, I suggest Paul would have used the word “so-mah” which is translated “body” rather than “sarx” which is translated “flesh”. When you read carefully Paul's writings, he generally uses the word “so-mah - body” in reference to his physical body but uses the word - “flesh” in reference to the human being, the carnal or human nature. “Thayers Greek Dictionary” relates that the word “sarx” means “the earthly nature of man apart from divine influence and therefore prone to sin and opposed to God”. No doubt there is a variety of Christian thoughts down through Church history. Several scholars, like Vincent's Greek studies listed the different opinions.

“The explanations of the peculiar nature of this affliction are numerous. Opinions are divided, generally, between mental or spiritual and bodily trials. Under the former head are sensual desires, faint-heartedness, doubts, temptations to despair, and blasphemous suggestions from the devil. Under the latter, persecution, means personal appearance, headache, epilepsy, earache, stone, ophthalmia. It was probably a bodily malady, "in the flesh;" but its nature must remain a

matter of conjecture.” (From Vincent’s Word Studies of the New Testament)

Vincent did not mention the metaphor and was inclined toward “the opinion” that it was a bodily sickness of some kind because of the phrase “in the flesh”. However, he was not dogmatic, and admits the uncertainty.

Another Greek source “Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament” also held an opinion that “in the flesh” implied a physical problem. While he too was not dogmatic, he lists the suggested illnesses and uses the word “malady” rather than a direct assertion to it being a sickness or disease. Robertson thought it probably was a physical affliction.

“What was it? Certainly, it was some physical malady that persisted. All sorts of theories are held (malaria, eye-trouble, epilepsy, insomnia, migraine or sick-headache, etc.). It is a blessing to the rest of us that we do not know the particular affliction that so beset Paul. Each of us has some such splinter or thorn in the flesh, perhaps several at once.” In his statement Robertson was merely citing the various opinions which gave support to his opinion. He was translating from Greek that the thorn was a bodily illness. Robertson was also careful to acknowledge that it was a “personified messenger of Satan”, as Paul had said. But I have a question! Why attempt to speculate a particular physical sickness and fail to consider the possibility that it was the variety of trials that literally torn into Paul’s flesh? If we consider the fact that Paul was whipped five times, beaten with rods three times and stoned once, along with many other physical hardships, we can be certain that Paul’s physical appearance was not representative of a “Greek God”. But does that mean the thorn was a sickness? Could he be relating to the various and many literal attacks that came upon his being? The fact that the text uses the word “flesh” does not grant license for a dogmatic conclusion that the thorn was a physical ailment. On the contrary. Again, Paul used it as a metaphor. Paul used the word “sarx” - “flesh” to describe carnal passions, impulses and behavior too. He used the word flesh as a metaphor in phrases such as: “to live in the flesh”, when comparing what it is “to live by faith”. (Galatians 2:20) In another place, Paul spoke about “walking in the flesh” as opposed to “walking in the spirit”. [Romans 8:1-3]. No scholar has ever drawn a conclusion from these phrases that Paul meant we walk in sickness? Consider as well the phrases; “the lust of the flesh”. That too implies the human nature. I often hear Christians kiddingly use the phrase “flesh out” when they joke about sitting in front of the TV watching a horror show and eating snacks to their fill. Certainly, the selection of the word “sarx” - “flesh” instead of “so-ma” - body” leave some room for fair speculation rather than dogmatic interpretation.

Unger’s Bible Dictionary describes a thorn with the figurative meaning as obstacles:

“Figurative“A painful thorn” <Ezekiel 28:24> should be rendered a smarting sting, figurative of the hurts of paganism. . . (Micah 7:4) refers to the corruption of the nation, . . . <Proverbs 15:19>, i.e., full of almost INSURMOUNTABLE OBSTACLES (cf. <22:5>). . . <Ecclesiastes 7:6> is that to which the laughter of fools is compared. THE WICKED are often compared to thorns.”(Numbers 33:55)

Let me point out further, that in scripture there is not one metaphorical use of “thorns” as an illness. Figuratively, a thorn in the flesh implied a personality, and that does fit with Paul’s interpretation of his situation as a “the messenger of Satan”. Among the last words of David we read, “The sons of Belial shall be all of them thorns”. (2 Samuel 23:6)

Regardless if you do or do not reason that Paul was referring to the thorn in metaphor, clearly the Bible repeatedly uses the “thorn” as a metaphor. It associates with such behaviors as: foolishness, slothfulness and negligence in dealing with your enemies. However, the Bible goes even further. It makes direct assertions that they will be in the path of errant behavior and will result in trouble as you proceed in on your daily course.

“The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns: but the way of the righteous is made plain.” (Proverbs 15:19) “As a thorn goeth up into the hand of a drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools.” (Proverbs 26:9)

“Thorns and snares are in the way of the froward: he that doth keep his soul shall be far from them.” (Proverbs 22:5)

Slothfulness, forwardness, drunkenness are issues in all generations. I doubt Paul had any drinking problem and based upon the record of his life one could not make a convincing argument that he was lazy or lacked a diligent lifestyle. Intellectually Paul was aware of the wisdom of the Old Testament proverbs which repeatedly renounces slothfulness and drunkenness. However, could the thorn attacking Paul be the result of any forwardness in his ways and thus a fulfillment of what God said? No doubt many balk at this suggestion. No one can prove that Paul was perfect in all his ways. His broken relationship with Barnabas shows some flaws. So does his relentlessness to go to the Jews when God told him specifically to go rather to the Gentiles. Let us not allow anyone to venerate Paul to deity any more than we would the virgin Mary! Paul was still a man. He taught others, “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” The word forward can be translated with these particular meanings; “twisted, distorted, crooked, perverse, perverted.” The very fact that we all have various opinion indicate that we are all a bit twisted or distorted in comparison to perfect understanding. Paul himself said “we see through a glass darkly.” He didn’t claim to know everything and was unmistakably on a quest to know God better.

There is something most striking with those who are offended with my suggestion that Paul might have been facing consequences from his own forwardness. They generally hold to the view that God sent, (or allowed), the thorn to teach him something, usually humility. In that they are directly implying that Paul was forward before God and needed correction. My perspective at least tries to apply all the scriptures in a meaningful, logical, biblical perspective on the issue of the thorn.

03 - Visions and Revelations of the Lord

Chapter 3 Visions and Revelations of the Lord

“It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. . . .”
(2 Corinthians 12:1)

One debater said to me: “the purpose of the revelations is MOOT, who cares?” Well anyone who wants to understand the subject should care. Another usual response is “the revelations are not the issue”. I disagree. The visions and revelations are a central part of Paul’s explanation about the thorn. Those who have presumed God sent a thorn to Paul’s flesh with the distinct purpose of keeping him humble, ignore the fact that God considered Paul trustworthy. God entrusted Paul continually with many visions and revelations. Why would God give Paul such deep and intimate revelations if he was a man struggling with pride and who potentially could get out of His control? As already noted by one scholar, the whole context of 2 Corinthians chapter 10-13 reveal that the “basic topic is Paul’s opponents.” Greater weight should be placed on identifying why God gave Paul the visions and revelations rather than speculating that God gave Paul the thorn too. The reason for the messenger of Satan was the revelations God gave to Paul. Why would God oppose His initial gift? Why would God contradict His own works? Why not simply withhold the revelations from God? Despite what some commentators have claimed, Paul revealed exactly what the thorn was, “the messenger of Satan”.

Logic alone would reason that Satan sent his messenger to stop what God was doing in Paul. However, we have more sure foundation. That foundation is the true dividing line. Jesus said clearly in John 10:10 that the thief comes “to steal, and to kill, and to destroy”. Jesus continued: “But, I am come that they might have life and that life more abundantly”. With the visions and revelations, God gave Paul some life. Satan came at once to steal it away. Amazingly, Satan has deceived some of us into thinking Jesus comes to make some people sick. Was Jesus lying to us in John 10:10? Do we always need to think God says one thing but He could mean something else? Satan is not God’s advocate, he is Gods opponent. Satan God’s servant, he is in rebellion against God. How is it that some Christians do not understand this?

Paul Was Entrusted with the Revelations “A man’s pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.” (Proverbs 29:23)

God had a reason to entrust Paul with so frequent visions and revelations. N doing so God honored Paul. We should understand why God trusted Paul. According to the scriptures, God respects the humble man. Paul’s boldness in taking the lead in ministry was not founded on arrogance but instead humility. Would God give abundant revelations to a man who was not humble? God knows all things so if He knew Paul would become conceited, why entrust him? What wisdom is in that management of a man; to give him revelations and punish him for receiving them? Oh, but the thorn was a good thing, some say. Something coming by way of Satan is not a good thing? It is a contradiction. Jesus said Satan comes to steal, kill and destroy. He has his own

agenda. One can readily see how “fatalism” has infiltrated the Church, perverted a great truth such as the sovereignty of God. Sovereignty means God has ultimate control, not automated control. Unless you can understand that Satan is Gods adversary, you will continue to be deceived by the devil. The argument is further confused by the presumption that Paul “was not supposed to share the revelations.” Some quote Paul; “I heard unspeakable words which it is not permitted to speak”, suggesting that God outlawed Paul from revealing the revelations. Other translations depend on a different version, using the phrase “not lawful for a man to utter”. As students of scripture, should we hastily determine that God gave Paul visions and revelations but forbid him to tell what he learned? I think, how ridiculous! Another question, was then Paul disobedient? In all his history, Paul earnestly shared his revelations with the churches. In all his epistles, Paul expounded on the truths he received by revelation. For instance, to the Corinthians Paul explained the communion table according to what he received by revelation. (1 Corinthians 11:23)

Sadly, even today, the church does not fully comprehend the depth of all that Paul received and shared. His thorn in the flesh is simply another example of this certainty. Many things were difficult to understand in his teachings. Peter pointed this out in his letter.

“As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.” (2 Peter 3:16)

Why is it that some distort what clearly Paul said about the thorn in his flesh being Satan’s messenger rather than Gods? Peter said there was some who were unlearned and unstable who wrestle with the scriptures. They should be wrestling with the devil or at least resisting him.

Consider these other examples of people who received revelations from God. Such as Johns Book of Revelation and Daniel’s vision. The Lord entrusted both John and Daniel with visions and revelations. There was a purpose in giving the revelations. They were for the Church. It is not a sin to tell the revelations you receive from God. Understandably, much of the things they saw were not possible for them to understand. They saw things even the angel said was beyond their ability to comprehend. Yet, they were instructed told to write what they saw.

“I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation,...was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia;” (Rev 1-5-7)

Once again, in respect to Paul’s vision of heaven, some translations give the meaning, “not lawful” while others use “not permitted” and still others use “not possible”. One scholar said the implication means, “Paul did not use these words”. That however, is not to say Paul was forbidden to use his own words. In my opinion, of the three, the usage of “not permitted” is the worst workable translation with the context. Barnes also suggests two of the three as possible translations but does not include the usage of “not permitted”. To further remedy this point, consider what Adam Clarke said about the problem:

“[Which it is not lawful for a man to utter.] The Jews thought that the divine name, the Tetragrammaton, Yahweh (H3068), should not be uttered, and that it is absolutely unlawful to pronounce it; indeed they say that the true pronunciation is utterly lost, and cannot be recovered

without an express revelation. Not one of them, to the present day, ever attempts to utter it; and, when they meet with it in their reading, always supply its place with 'Adonay (H136), Lord. It is probable that the apostle refers to some communication concerning the divine nature and the divine economy, of which he was only to make a general use in his preaching and writing. No doubt that what he learned at this time formed the basis of all his doctrines."

Adam Clark's interesting point of view fits Paul's history. There was a censorship among Jew against speaking the name of God. Paul was aware of it and in using the word unlawful, may be referring to Jews law. However, as Clark pointed out, there is not doubt that Paul learned by revelation and took what he learned as the basis of his teachings. When God gives a vision or revelation, His purpose is to present information He wants us to know. The Purpose of the Revelations

What was the purpose for the revelations? The scriptures support the assessment that Paul's humility (i.e. Proverbs 29:23) is why God lifted him up to an apostolic ministry. We can also see in the context of Paul's reference to the thorn, he warned the Corinthians that he had a humbling task:

"And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed." (2 Corinthians 12:21)

I cannot stress enough how important it is for you to see how that verse follows Paul's line of thought. Paul started the chapter telling us about him coming to visions and revelations of the Lord. Now we see why? He was advising them of Gods power. He could only know of their sins by revelation of the Lord for he was not present with them. Paul, like the prophet Nathan, who confronted David, [2 Samuel 12:1-12], and Peter who reproved Ananias and Sapphira [Acts 5:1-12], received supernatural disclosure of sin. Paul had an awesome responsibility and that was to correct their sin with public exposure - if necessary. Such gifting is one of the "signs and wonders that are done by the hands of Apostles". To be used in that way is humbling. Few are entrusted with power because it can be so easily abused. Paul however, would use it wisely.

Paul continued his warning to the Corinthians all the way through chapter 13 verse 10. In verse three, he warned when he came again, "I will not spare, since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you." Christ revealed to Paul their sin to correct them and warned in verse 10 that he would use "sharpness according to the power which the Lord had given me for edification and not destruction".

Public exposure of sin was not Gods first plan, repentance was. However if necessary, for edification and not destruction, the power of Gods revelation would be manifest. Such power required from Paul a humbling task. He did not want to resort to that, but he would if necessary.

It this later warning Paul continued to use the same Greek word repeatedly to speak about weakness. In this case, he was saying his gifting was not weak but mighty. Paul used the same word in (2 Corinthians 11:29), (2 Corinthians 12:5), (2 Corinthians 12:9), (2 Corinthians 12:10), (2 Corinthians 13:3), (2 Corinthians 13:4). The translators however interjected different definitions; "infirmities" and "weak". I guess they thought they were helping us understand but in reality, they added confusion. Each usage of the Greek word were in the same context of Paul speaking about

his abundant revelations from the Lord, making his ministry stand out in power although opposed.

As for the purpose of the revelations, one debater once shouted angrily at me: "PAUL DID NOT SAY A THING ABOUT IT!" Evidently, the debater was not looking past the single verse. I suggest this since the context says a great deal about the purpose. God gave Paul visions and revelation, to vindicate, exalt, expand and draw attention to his apostolic authority and ministry. Among other things, Paul had revelation about our adversary, the devil. He learned how to fight with weapons that are not instinctively human. Revelations are given to empower the believer to "resist the devil", "fight the good fight of faith", and to "put on the whole armour of God". Paul was advancing the kingdom by the light he was given while the devil was working to stall, hinder and stop the advancement.

There is always a reason for supernatural revelation of God. It might be for instruction or for correction but it is certain, light dispels darkness. Satan governs the darkness. (Acts 26:18, Ephesians 6:12) Satan's strategies, his lies, his enticement to sin, are exposed by the enlightenment of God's revelation. Paul came behind in nothing when compared with the other apostles. Attached to his remarks about the thorn, to show proof of his apostolic ministry to the Corinthians, Paul said:

"Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." (2 Corinthians 12:12) The signs, wonders, and mighty deeds were evidence of Paul's apostleship. The visions and revelations Paul received added deep insight into God's truth and the state of individuals. Paul's triumph over Corinthian opposition challenging his authoritative ministry was galvanized by the communications from the Lord. Paul testified in his prayers that it is the Will of God for all to receive revelation from God.

"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him": (Ephesians 1:17)

04 - The Messenger of Satan

Chapter 4 The Messenger of Satan "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." (2 Corinthians 12:7)

Some claim the thorn was "the hand of God was working for Paul's good". Common sense should make us think through that view. Messengers of Satan are in fact sent by Satan. The text clearly says it was the messenger of Satan, not God. Some wrestle with that scripture. Some have argued that "Paul's own words very strongly indicate while the messenger was from Satan, the giver was God". I see no such strong indication. Rather it is conjecture, a forced conclusion rooted in the requirements of Calvinistic thought. The central problem is that it ignores many things including: the text, the context, the whole council of God as well as incorrectly implying that Satan is Gods servant rather than his adversary.

Paul's thorn was a messenger of Satan not a message from GOD. Paul cited a variety of hostile interruptions in the Chapter 11. Those events led him to make the statement about the thorn. He listed the many things he had suffered including: prison, beatings, stoning, shipwrecks, perils, hunger, thirst, fasting, cold and nakedness." A demon sent from Satan stirred all of those hardships to hinder Paul in his earthly ministry outreach.

Other scholars correctly point out that the thorn was a demon angel who continually incited rage in people to attack Paul. Virtually every Hebrew scholar recognizes a thorn, in scripture, was a metaphor. The metaphor is typically referred to as a personality, but never as a physical disease. Vincent's Greek word study explains that the messenger was an angel under Satan's command. The word for messenger is used 188 times in the Bible. Each and every time it refers to a personality not a thing. The messenger of Satan was a spiritual entity not a disease. A Tormenting Agent

"[Messenger of Satan] [angelos (G32) Satan (G4566)]. The torment is thus personified. "Messenger" is the word commonly rendered "angel" in the New Testament, though sometimes used of human messengers, as <Luke 7:24; Luke 7:27; Luke 9:52; James 2:25>; see also on the "angels" of the churches, <Revelation 1:20>. "Messenger and Satan" are not to be taken in apposition-- "a messenger who was Satan"-- because Satan is never called [angelos] (G32) in the New Testament. Messenger is figurative, in the sense of "agent." Satan is conceived in the New Testament as the originator of physical evil. Thus, in the gospel narrative, demoniac possession is often accompanied with some form of disease. Compare <Luke 13:16; Acts 10:38>, and see the note at <1 Corinthians 5:5> (Vincent's Word Studies of the New Testament)

Certainly, Paul was not demon possessed. Nor was the messenger the devil himself. It was merely a representative of Satan. The messenger of Satan was a personified evil agent, or better described as a fallen angel assigned to torment Paul.

Note that Vincent shares the view that such messengers can come in the form of a disease. A demon, manifesting in the form of a disease, is a common belief of those who have a divine healing ministry. Yet, they do not hold to the opinion that Paul's thorn was a disease. Jesus instructed his disciples to "cast out demons" along with heal the sick. There are many instances in Jesus' ministry where He cast out demons from the body of sick people. (Matthew 8:16, Matthew 12:22-24, Mark 3:15, Luke 9:42). The same can be said for the disciples ministry (Luke 10:17, Acts 5:16; Acts 8:7). Paul also cast of evil spirits. (Acts 16:18) Paul had a healing ministry. Would not Paul have come across hypocritical to direct people to Gods healing power while he could not be healed himself?

Agreeably, messengers of Satan can manifest in ones physical body. Moreover, I think it is obvious that Paul's life was full of physical pain and torment. However, the "thorn in the flesh" was not a single blow. Thus, it could not be a particular disease such as the commonly suggested eye disease. The demon agent sent a constant message to Paul. If it came in words, the messenger might have said; "thou shall not be free of opposition". Paul referred spiritual warfare to, not a single physical disease.

Spiritual Warfare For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Ephesians 6:12) No doubt, Paul alludes to evil spirits here. Both good angels and demon angels are divided into ranks. They are all under the control of one leader. The good angels are led by the Godhead. Evil angels are under the command of the devil. Both send forth their angels to do their will. (Hebrews 1:14, Revelation 12:7; Revelation 12:9)

Generally, scholars agree that "Principalities" are principal rulers or the lower ranking demons residing in the spirit realm. Barnes calls them, "The rulers that preside over the regions of ignorance and sin with which the earth abounds". The "Powers" [Exousias] refer to delegated demon authorities in the spirit realm. The "Rulers of the Darkness of this world" are defined by Barnes as: "Foul and malignant spirits" in a wide and a powerful empire . . . the power of selfish, corrupt, and base passions". These demons would be the direct tempters to sin.

Adam Clark called the Spiritual wickedness, "highly refined and sublimed evil; disguised in falsehood". He suggests they are the, "angels which kept not their first estate; who fell from the heavenly places but are ever longing after and striving to regain them; and which have their station in the regions of the air".

In any event, Paul was sharing his revelations of the rank and order of demonic forces which war against our good fight of faith. It is not a fleshly, carnal fight. Although it is a fight we must take up in these earthen vessels known as our bodies. It is a spiritual struggle. One that requires us to pull down "fortified arguments", (such as Paul's thorn being sent from God) "casting aside pretenses and speculations" (such as the thorn being a disease) which are designed to hinder us from "believing all things". The subject of Paul's thorn is one of strongest "fortified arguments" against healing and one therefore our spiritual warfare must overcome.

Many do not believe we are in spiritual warfare. They avoid mentioning the devil. Usually they are the loudest proponents of teaching Paul's Thorn was a sickness, given to keep Paul humble. Those who do not believe in spiritual warfare, divine healing or miracles, would understandably

look for another interpretation of what the messenger was. Who Gave the Thorn?

One researcher argued his case with linguistic high jinks. He claimed that “the subject of the passive verb “given” was God, NOT Satan”. Therefore, he insisted, “the thorn was given by God.” My own research found no Greek scholars to be so dogmatic as to claim God was the only subject and thus gave Paul the thorn. Some commentators share that point of view. However, there are clearly two other subjects in the text, Satan and his messenger. When I pointed this out, the same person back stepped, saying, “If God didn’t give it, he allowed it”. The giver of the thorn is certainly recognized in the structure of the whole comment. It is Satan. If it meant, as some suggest, that Paul said; “there was given to me by God, a thorn”, there is no need to add to the statement that key phrase; “the messenger of Satan”. I repeat, in all that Paul wrote, it is his understanding that Satan was an adversary, and not the servant of God.

God Did Allowed It

Consider the assessment that God allowed it. Evil is all around us. Just because evil exists and therefore obviously allowed by God to exist, are we to conclude that evil is Gods Will? It is not Gods Will. He hates evil and told us to do the same.

“Ye that love the LORD, hate evil: he preserveth the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked.” (Psalms 97:10)

We can also acknowledge that God allows sin, sickness and a host of others wicked things. None of which is the Will of God. Evil is always associated with sin, disobedience, or ignorance. Why is it that in the case of Paul’s thorn, and its clear reference to being a messenger of Satan, we are to conclude God did it? Is it justified to determine God was the giver of the thorn because He allowed it? I cannot concede to that concept. It is a conclusion formed from a fatalistic concept. It is not rooted or grounded in sound doctrine.

Someone once said correctly: “God will allow anything you will allow”. God does not want us to sin does He? Yet, He allows it! Does that mean that God commissioned it or was the Father of it? Absolutely not! Why not recognize the messenger of Satan is an evil source just as sin is. It was the “messenger of Satan” not a gift of God. Satan was the giver with a clear purpose to keep Paul’s light from shining. Satan sent this messenger to aggressively keep Paul’s ministry and message down. Paul encountered satanic opposition every day of his life.

Adam Clarke’s Commentary makes this comment about the grievous pain Paul felt and endured in his flesh. He sees Paul’s thorn as times of distress and opposition.

“What this thorn in the flesh might be has given birth to a multitude of conjectures: . . . I believe the apostle to refer simply to the DISTRESSES he had endured through the opposition he met at Corinth; which were as painful and grievous to him as a thorn in his flesh”. Does God use Satan? This question itself requires an investigative book to research all the implications in scripture. The Bible states in detail and with many illustrations, which God uses His Word, angels, the gifts of the Spirit and Holy Spirit Himself, to minister to His saints. We should never forget that the Holy Spirit is our teacher while Satan is not. This is especially true in the case of Paul who was receiving abounding messages from God. God used visions, dreams, His own angels, the Holy Spirit, and even the Lord spoke to Paul.

Most researchers, when trying to analyze the question cite several Old Testament references. There is the obvious case of Job. Satan stood before God requesting permission to get at Gods best man on the earth, Job. God granted limited permission. However, there is much more to the story that most scholars overlook. Frankly, it is highly questionable if one should conclude that God “used” Satan in the case of Job. Furthermore, it is certain Satan was not a good messenger from God. Satan wanted to hurt Job, not benefit him. God does not need to use Satan to send a message to His servants. When you read the whole story, we see that God spoke very clearly and forcefully to Job. (Job chapter 38-40) My point is that in any of those Old Testament circumstances, we dare not imply the conditions of that era usurps the New Testament covenant that is based on better promises. (Hebrews 8:6). Job for instance, was not even under the Old Covenant, let alone familiar with the New Covenant we now live in.

While it is true, God never changes, that is in reference to His character and judgments not His methods. God has modified the ways He deals with man throughout the ages. He made covenants with Noah, Abraham and a host of men on a personal level, such as the case of David. By the time Paul received the thorn in the flesh, he was subject to the New Testament Law, written in his heart by the new birth. He had a mediator between him and God - Jesus - whom Job did not have. (Job 9:33) Does God “use” Satan to punish people? While I do not think the word “use” is appropriate, we must acknowledge that God does turn some people over to Satan. However, as you reflect on this reference, note that it refers specifically to a person living in open sin.

“To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” (1 Corinthians 5:5) This reference did not and could not apply to Paul and his thorn in the flesh. Paul was not living in blatant sin. Neither was he in danger of losing his salvation. Paul was in the hands of God. He had close communication with God. Paul was a willing, obedient and faithful servant. He was a proved and approved. He was in right standing with God. What right do we have then to force the speculative notion that Paul was prone conceit?

While God is shown throughout the Bible to use evil personages, such as pagans to bring about just consequences, God has never done evil. Yet, it remains such a common blunder to think God does evil, James found it necessary to confront that error.

“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed”. (James 1:13-14)

05 - The Purpose of Paul's Thorn

Chapter 5 The Purpose of Paul's Thorn "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelation there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me..." (2 Corinthians 12:7)

There were two indisputable reasons for Paul receiving the "thorn". First and foremost, it was to keep Paul from being exalted. Secondly, it was sent to buffet or beat Paul down. Let's consider both concepts briefly and later I will get into this with much more detail.

"Lest I should be Exalted Above Measure" This phrase is the most confusing of the two for several reasons. Mostly, because Greek scholars, after giving the literal definition add their educated opinion with a "figurative" example; such as "to become haughty". ie...Strongs Greek Dictionary. However, the Greek word for "conceit" or "pride" is not in the literal text, although some translation impress it upon us.

"To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me..." (2 Corinthians 12:7) New International Version The Greek word "huper-airomai", translated "exalted above measure" is from three Greek words "huper", 'airo" and "mai". The literal definitions of "huper" can be translated as "over, above, beyond, across and superior". The literal definition for the Greek word "airo" is; to lift, to raise to sail". Neither of these two words compounded into the Greek words mean pride, arrogance or conceit. It is the Greek extension "mai", that is added to the end of the compound that lead these scholars to that conclusion. Because it refers to person Paul. He is the subject, the "I" that is denoted in the phrase "exalted above measure". But does that confirm the meaning to be prideful or conceited? I am not at all convinced for many reason which are explained further in this book. As mentioned, some scholars suggest that "God foresaw the danger of pride and conceit" entering Paul following the visions and revelations God gave Him. So they claim God added a "thorn" to keep that from happening. Or to keep Paul humble. Sounds good on the surface, but is it accurate with the context? Is it accurate with the overall constitution of Gods Ways?

Certainly not all scholars lean toward that opinion. Others suggest that God was giving Paul the visions and revelations consistent with His promises to exalt the humble in due time. (1 Peter 5:6) How else can God promote His ministers if not by giving then revelation? Put another way, these scholars claim God was elevating Paul' effectiveness against the god of this world by giving him light to shine on the darkness. This agrees with the specific mission Paul said Jesus gave to him.

"Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me." Acts 26:18

Whenever Paul implied pride and conceit, including several times in this epistle to the Corinthians, he used the literal Greek word. He didn't hide it. Furthermore, if Paul had been tempted to exalt

himself into pride, wouldn't the Lord be guilty of being the tempter? Can't you see that? Tempting us is contrary to God's character.

In respect to this specific phrase, this NIV and some other translations are actually interpretations. I think it is the worst of the possible translations. The actual Greek word for conceit, pride and arrogance are not in the text. Did Satan slip it in as a "Trojan Horse"? The context favors the "King James" translation "lest I be exalted above measure", and the "Revised Standard" translation; "to keep me from being elated" is superior to the "New International"; "to keep me from being conceited".

Someone once said, "oh but Paul wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit and probably didn't know the Lord was protecting him from pride". Well I ask, if God meant, : "lest Paul is lifted up with Pride", why didn't He move upon Paul to write the best suited word to imply pride? When Paul communicated pride, or "self-exalting", at other times in his writings, he consistently used another word which properly translates into those definitions. That is the Greek word; "tuphoo". It means "to inflate with self-conceit". Paul used it several times to Timothy.

"Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride ("tuphoo") he fall into the condemnation of the devil." (1 Timothy 3:6)

Here Paul advised Timothy not to appoint a new convert to leadership. Why? When they possess authority, they are easily inflated with pride. PAUL WAS NOT A NOVICE. Paul was a veteran! A mighty warrior. He became a threat to Satan, the god of this world, not to himself. God choose to give Paul those visions and revelations. God knew Paul, by proving him. He had 14 years of preparation and many years of enduring hardship in service with God. Paul was a partaker of the "the meat of the Word".

There are two other scripture that Paul uses to convey pride and conceit. Again the Greek word "tuphoo" is cited and best defines "exalting oneself".

"If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is conceited ["tuphoo"] (KJV: proud) understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions," (1 Timothy 6:3-4) New American Standard In this next reference where Paul uses "tuphoo" to convey conceit, he also used another word for "proud" which is also not the same word used in 2 Corinthians 12:7. It refers to appearing above others.

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, (Gr: "huperephanos" to appear above others) blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection rucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:1-4 NIV) In these cases an evil character is referred to and that does not fit the Apostle Paul's problem when describing the thorn in the flesh. Not only was Paul above that character, but if Paul meant that his thorn was to keep him from being conceited, why didn't he use the same words?

Sent to Buffet Paul The second purpose for the thorn was to buffet Paul. Note that this “buffeting” which Paul described was not the cause for the exalting but for the purpose of bringing the exalting under control. That is very important.

Other Bibles have used the word “torment” (NIV) and the phrase “to harass me” (RSV) to translate the text. The expositor’s Greek Testament mentions that the tense indicates “this buffeting was not a single isolated trial but continual”. The Greek scholar Robertson, from “Word Pictures in the New Testament” said:

“Buffet (kolaphizêi). See on #Matthew 26:67; 1 Corinthians 4:11 for this late and rare word from kolaphos, FIST. THE MESSENGER OF SATAN KEPT SLAPPING PAUL IN THE FACE”.

Buffeting refers to a repeated blow. Robertson designated two references to support his commentary. The reference in Matthew 26 is the occasion where Roman soldiers spit in Jesus’ face and slapped Him at His trial. The other reference is when Paul used the word the first time to the same group of people. In 1 Corinthians 4:11 Paul said, “we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted.” Was he speaking of sickness or hardships? There is another occasion in scripture, this time Peter uses it.

“For this [is] thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. 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.” (1 Peter 2:19-20)

Peter did not insinuate buffeting is the hand of God making us sick. He was speaking of enduring grief and suffering wrongfully, as in living the Christian lifestyle. God does not “use” the devil to buffet faithful servants. Paul certainly expressed grief about the thorn. He also had to be patient in waiting on the Lords reply to his grievance. However, what fault or wrong was Paul committing in receiving visions and revelations of the Lord?

Paul’s buffeting hindered his ministry. His companions saw his hardships and told Paul something like this: “don’t keep going, can’t you read between the lines, God must be telling you something with all your difficulties.” They did this to Paul’s on several occasions. (Acts 19:29-30; Acts 21:11-14). Yet, Paul knowing God willed that he endure the buffeting, persisted onward.

Thorns represent a conflict. Christians can expect conflicts against their walk. Paul said; “I must finish the course set before me”. He knew it meant conflict. Each time Paul was hit with one blow after another, Paul got up and kept going. The purpose for the “buffeting” was to stop Paul from telling the revelations. Satan’s messenger was sent to slow Paul’s ministry.

Visions and revelation did not fill Paul with conceit it humbled him. They caused Paul to strive “toward the mark of the high calling of God”. Paul was inspired with a sense of urgency and compelling love by what the Lord revealed to him. Therefore, Satan sent Paul a message. In words it might sound like this; “This is war Paul, I will not let you minister without opposition.”

Look at Measure before closing this chapter Jesus gave us a measure of faith. But Jesus had the Spirit without measure.

Mark 7:37 And were beyond measure (superabundantly, exceedingly) astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.

2 Corinthians 1:8 For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure (down beyond), above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life:

2 Corinthians 10:13 But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure (Gr: metron; meter, by degree), to reach even unto you.

Galatians 1:13 For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it:

Ephesians 4:7 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

Ephesians 4:13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:

Ephesians 4:16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

06 - Paul's Weakness

Chapter 6 Paul's Weakness When describing his weaknesses Paul used the Greek words: "astheneia" and *astheneo*, which come from the root Greek word "as-then-ace". The basic meaning is "strengthless". Most of our Bible translations, relying on Greek scholarship, interchange the variety of definitions. The variety includes: want of strength, weakness, infirmity, or frailty of the body or soul, feebleness of health or sickness of the soul, a malady; disease. Of the many occurrences where these words appear in the New Testament, the King James translate them weak or weakness 29 times, sick or sickness 18 times, infirmities or infirmity 17 times, diseases 6 time, and impotent 2 times. As in the case of Bibles, translators have a certain liberty and tend to follow a particular preference. However, the contexts should dictate which definition fits as the proper meaning. It is fair to assume that on some occasions translating them as an illness does fit. Yet, in the seven occurrences in the Corinthian letters, each time the direct context implies a moral, spiritual, or social weakness. A sickness or disease does not fit. Why imply that God gave and left a physical illness with severe pain on Paul to teach him to stay humble? To me that makes no sense. Any parent today would be jailed for child abuse if they acted in such a way toward their child.

We really do not have to speculate or add to the word of God in regard to the thorn. Paul inventoried his infirmities on several occasions. The context of the listings tells a comprehensive story. Never did Paul claim to be sick. Never do the scriptures confirm that he had some disease. Here is one example of Paul's own list of "*astheneo*":

"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, (*astheneo*) in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, (*astheneia*) then am I strong. (2 Corinthians 12:10) A more detailed list is noted in the chapter before Paul spoke of the revelations and thorn. In 2 Corinthians 11:20-33, Paul gave his reasoned explanation for the reference to the thorn metaphor. Paul started by reminding his readers that they allow someone to hit them in the face. Then he listed his own struggle and the constant blows he experienced.

"...in labours more abundant, 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 perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness..."

Among the many things listed, Paul does not cite a single sickness let alone a constant disease. Why do some ignore this and insist his thorn must have been a disease? Granted, the Greek word for "infirmity" is sometimes translated "illness" but more often it applies to a "weakness or feebleness" of soul. Paul includes that word three times in these two verses and it is not in reference to a sickness, but in regard to running for his life.

“Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities...In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept 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.” (2 Corinthians 11:29-30)

Paul specifically said fleeing for his life, while in Damascus was one of his weaknesses. There is no logical way to suggest that event was a sickness. In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul used the phrase; “Through infirmity (weakness) of the flesh I preached the gospel”. Is it correct to interpret reference as a sickness? Absolutely Not! One is forcing that interpretation at the expense of the context. For instance, how could Paul’s illness preach the gospel? Does this interpretation fit; “I through illness of the flesh preached”? Paul was reinforcing what he had said in his opening remarks to the Galatians. When he came to them, he was weak in his physical appearance (and may well have felt weak in his soul). Nevertheless, he pointed out that he carried forth a heavenly message.

“But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 1:11-12)

Some say, the idea that Paul had an eye disease is perfectly plausible in light of Paul’s own choice of words to the Galatians. “For I bear record that you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.” It is not that plausible. That statement is a figure of speech just like the “Thorn in the flesh” is a metaphor. They are metaphors, idioms used to stress a point. Paul was attesting to the love they had for him. He did not say he has a disease. It is like saying; “He would give his right arm to help you”, or “He would give the shirt off his back”.

Then at his closing remarks to the Galatians, Paul said; “see how large a letter I have written to you with my own hand”. This phrase is the source of another presumption that advanced the idea that it is plausible that Paul had an eye disease and needed to write in “big” letters so he could see what he was writing. Well the fact is a blind man can know what he is writing. In this case, Paul was acknowledging that he had written the “epistle” himself. It had nothing to do with how big he wrote the alphabets. Undoubtedly, Paul did not need God to give him an eye disease on top of all the other things he suffered from the devil, to humble him.

Agreeably, Paul suffered physically from many abuses, including stoning, beatings and whippings. No question, they left their mark on his physical appearance and limited his natural ability. Nevertheless, it is presumptuous to use Paul’s “Thorn in the flesh” as a doctrine to advocate Paul’s weakness was the mark of a sickness or disease.

Weakened by Distressing Opposition The historical record of Paul’s ministry, which includes the book of Acts and Paul’s own epistles, show he endured much opposition. Paul felt hopelessly powerless against them. Demonic hindrances dominated his history.

“But as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand. For which cause also I have been much hindered from coming to you.” (Romans 15:21-22)

Dear reader, it was not God closing a door on Paul. The devil was hindering Paul from effectively advancing his Gospel message.

“Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.”
(1 Thessalonians 2:18)

Paul said Satan hindered him. Are we to conclude or to allow anyone to uphold that this man, whom God used to write by inspiration, was ‘wrong’ in his assessment? Both this text and 2 Corinthians 12:7 prove Paul knew, and knew by inspiration, that it was Satan who opposing him using continued blows.

Other research sources are familiar with the point of view that Paul’s weakness in his flesh was the opposition to his ministry. From Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary:

“A reference to some extreme difficulty “in the flesh” which the apostle Paul encountered in his ministry <2 Corinthians 12:7>. . . The purpose of this difficulty was to prevent Paul from being “exalted above measure.” The thorn was designated as a “messenger of Satan,” perhaps to indicate that Satan, as an adversary, resisted Paul’s ministry.” . . . “If the best translation is “in the flesh,” referring to the physical flesh, the thorn MAY REFER to some physical infirmity . . . An eye ailment seems to be supported by <Galatians 4:13-15>. If the translation is “for the flesh,” referring to the Pauline concept of man’s lower nature, the thorn May Refer to some painful experiences which are spiritual in nature, such as temptation or OPPOSITION of the Jews.”

07 - Strength Made Perfect in Weakness

Chapter 7 Strength Made Perfect in Weakness

“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.” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

Now we turn our attention to the outcome of Paul’s weakness. God’s strength was perfected. Paul used the basic Greek words (astheneo) and (astheneia) four times in this verse alone. We also see that Paul made a dramatic conclusion based directly on what Jesus said to him. The three important words: strength, perfect and infirmities (also translated once as weak) are defined from the Greek to mean:

1) Strength is: “dunamis” meaning “miraculous power, might, force & ability”. 2) Perfect is: “teleioo”, meaning “to complete, accomplish, finish and fulfill” 3) Weak & infirmity: “astheneia”, meaning; “feebleness (of body or mind) a malady; moral frailty: - disease, infirmity, sickness, weakness.”

Using or Misusing Definitions

One can see that the variety of definitions give translators some choices. The difficulty is making the best decision of properly relating what the author meant. Using these diverse definitions let me cite a couple of ways the text could be interpreted by someone who does not believe in miracles.

·Gods ability is finished; through moral frailty ·Gods power is complete in sickness and disease
Can you see my point of concern? Different translations can imply a totally different message. They can articulate the translation of verses in ways which convey a very different message. There are many verses in the Bible where this has happened. For instance in Psalms 116:15 we have a beautiful verse that says; “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints”. The Hebrew word for precious has several other definitions that convey the opposite meaning including: costly and valuable. Depending on the translator, two meanings are conveyed. One which implies that the death of God saints is a good thing in Gods eyes. The other implies that our death it a costly thing in Gods eyes.

If translators started with the premise that Paul’s weakness was a disease, they add that to their translation. On the other hand, translations that did not start with that premise do not add the concept to the translation. This is why we should research the background of translations.

God’s Strength

Strength is the Greek word “Dunamis” that, as noted, can be translated in variety of ways including: “able, mighty, possible, power, strong”. Yet, all these definitions are in relationship to the miraculous. Paul concluded; “when I am weak [feeble in mind or body] then I am strong.”

["dunamis"- powerful or capable]. Some commentators pay little to no attention to the conclusion which Paul assessed to accepting his weakness. The word implies Paul received a miraculous endowment. Paul did not say; "I am weak but God is strong". Paul said; "I am weak", then he concluded, "I am strong".

There should be no reduction to Paul's statement. Some teachers have tried to force the idea that Paul was referring to merely becoming content. Yes, it is God's power and yes, it is God's strength. However, when manifest in Paul, it brought to the forefront miraculous power. When the POWER of CHRIST manifests it does so in more than endurance, contentment and patience. (Although all of those things are at work). It joined Paul to the miraculous power of God, replenishing his zeal, reinforced his vision and reassured him that God was with him so that he could say "who can be against me". It enabled Paul to overcome the obstacles, and "run through a troop and leap over a wall". (Psalms 18:29) For you to have a better understanding of Paul's meaning here are two verses where Jesus used the same word. I have highlighted the translated word. Try to replace that meaning with the word contentment.

"But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26) "Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." (Mark 9:23) Gods Strength Made Perfect

"Teleioo" is the Greek word translated perfect means "to complete, accomplish, consummate". Thayer's Greek dictionary gives a more exhaustive definition. Here are a few that commentators should consider more carefully: "to carry through completely, to bring to an end; to add what is yet wanting in order to render a thing full, to bring to the goal proposed, to bring to a close or fulfillment".

Paul did not imply that God made him perfect, as in the sense of becoming sinless, faultless, or all knowing or all wise. That is not what the work "teleioo" means at all. Paul meant that each and every time he came to the end of himself, be it exhausted physically, or at his wits end mentally and emotionally, then God would supply whatever power necessary to carry Paul through to the end of his mission. There would always be a battle. Trials and tribulations will follow us. We must go through them. (1 Thessalonians 3:4)

Sovereign Power

Some presume that God's power goes out "only as He sovereignly decides?" This leaves the impression that God would not honor certain promises. It also leaves the impression that God deals with us erratically. In the matter of sovereignty, they somehow overlook that what God has transcribed in His word is "a more sure word" (2 Peter 1:19). In other words, the details of scripture are sovereignly inspired and God sovereignly enforces what He inspired. Every precept and principle, every law and judgment, every promise and warning, in essence every "jot and tittle" of His word He shall faithfully fulfill. When God acts, it might appear from ones perspective that He acted arbitrarily. On the most part, the impaired vision is the result of our "lack of knowledge" of what God said. (Hosea 4:6) In truth, God does exactly as He announced He would do, taking into consideration the promises, the circumstances of every individual and the secrets of men's heart. Therefore, we should "give more earnest heed" to what God said so we can learn His ways. Unless we pay close attention to the details of scripture, we may overlook some critical things.

They might slip our attention (Hebrews 2:1) to our loss.

God did not deal with Paul haphazardly in giving him visions and revelations. Paul was proved. He was prepared by God. Each new day God brought Paul to new heights. Each new height brought new obstacles. Moreover, at each new obstacle God supplied strength when Paul weakened. In John 5:5-7 we have a story that demonstrates the weakness in thinking God only acts “when He sovereignly decides”. There was a sick man who waited most of his life to be the first to enter into water when it stirred every season. Jesus said, “all things are possible to them who believe.” Those that wait for something to happen to determine God’s will have missed a part of God’s will. Like Thomas, some not comprehending His word, will only believe if it happens.

God’s power toward us is more than humble acceptance and contentment. Those who equate God’s strength to nothing more than “being content” restrain God’s power. I do not mean to lessen the virtues of contentment. On the contrary, I think the issue of Paul’s thorn points to that but much more. Paul penned these words:

“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to ABOUND: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I CAN DO ALL things THROUGH Christ which strengthens me.” (Php 4:11-13)

God did not instruct Paul to accept everything that happened to him, as if it was Gods will. The instruction from the Lord was learn how to be full and to abound, how to become hungry and needy again. Then Paul learned! He said: “I CAN DO” all those things because he was replenished by the empowerment of Christ.

08 - Lest I Be Exalted Above Measure

Chapter 8 Lest I Be Exalted Above Measure

“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.” (2 Corinthians 12:7)

We now look at that phrase again “lest I should be exalted above measure”. It is important enough that he repeated twice in the same breath. Yet, it is also very isolated to that moment of inspiration for he only used the word one other time in all his other letters. Considering the many times Paul spoke about pride and arrogance, it is interesting to note that he did not repeat the phrase in most cases.

We have already mentioned that the chief purpose for Paul was given the thorn in flesh was to keep him from being exalted above measure. And it is also clear that Paul is the one in danger of doing the exalting. But we must now ask some critical questions; what was Paul in danger of exalting himself over? And, who was in danger?

Most readily agree there was no danger to God. In other words, Paul could not possibly have been a threat to Gods kingdom? Was then God protecting Paul from himself? Some think so! However, if Paul was in danger of some sinful development from the visions and revelations, why did God even consider Paul trustworthy to begin with? Why not protect him by withholding the revelations? That seems to be the case with Jesus’ ministry to the average person as well as his disciples. (Matthew 13:13, John 16:12) And why would God use Satan to protect any of His children let alone Paul? Wasn’t it Satan that God and Paul were at odds with? Can you see how confused mortals get by tossing and turning on the scriptures? (2 Peter 3:16)

Isn’t it at least reasonable to consider Paul was a threat to the devil? Satan sent the messenger, not God! Why, because the visions and revelations the Lord was giving Paul enlightened him so greatly that he overpowered the darkness in the minds of men. Paul, by Gods design was exalting himself, yes, but in what way? In his ability over the devils kingdom. As we’ve noted the original Greek phrase “huper-airomai” is from three Greek words [huper]: which simply means “over”, [airo]; which means “to lift up” and [mai] which means “I”. Another literal translation could be “lest I be lifted up and over”.

Some paraphrased Bibles, thinking to help clarify the issue add to the text. One paraphrase says “To keep me from being puffed up with pride” (Good News). Another, “that I not be made arrogant”. Still another one, (The World English) uses; “that I should not be exalted excessively”. Still another; “Of course, I am now referring to the wonderful things I saw. One of Satan’s angels was sent to make me suffer terribly, so that I would not feel too proud.” (Contemporary English Version). This last version at least acknowledges that it was Satan making Paul suffer. But isn’t it strange that to clarify a meaning they would think the devil didn’t want Paul to become proud? I like this paraphrase; “And lest the greatness of the revelations should exalt me”. (Douay-Rheims

Bible).

These are all examples of paraphrases, not literal translations. They illustrate the liberty paraphrased Bibles have. In addition, they prove how they can influence your thought process, sometimes at great loss. The New Thayer's Greek English Lexicon: cited several possibilities for interpreting "huperairomai". Pride is listed, however, lexicons do point out that the application must be according to the context and not every possible definition applies. These three definitions from Thayer's seem to fit the context of 2 Corinthians 12 better than the idea of "conceit".

1) "to lift or raise up over something" - If this is was Paul's meaning He could be rising up over the devils darkness by the revelations 2) "to lift oneself up" - if this meaning applies, then Paul could again be lifting himself over the devil not "with pride"

3) "To behave insolently towards one" - if this was the intended meaning Paul's revelations would have had bold contempt for Satan. He certainly was not showing it toward the one giving him the visions.

Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament offers a little commentary along with giving the literal definition for "huperairoo" as, "to lift up beyond."

"[That I should not be exalted overmuch] [hina (G2443) mee (G3361) huperairoomai (G5229)]. Present passive subjunctive in final clause of [huperairoo] (G5229), an old verb, to lift up beyond, only here in the New Testament. This clause is repeated at the end of the sentence"

Robertson's notation "only here in the New Testament" refers to the "final clause" [mai] attached to "huperairo" and points out that it is in the "subjunctive".

Webster's Dictionary explains that "subjunctive" refers to the mood or "attitude of the speaker toward what is being said as in expressing a fact, possibility, wish, or command, and indicated by inflection of the verb". In other words, the same way one can change his tone of speech, a Greek word can be written to identify a change in the writers tone. Webster's goes on to explain "The subjunctive mood has largely disappeared in English." Nevertheless, he adds that the subjunctive does occur "in some established or idiomatic expressions". (That would fit with the point that Paul was speaking in metaphor.) Webster's gives examples such as: "So be it", "if this be treason", and "Heaven help us". Note how our English Bibles would translate the phrase "lest I be lifted up" instead of "lest I is lifted up". The second does not sound right. What Robertson brought out is an important point. The "final clause" was meant to convey that Paul did not mean he would lift himself up but rather, he changed his tone to convey that God was actually lifting up by the revelations. Is it any wonder why Jesus in His prayer and His last supper would pray four times that we would be one as He was one with the Father? (John 17:20-23) Paul explains himself in a similar way.

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

Scholars explain "the passive means the receiver of the action except when the doer of the action is not mentioned." They also point out; "the use of the passive voice indicates that it is the subject of the sentence which receives the action." Paul said, "Lest I be exalted". He is the subject. Paul is

also the receiver of the action (exalted), not the one doing the exalting. Complicated as all this sounds, it does indicate the structure of the phrase is consistent with “Lest I be exalted” as opposed to “lest I were to exalt myself”. That is a very important point. Was Paul Exalting Himself?

If Paul was implying that in some way he was exalting himself, it might be in the sense of getting back up after each blow. Paul was masterful at bouncing back from horrible conditions. Time after time, as he mentioned in 2 Corinthians, chapter 11, Paul encountered obstacles to the course God set him on. At times, evil people and circumstances literally beat him down. Yet, up from each blow Paul would arise. Getting back up after a fall and / or overcoming an obstacle, is not pride. The intention of God's grace is to strengthen you to get up after a fall. As mentioned, there are other references in the Bible where different Greek words were translated “exalt yourself”. For instance, there is the Greek word; “tuphoo” which means literally “to inflate with self-conceit”. Paul used it several times in his letters to Timothy.

“Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride (“tuphoo”) he fall into the condemnation of the devil.” (1 Timothy 3:6)

“If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is conceited yuphoo”... (1 Timothy 6:3-4) New American Standard

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves,... treacherous, rash, conceited, (“tuphoo”) lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:4 NIV)

Another Greek word which directly means exalting oneself is “epairo”. Paul used it in the same letter to the Corinthians and in just a few short breaths before referencing the thorn.

“For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.” (2 Corinthians 11:20)

Then there is the only other reference where Paul used the same phrase “huper-airamai” but is a slightly different form.

“Who opposeth and exalteth himself (huperairomenos) above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.” (2 Thessalonians 2:4) In 2 Corinthians 12:7 Paul wrote the Greek phrase “huperairo-mai”, which the King James translated “exalted above measure”. In this other reference, Paul wrote “huperairomenos”. Note that there is the slight difference with the ending. In many ways, this text in 2 Thessalonians reads differently than (2 Corinthians 12:7). First, this verse is in reference to the “anti-Christ” not a servant of God. The ministry of Paul and that of the anti-Christ have a completely different vision and goal. Also in this verse, other Greek words are included to specifically define the self-will of the anti-Christ. In fact there are three direct references. First, the phrase “above all that is called God or worshipped”. Then there is the Greek word translated “as God”. Finally, the phrase “showing himself that he is God” is added. These added phrases are reasons to justify the translation that the anti-Christ will “exalts himself”. While it is Paul himself who graphically exposed the coming anti-Christ's self centeredness, he used none of those other phrases to imply self-exalting.

We know that the anti-Christ will attempt to exalt his evil influence in world conquest. However, Paul pressed toward the mark of the high calling to influence people to the true God. The anti-Christ will strive to exalt himself over God before the nations. Paul never was suspect or tempted with that frame of mind. Paul knew that it is only in Christ that “we live and move and have our being”. The anti-Christ will oppose God. God gave Paul visions and revelation to oppose Satan. The anti-Christ will advance a one-world system. Paul advanced a revelation that only when Jesus’ returned would there be a revived world. Could Paul mean Elated?

There is another possible translation of the Greek word “huper-airomai”. The Weymouth New Testament translates the phrase; “therefore lest I should be over-elated”. Other translations such as: The New English Version, “Goodspeed”, and the “Revised Standard” use “elated” to define the Greek phrase. “And to keep me from being (unduly) elated”. In the Dictionary of the New Testament” (pg. 1243), we find a comment that lends support for this usage. “The word [hypsoo] is common in the LXX with reference to the exaltation of God, joyful exaltation by God, which on the presupposition of abasement means glorification” (Isaiah 52:13) Some argue that the only thing [hypsoo] has in common with the word in 2 Corinthians 12:7 “is that the spelling of both words starts with the same letters: hyp!!!” However, the best critic must admit that [hypsoo] is included in a discussion of other NT words that are commonly translated by the English word “exalt”. The Bible says the “joy of the Lord is our strength.” And most certainly Paul did much to explain and illustrate how liberating it is to become elated in times of trials. Thus, if Paul meant his elation was a threat, it is no strange thing that Satan sent the thorn to continually try to rob Paul of his joy. It deserves special consideration when we see that Paul was expounding on Gods strength manifesting when he was weak. It can further be said that Paul pulled out all the stops to manifest continual elation in his ministry. (Acts 16:25-26). He rejoiced in the worst of times and called on us to do the same. (Php 4:4) Exalted Over What

If Paul’s statement “lest I be exalted above measure” he meant “lest I become proud, arrogant, haughty etc... one must address what it is Paul could be exalting himself over? If is true that the thorn was meant to keep Paul humble, the conclusion must allow that it was only to keep him from becoming too proud. Because, if you read carefully the implication is that God was allowing Paul to indulge in some pride as long as it wasn’t above or beyond the measure. Note that Paul did not say the thorn would keep him from being lifted up completely. He said it was to keep him from lifted “above measure” or “over much” or “beyond”. In the same way a bar is set before an athlete to measure his jump, the phrase “exalted over”, or “to lift up beyond” must have some bar to measure the accomplishment. The question is, what was it that Paul was not to be exalted over? Is there any evidence that Paul was ever tempted to place himself equal with or over God? No! Did Paul ever seek personal attention or allow people to consider him as a god? Again, no! Instead, we see that Paul quickly and openly resisted such titles. (Acts 14:11-15) On the other hand, when Paul received such wisdom from God, he shared it with the church and that got Satan’s attention. He became a marked man. Paul was a threat to Satan. To this day, the productive people of God are targeted for temptations, trials and persecutions from the devil. No doubt, the revelations lifted Paul’s knowledge of God over that of the false teachers attempting to usurp his Apostolic Ministry. Furthermore, the revelations enlightened Paul’s understanding over the power of Satan’s darkness!

Thus the question remains, was Paul “lifting Himself up over God”? Had Paul become a threat to God? Was Paul tempted to lift himself above himself or the devil? Or, could it be that God gave Paul the revelations to help him be lifted up in effective ministry? The fact is, in all that scripture reveals about Paul, he is never shown in any state of pride. Rather, it continually showed him striving to exalt the name of Jesus in the mind of his listeners.

It would be fair then to suggest God gave Paul revelations to exalt him over Satan’s power. God gave Paul wisdom to apply what Jesus did in destroying the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8) Paul went on to do the works of Jesus. God gave Paul direction, as well as information and inspiration so he could maintain a superior ministry. It was Satan’s goal to send a messenger against Paul so that Paul would not be exalted above the measure of his own demonic restraint.

Check to see if I can use any of this in the chapter!

Exalted above measure is frequently used in connection with pride etc... It doesn’t refer to exalting self over God, but being exalted above measure, the measure of general saving faith to a gift or manifestation of faith as in 1 Corinthians 12.

09 - God Exalts The Humble and Cast the Proud Aside

Chapter 9 God Exalts The Humble and Cast the Proud Aside “Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.” (James 4:10) RSV

“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:” (1 Peter 5:6-9)

If, in the mind of God, Paul did not fit these two verses, who did? Furthermore, why did God assure Paul that he would come to visions and revelations if at anytime he had become puffed up? Would not his proud state defeat his confidence?

Paul actually epitomized true humility. These verses directly tell us it is God’s will to promote, advance and exalt the humble. So then, why have man among us draw conclusions inconsistent with these truths if not by unknown persuasion of the devil? Those who think among us that God did not want Paul exalted are not speaking consistently with the scriptures. By way of the revelations, God exalted Paul just as He did: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Daniel, David etc...

Those who presumptuously claim and now maintain that Paul’s thorn was to keep him humble also seem to succumb to other “wiles of the devil”. Particularly the fatalistic idea that assumes God ordains everything that happens and that Satan is nothing more than God’s servant rather than His adversary. If you do not believe Satan is the one battling us in our “fight the good fight of faith”, consider what Peter taught to see that Satan is at war with Gods servants.

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith," (1 Peter 5:9) The Greek root word that directly translates “exalted”, is [hupsoo]. It can also be translated “to elevate”. The same form of the word is used in (Ephesians 3:18) where Paul mentioned comprehending the depth and “height” of God. Other occasions include James 1:9 where it is written: “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted”. We do not try to interpret this “let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is self exalted”. The brother of low degree is the humble or humiliated brother who by faith knows he is about to be exalted (vaulted) by God.

“The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it.” (Acts 13:17)

God exalted the people of Israel from that low, humiliating state of slavery. Paul of course was speaking of the time when God first exalted Moses from his own low estate, to deliver Israel. Moses had spent the last 40 years of his life as a lowly Shepard in the land of Midian. How was Moses exalted? Like Paul, by visions and revelations. Moses first heard and saw God’s power at the burning bush. From that moment, God exalted a humble Shepard to be type of the Messiah using constant miracles. Sadly, Paul went on to acknowledge that the people did not behave well and suffered for 40 years for their unfaithful manners. (Acts 13:18)

Another excellent example for understanding how God promises to exalt the humble are found in the teaching of Jesus himself.

“For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” (Luke 14:11 & Matthew 23:12) This certainly confirms that God’s business is to exalt the humble person. But it is also important to note that the Greek word [hupoo] is used in two contrasting applications here. Once in a bad sense, and once in a good sense. In the bad sense, Jesus used the Greek personal pronoun [heautou] which means “himself” independent of the Greek word [hupoo] which means exalted. He did not use the phrase [huperairomai] to imply exalting oneself.

Paul’s Humility

“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 (over) 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.”

(2 Corinthians 12:6-7)

Once again, in the very context of Paul’s reference to the thorn he does not indicate any sign of having trouble with pride. Note three things here:

Paul said, "I shall not be a fool" if he were to glory. This reflects humility not conceit?

Paul purposed to tell the truth. This, a consistent pattern with Paul’s life, is also evidence of humility rather than conceit. humility?

Paul was concerned that others would think he was above what he was. Another consistent trait with Paul’s history that he would not allow any man to think he was something more than he was. All of this is evidence of his humility not some temptation to be puffed up.

God Hates Pride

Revelation brings wisdom not pride. When pride comes the revelations will stop for God will not encourage pride, arrogance and a haughty spirit.

“The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.” (Proverbs 8:13 KJV) Pride is everything God is not. It brings men to shame and reduces their wisdom.

“When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.” (Proverbs 11:2) Pride results in terrible things and they all lead to a man’s destruction.

“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” Proverbs 16:18

Paul told the Romans to “let God be true and everyman a liar”. He obviously knew that some people would overlook the many things God said. Man, in his pride assumes many things. Eventually pride will attempt to fit the scriptures into its depraved interpretations. Much in scripture alerts us of how God responds to the proud and to the humble. Yet, with all these precepts, pride either refuses to accept what God said. Pride moves men to their own “smooth” explanations of

how God looks at things.

Paul said he would come to more visions and revelations. Why? Because he planned to remain humble. He was not falling into pride by the revelations for if that became the case, the revelations would stop. God entrusted Paul with superior insight because of his humility. God gives revelation to exalt the humble, while He resists the proud and gives them nothing. In matters of life and death, doctrine, as well as in every accusation, God said we must have two or three witnesses. (Deuteronomy 17:6, Hebrews 10:28, 1 Timothy 5:19). In the very letter to the Corinthians and particularly his closing remarks, Paul made this comment about sound doctrine.

“This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.” (2 Corinthians 13:1)

There is not one other place in scripture that confirms or establishes the notion that Paul was lifted up with pride when God gave him any vision or revelation. On each account, Paul was more humbled. Consider how Paul conducted himself when people claimed he was a god to best illustrate this fact.

“And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother’s womb, who never had walked: The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. . . Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:” (Acts 14:8-15)

10 - Paul's Revelation of Grace

Chapter 10 Paul's Revelation of Grace

“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.” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

Paul had opened this chapter to the Corinthians declaring that he would come to more “visions and revelations of the Lord”. Now in the context of these two verses, Paul unveils the Lord's newest revelation to him. It was a fresh revelation of His grace.

Paul was troubled over the continued problems he had in his attempt to advance the gospel. He knew the cause was demonic and that seen by his use of the metaphor “thorn in the flesh” and declaration “a messenger of Satan”. However, he did not know what to do about it and even more perplexing, why God was not doing anything about it. He knew he was doing Gods work so why wasn't the Lord intervening on his behalf. Thus, he sought the Lord about it. Contrary to what many teach, Jesus responded. Jesus' reply however, was not as expected. Instead of taking direct action, the Lord gave a direct revelation, drawing the focus of attention to His grace. At that moment Paul received a deeper revelation of grace. Now he would teach it to the Corinthians. He had learned that “When I am weak” then Gods grace went to work on his behalf and “THEN I AM STRONG”.

Some think they are being humble by proclaiming, “that means: when we are weak, then God is strong”. Neither Jesus nor Paul said that. The revelation of the Lord to Paul was that grace made him strong. Yes, it is through the power of Christ, but the manifestation was in him. This is so important for the believer to understand. We are not to expect Jesus to come down from heaven to do something about the devil. Rather, we are to live by faith in Christ, and that faith includes faith in His grace. Only then do we receive strength. Grace can manifest in many ways. Grace might manifest as it did for Samson, with superhuman strength. It might manifest as it did with Moses, in the working of miracles. It might manifest as it did to Solomon, with wisdom, or as it did to the prophets who received the authority to make prophetic decrees. In every way however, the manifestation of grace is IN US. As seen in Paul's personal story, if we do not get know this, then we will not personally experience its transforming power as Paul described. Sadly, this is why today's church is so unlike the early church. Its lack of power, signs, wonders and miracles is because it does not understand why or how grace manifests.

All believers, even as in the case of Paul, will only be empowered if they come to understand grace and then willingly exhaust all human capabilities. That is when God intervenes. Paul experienced this grace often, having overcome beatings, stoning and many other crisis'. Maybe at the start he thought it was his own willpower. However, when he sought the Lord it was revealed to him that it was the grace of God. Grace is what we receive and grace is what we must rely on.

Gods Grace Revealed by Scripture

Beside Paul's testimony the New Testament has a lot to say about Gods grace. One of the first things we learn is that Gods grace is something we receive in various measures.

"For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:17)

Grace implies MUCH MORE than unmerited favor. Here it results in reigning in life when it is mixed with the gift of righteousness. The implication here is that some do not receive grace. Others receive grace in a variety of degrees. Reigning in this life is the highest reward for those who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness. However, each individual believer must receive both grace and righteousness. God does not impose these benefits on us. In other words, these divine benefits do not fall on us from heaven.

It is a fact that not all believers have received the abundance of grace. Many stop at just enough grace for eternal life. Thus they do not receive a full reward. (2 John 1:8)

What does it mean to "receive"? Some think it means God arbitrarily imposes things on us sovereignly. Thus, if they don't have something from God they conclude that it is not Gods will. However, they ignore many scriptures that teach us that receiving anything from God is by faith. It is our responsibility to believe and receive.

"Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord," (2 Peter 1:2)

Grace and peace is multiplied in us by growing in the knowledge of God. Many believers do not grow in the knowledge of God because they have been spoiled by a fatalistic theology that implies "whatever happens is ordained of God". On the other hand, we are told that if we walk in the Spirit, and receive the knowledge of God, His grace will be multiplied unto us. Then we can say as Paul said, "when I am weak, then I am strong". At our weakest moments, we need not think we are fragile, except in ourselves. Instead, we should think as God said. When you are weak, when you can't keep going, then rejoice rather than despair, for Gods grace is available. Receive it and it renews your strong.

Paul came originally the Corinthians in a weak state. (1 Corinthians 2:3) In his final epistle to them he found it necessary to defend his strong state by explaining the grace that was bestowed upon him. Paul exercised commanding authority in the weighty letter to them. His enemies who were false teachers and self-proclaimed apostles tried to get the people to not pay attention to Paul's instructions. Among many things they probably pointed to his many problems as proof that God was not with him. Therefore, Paul had to address that argument.

"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;" (2 Corinthians 4:8)

"For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without [were] fightings, within [were] fears." (2 Corinthians 7:5) In conclusion to admitting his many tribulations, Paul demonstrated wisdom by detailing his superior efforts and his overcoming boldness.

I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also. Are they Hebrews? so [am] I. Are they Israelites? so [am] I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so [am] I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant,..." (2 Corinthians 11:21-24)

Paul, as we see in the context and explained in another chapter, went on to cite many challenges and obstacles he had overcome. In this manner he showed them the proof of his elevated position of Apostleship. All of which is the reason, as proved by the context, for Paul mentioning the "thorn in the flesh". God's consequence of God's grace was so wonderfully revealed to him, he now found pleasure in his trials.

"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."

11 - Gods Grace is Sufficient

Chapter 11 Gods Grace is Sufficient

“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.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

It is amazing how often I hear people say that when Paul sought the Lord about the “thorn in the flesh” God told him NO, He would not remove it! I cannot understand how “my grace is sufficient” could be twisted so haphazardly into a negative reply. They have first miss it by thinking Paul asked God to deal with it. Actually, Paul sought His council about it. As misleading as that error can develop into, it is minor in comparison. This second error absolutely contradicts what Jesus said. It is like calling something white, black.

There are a number of bad assessments of Jesus’ statement, “my grace is sufficient”. All of which typify how far many church’s have strayed from paying attention to the specific’s of Gods word. Here are a few of the errant points of view that radically misrepresent what the Lord said.

“Paul’s thorn was not removed despite Paul’s persistent petition”.

“God refused to remove the thorn, because it was meant for his good”

“Grace was sufficient to help Paul to “endure” the thorn”

“It makes perfect sense that God would permit Paul’s weakness to remain to keep him from being conceited”

Jesus’ actual comment does not incorporate any of these suggested explanations. They are all liberal speculations. Not only that, but they are contrary to the pattern by which Paul carried out his ministry after he received the Lords revelation. Paul did more than endure, he adapted and overcame spiritually.

Let me use H. A. Ironside’s comments (a well respected Bible teacher) to illustrate how even good men have placed their opinion over what Jesus said. In his reply to the phrase; “My grace is sufficient for thee”, note that Ironside even put quotes on what he assumed Jesus had said.

“The Lord finally said, “No, Paul; I am not going to deliver you from it, but I am going to do better than that; I am going to give you grace to bear it”.

Jesus’ words "My Grace is sufficient" does not translate into a negative response such as a NO! Nor did Jesus speak of endurance. Jesus did not say no to Paul! Jesus did not say I am not going to deliver you. Jesus did not say He sent it for Paul’s good. Jesus did not say it was allowed to keep him humble. Finally, Jesus did not imply that bearing the pain of the thorn was better than deliverance of it. Ironside, like other commentators completely misrepresented what Jesus said for reason I can not phantom other than he put his trust in the explanations of others. Many are guilty

of doing the same thing. They presumed what Jesus meant rather than focused on what he exactly said. All of those contentions are presumptuous opinions. To insinuate that Jesus' statement "My grace is sufficient" means "No Paul, I will not remove the thorn, it is meant for your good" is criminal if we were to live by the standards of the Old Testament. God gave severe warning "add not to my Word". (Deuteronomy 4:2) Jesus did not suggest, imply or state a denial. (Let alone three times). Paul sought the Lord about the situation three times. However, Jesus' slow reply was not a refusal to answer Paul. He answered Paul with a direct revelation. The Lord's answer was; "My grace is sufficient". We could translate it "My grace is enough". We could also truthfully translate it "My grace will supply you with unfailing strength to ward off and be your defense" .

What Did Jesus Say Again?

Jesus said; "My grace is sufficient." The Greek word translated sufficient is translated other places as "ENOUGH". It could be stated that Lord said to Paul, "My grace is enough". What did Jesus mean when he told Paul, "My grace is sufficient"? Another translation said; "My grace is ENOUGH!" Thayer's Greek dictionary defines "sufficient" as: "to be possessed of unfailing strength, to defend, to ward off".

Let me use this illustration. What if you were to purchase a shirt priced at \$15.00 and gave the cashier a \$20.00 bill, yet you continue to search your wallet. Finally the cashier says, "this is sufficient." Would you interpret the cashiers comment to mean the twenty dollar bill will only allow you to put the shirt on lay away? Or would you think the cashier meant you can not buy the shirt? This is what some analysts have done to Jesus' reply. They need to be more careful and precise in what God wrote. Some need a better view of God's word before they can have a better understanding of God grace. Sufficient grace does not mean a partial solution, or a partial endowment. Grace provides sufficiently.

Someone once said; "The only way to misunderstand God's grace is to ignore what God said grace is." Jesus' reply "My grae is sufficient" is typical of His manner of teaching. Frequently, when asked, Jesus would seem evasively. Yet, He wasn't avoiding the issue. He was giving them time to correct their misunderstanding. There are many such examples. (Matthew 14:16-21; Matthew 16:12; Matthew 16:18, John 6:53-63, Mark 2:1-12; Mark 7:1-23 i.e.) However, a classic example is found in the story of Lazarus. Notice how carefully Jesus was with what He said.

"But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him. These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead." (John 11:10-14)

It is true that many of the Lords disciples, past and present day, have at times thought Jesus meant something other than what He said. The phrase; "my grace is sufficient", is not a negative response but rather a positive one. It is full of hope and victory. It was a statement of reality and clear perception. Yes, the Lord was unhurried in His reply to Paul for the same reason He is slow in responding to our many hasty petitions. We ask amiss. The Lords delay prepared Paul to evaluate the situation so he could learn and therefore grow.

If God does not respond at once, some say the delay is because God is saying no. That is a deception of Satan. They need to look closer into the Word of God. They should take into consideration Daniels experience. When he was troubled about something he persisted in prayer and fasting. He did not even think to give up when he was seeking God? Finally, the answer came with an explanation for the delay.

“Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.” (Daniel 10:12-13) Did the Thorn Remain?

Why there is an argument on this point is a mystery to me. It can only be the result of confusing the issue. The thorn was no more a solitary issue than temptation or sin is a single problem. Dealing with the devil is a continual necessity.

One speculator argued this case to me; “if the thorn was removed, then Paul’s whole point about Christ’s strength showing in our weakness falls and becomes illogical and with no purpose.” How does that logic figure? Humans don’t need a thorn to be weak, we are weak already. Paul admittedly had more than his share of weaknesses. The thorn was not the weakness it was a demon prodding his weaknesses so he could attack him. The thorn was like an army in battle which continually probes for a weak area. Paul was human but he came to understand how Gods grace filled the void in his being, time and time again.

One person mockingly said to me, “Paul should’ve ORDERED that messenger to leave him alone and quit buffeting him.” Well on several occasions he did. (i.e. Acts 16:18) So I ask, is that so far from the truth? Jesus was victorious over the devil. However, even after the Devil left off tempting Jesus, it was only for a season. (Luke 4:13). Before and after ascending to the Father, Jesus gave instruction to “cast out demons”. (Matthew 10:1; Matthew 10:8, Mark 16:17, Luke 9:1). Many believers other than the twelve apostles did just that. (i.e. Luke 10:19). Later in their ministry, James, Peter as well as Paul gave instruction to resist the devil. (James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:9, Ephesians 6:11-12). What does it mean to resist the devil? It means to “withstand and oppose”. One thing for sure, resist does not mean to accept what the devil is doing and then conclude that it is good for you. Dear reader, grace is not for tolerance, it is for overcoming. The better question is what was Paul to do with Gods grace? Again, it should be noted, this was a new revelation to Paul about grace. Was the Lords answer; “my grace is sufficient grace” to mean Paul was to remain weak? Certainly, Paul did not make that conclusion for he did not remain weak, rather he proclaimed “then I am strong”! Paul concluded that Gods grace make him strong. Paul understood the Lords reply at once. He would rise to the occasion, with the ability of God. In the light of the whole context, that is what Paul was teaching the Corinthians. Yet, somehow, some way many are confused and actually teach the church that Paul’s weaknesses remained.

Those who claim God told Paul the thorn was sent and would remain, also proclaim that Paul remained weak. That is not what followed in Paul’s explanation. It contradicts the words of Paul. Paul did not say he remained weak, rather he said he took pleasure in and rejoiced in those moments. Paul said he rejoiced when He was weak, for when he was weak, then he was strong -strengthened by God’s strength - manifested in him. Paul directly confessed; “when I am weak

then I AM STRONG". In another place he said; "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheth me" (Philp 4:13) Sufficient Grace does not mean Sustaining grace

Paul at first he assumed he needed God to do something about the thorn. However, he learned by direct communication that the grace Jesus had already provided, in the atonement, was the answer to his problem. Did Jesus mean grace was sufficient to overcome or merely to sustain Paul? Scripture states that Jesus came in the flesh to "destroyed the works of the devil". (1 John 3:8) Jesus encountered demonic opposition and hindering spirits just as Paul did. We can honestly say Jesus was buffeted (blow after blow) too. Why is it that no scholars claim Jesus had some disease?

Jesus told evil spirits to shut up and they did. Jesus told them to come out and they did. Jesus did not put up with devils he rebuked them time after time. (Matthew 8:16, Mark 1:34) However, they were always present. The only exception where it seemed that Jesus let the devils have their way, is when it was time for Jesus to be offered up as our sacrifice. Then Jesus went to the slaughter house, as a "lamb led to the slaughter". Yet, make note that in that specific case, Jesus did this willingly (Matthew 26:53), in accordance with the Fathers Will and only for a short season. Within three days Jesus rose from the grave. All of those events were first predestined and finally accomplished a great victory.

Dear readers, Jesus overcame all demonic forms; lies, deceptions, accusations, persecution, arguments, pleas, temptations and even demonized people. Those victories were written as examples for us to follow. (1 Peter 2:21) Peter went on to explain that in those encounters, Jesus "suffered in the flesh". (1 Peter 3:13 - 1 Peter 4:2). Jesus' suffering in the flesh was not an affliction of some sickness or disease. It was a testament of what we must overcome in for and with Christ. In the light of this, ask yourself, why is it that commentators who interpret Paul's thorn as a physical infliction, because in was "in the flesh", do not concluded the same in relation with Jesus' suffering "in the flesh"? At the cross, Jesus legally and effectively destroyed the power of the devil for us. We are now "redeemed from the curse of the law". (Galatians 3:13) The Christian must realize the fullness of that redemptive work to enjoy the effects of its power. If we do not know the truth, the devil can and does take advantage of us.

Paul needed to hear Jesus say; "My grace is sufficient". Jesus was; "full of grace and truth and of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace". (John 1:14-16) In Christ we were supplied a sufficient grace. If we receive that grace as if it is something less than sufficient, we are foolishly at a loss. Yet, if we do not "receive" His grace or do not have a revelation of the grace, we are found doing what Paul so beautifully described to the Romans, missing the mark because we are looking for help to come down from above or come up from the grave.

"But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;..." (Romans 10:6-8) When we come to know the grace God provided us in the atonement and mix it with the gift of righteousness, it will result in us receiving even the impossible. (Luke 1:37, Mark 10:27) This is what Paul tapped into in his own ministry.

We must not misunderstand the power of God and think we are sufficiently living for Christ. When Paul said; “some have a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: (2 Timothy 3:5) he forewarned us that many will interpret God’s power in lesser terms. Listen to Paul’s prayer for the church to better understand how well Paul recognized the need for us to comprehend Gods grace so we can do much more than we ever dreamed possible.

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.” (Ephesians 3:17-20) Sufficient Resistance

Grace requires something from the believer. Since Christ’s strength was "made perfect in weakness", how is it reasonable to imply that the thorn was not dealt with? Since God's grace is sufficient, God’s strength completed what was weak in Paul. Paul’s testimony is that he learned that perseverance and patience is important. When empowered by grace Paul could and he would resist the onslaught against him. In another revelation he learned that his greatest weapon was in praising God in every blow.

“And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one’s bands were loosed.” (Acts 16:23-26)

Grace makes available the manifestation of supernatural ability. The grace of God did more than give Paul and Silas a sense of contentment. It is clear they received grace and the gift of righteousness in abundance and ruled the circumstance. They overcame the onslaught against them. Grace lifted them to tremendous courage and action. They rejoiced instead of cried. They prayed instead of complained. They resisted instead of accepted this trial. And the result was grace brought to their soul a strength which produced a supernatural faith to meet the conflict boldly. The abundant supply of grace resulted in a miraculous deliverance. There are many examples in scripture that illustrate grace as a means of miraculous deliverance.

Proud religious leaders once imprisoned the Apostles. They were frustrated that a crippled man was healed on the Sabbath. They commanded the Apostles not to preach about Jesus anymore. The apostles, once let go, returned to the church and reported all that happened. Then they all lifted up this prayer to God.

“Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken...” (Acts 4:29-31)

They asked for three things. They asked for BOLDNESS, HEALINGS and for SIGNS AND WONDERS. Their united prayer was heard and their faith obviously pleased God for He sent a sign immediately, shaping the building, and confirming His pleasure. This event was not the end of

the Lord pleasure for He went on to bear witness in the apostles:

“And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.” (Acts 4:33) Later Paul, Barnabas and their converted disciples also enjoyed this kind of overcoming grace in their ministry.

“Long time therefore abode they (Paul & Barnabas) speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.” (Acts 14:3)

None of these great events in the history of the early church would have happened if their understanding of grace was limited to merely enduring opposition. They resisted, withstood and opposed sickness, diseases and demons. Here is another great text which gives insight into grace and the responsibilities we have. Paul said this to the same Corinthians in his first epistle.

“But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” (1 Corinthians 15:10)

Here Paul humbly testifies that his Apostleship and all his success, was because of God’s grace. Note that Paul implies that Gods grace, though bestowed on him, could have been vain. In other words, grace might not have produced had he not put it to use. Paul testified that Gods grace was at work in him, inspiring him to labor more abundantly. This text reveals a dual action. God was at work to urge Paul on, beyond the call of duty and human capacity. Then we see on Paul’s part, he actively laboring abundantly.

Paul’s thorn was not a one-time struggle where he could rebuke the devil and go on with no other demonic battles. The strategies of Satan are constant. Blow after blow he attacked Paul and will attack all who believe. Yet, so is Gods grace continual. We are in a perpetual battle. Paul called it “the good fight of faith”. Grace is one of the weapons of our warfare. The devil will continue to attack with every ; from persecution to confusion, and from lies to vain imaginations. To succeed we must continue to look to the grace of God. Sometimes we are confused as was Paul. The Lessons Paul Learn

Paul learned several things from what Jesus said to him. First, he learned that some requests are unfounded. Praying for Satan to be removed is missing the mark. We “ask, and receive not, because we “ask amiss.” (James 4:3) Satan, although legally defeated through the cross of Christ, remains in the dark and on the loose. He is still able to take advantage of us through deception until the second coming.

“And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.”

(Revelation 20:2-3)

Complete restoration of humanity is on a time line. We are presently in the age of grace. Thankfully, for those who understand the scriptures know that grace is sufficient. Jesus let Paul

know that His grace, is the weapon we need to rely on. Jesus gave Paul a great revelation so Satan could not deceive him any longer. As Paul testified, "he will come to visions and revelations", Paul realized by revelation, "when I am weak, THEN AM I STRONG"!

Jesus' words drew attention to the solution. Satan is still deceiving many and for a season his darkness was overwhelming Paul. When Paul learned, by revelation, a deeper understanding of grace, he became an even greater minister. Paul learned that the grace of God can be depended upon. It is a divine intervention. In this present age we who believe in Christ should stop looking for God to do something more. We should learn how to receive Gods grace. When difficulties arise, we beg God for relief. Sometimes there is a delay. Some consider the delay a negative answer from God. Don't! Continue to seek God in prayer. Jesus said, "men ought always to pray, and not to faint". (Luke 18:1) He said that because God will respond to our prayers, yet always with wisdom. In everything, Paul pressed toward his goal. God taught Paul to look to the resources already supplied, rather than always expect an act of providence. That is a great lesson every Christian must learn. Paul closed his letter to the Corinthians with the words, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be you with". Like Paul, The Lord expects Christians to "grow in the GRACE of God".

I realize arguments over Bible issues leave a negative impression on people. However, to let a specious conclusion remain is in itself a failure to resist the devil and to allow him to take further advantage of Christians. Failure to defend the truth of scripture weakens the church and discourages the faith of many brethren. I did not take up this issue to be indignant. Rather, I strove to pull down a powerful stronghold. Paul's thorn was a continual attack thus requiring a continual counter attack of truth. Paul was a classical battler for the truth. It is in that Spirit I have endeavored to present the truth about the "thorn in the flesh".

12 - Additional Comments and Questions

Chapter 12 Additional Comments and Questions In his classic book titled "Christ the Healer", gave further and impressive commentary about Paul's thorn.

"Paul's Sufferings"

"Soon after Paul's conversion, God said Ananias, "I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake," not by sickness, but by persecutions which Paul enumerates as his buffetings. Paul had persecuted the Christians from place to place, and now he, himself, was beginning to experience the same greater persecutions. Specifically, the buffetings instigated by Satan's angel, Paul goes on to say, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproach, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." Paul first mentions "infirmities" for he realized, and every christian should realize, his weakness and inability in his own strength to stand up against a satanic messenger, and to pass triumphantly through "reproaches, necessities, persecutions, distresses," and all the other buffetings he elsewhere catalogues; and this is why he besought the Lord three times to be rid of "him" (the messenger) who was buffeting him so severely and in so many ways."

"How could it be true that Christ's strength was made perfect in Paul's weakness if he was left weak, or unless Paul was an actual partaker of Christ's strength, which would remove the weakness, whether it was physical or spiritual?" Without God's strength being imparted to him is a man powerful when he is weak, whether physically or spiritually? Paul saw that the grace of God given him made his very buffetings, even his imprisonment, to work together for his good and to turn out for the "furtherance of the Gospel." What servant of God has learned, and probably more than once, that it is when he is most conscious of his own weakness that the power of Christ rests upon him most: or, that it is when he is consciously weakest in himself that he is the strongest because of depending, not on his own, but on Divine strength?"

Quotes taken from TL Osborn's book; "Heal the Sick"

"If Paul's thorn did not hinder the faith of people and his healing ministry, why should it be used to hinder people today? The assumption that God wouldn't heal Paul even after three requests causes people to abandon God's promise to heal."

"It is strange that those who preach the thorn was a sickness, do not pray to be healed but do seek medical assistance. To be consistent they should "Glory in their sickness".

"If the statement "My grace is sufficient for thee" meant that God was telling Paul keep his sickness, it would be the only case in the Bible where God told anyone He wanted them to remain sick".

"Paul said, "I kept back nothing that was profitable to you". Those who do not teach divine healing are at best, unknowingly keeping back a featured blessing of the Bible. Paul said the thorn was given because of the abundance of the revelation he had. Many who are sick among us have no

revelation and do not know why they are sick. God gives the revelations, Satan sends the thorns.”

Final Questions and thoughts for you to personally Consider:

Was God’s purpose for giving Paul Visions and Revelations meaningless or unadvised?

Paul learned “For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). Does that imply he was left weak?

In 2 Corinthians 10-13 Paul’s basic theme was an explanation and listing of his opponents. The whole section refers to the outsiders who were oppressing the Corinthian church

In 2 Corinthians 12:10 Paul mentions weakness in a list which includes “insults, hardships, persecutions & difficulties”. Nothing in his list includes illness or his pride.

If Paul were tempted to feel proud, how proud could he feel when the churches were being subverted as soon as he left them?

If in his weakness’ Paul was made strong by grace, did not that grace make him the classic example of an overcomer?

Can you imagine Paul saying; "I will glory in my ophthalmia" or "I will glory in my conceit"?

If Christ’s strength was "showing", then how is it that some claim it was not dealt with?

How could it be true that Christ’s strength was made perfect in Paul’s weakness if he was left weak?

If Paul was the "sickest of men" as many have claimed, how could he labor "more abundantly than them all"?

Paul in the plainest words tells what his thorn was. How strange that ministers today should add to the inspired scripture and say it was something else?

In Acts 19; it says that God did special miracles through Paul. Handkerchiefs were placed on his person and given out to the sick in which miracle healings were transferred. It would be more than strange that the sick would find inspiration from one who was in physical torment. Further, the handkerchiefs would be consider infectious if they came from the "sickest of men".

In closing, let me say that truth will not automatically come to the human soul. We must apply ourselves to study, meditation and prayer to hear from God. It is a struggle for all because there are so many distractions. Paul himself said “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection”. (1 Corinthians 9:27) He exhorted that we “put on the whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11) to be strong in the Lord. Peter implied that we can “grow in grace and the knowledge of God”. (2 Peter 3:18) If we are to receive all the benefits of God, such as truth and healing, it is our responsibility to apply ourselves and consecrate ourselves to God. May God bless you in that adventure.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
 - 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net