



— SECOND — CORINTHIANS



The Comfort of God FOR and THROUGH His People

Part 38—“Contentment in Weakness”— I September 2024

Introduction: Contentment or Indifference?

In Scripture, we are told that godliness with contentment is of great gain (1 Tim. 6:6). In a fallen world, however, even Christians can be tempted to baptize indifference and apathy and call it *contentment*. God calls us to be a people who exercise dominion in the world and to seek the flourishing of others, particularly those for whom we have responsibility. Indifference, therefore, unbecoming of believers.

Main Point: The sufficiency of Christ’s grace to us enables us to point to Him as our source of _____ and _____ as we endure faithfully as His witnesses in circumstances beyond our control.

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Context

In the final section of his letter, Paul has addressed many of the criticisms of his opponents in Corinth who are damaging the church by preaching a different Jesus and a different gospel. He has also asked the Corinthians to bear with him as he foolishly boasts of his “accomplishments” which in reality are things that his opponents would consider shameful. Having done this, he now turns to speak of a particular visionary experience he had even as he further emphasizes his own limitations and weaknesses so that Christ’s strength might be made manifest.

Exposition

I. In response to the false teachers and their boasting about ecstatic spiritual experiences, Paul refers in general terms to a heavenly vision which was given to him. (12:1-6)

*2 Cor. 12:1-2a—¹ I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.
² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven...*

- ⇒ The fact that Paul even brought the matter up indicates that the false teachers were known to boast of such things.
- ⇒ Scripture records that Paul received numerous visions and revelations (Acts 9:10, 16:9-10, 18:9-11). This particular vision is referenced only in 2 Corinthians and is done so only in very general terms.

What we know about Paul’s vision:

- (1) It happened _____ years prior to the writing of this letter, before he had begun his missionary journeys and when he was in either Antioch or Cilicia (circa A.D. 40).
- (2) He was unsure about the _____ in which he experienced the vision but was sure of _____ he experienced it.
“the third heaven”
“paradise”
- (3) He _____ things that he was both unable and unwilling to repeat to others.

“God’s purpose for Paul involved the apostle in staggering sufferings, formidable opposition, and quite incredible challenges; and so to fortify him for his service and sufferings, the God of all hope displayed to the apostle a little more of the glory to come than most of us perceive, so that it would serve as an anchor for his soul in the roughest weather.” —D.A. Carson

2 Cor. 12:5-6—⁵ On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses—⁶ though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me.

- ⇒ His insistence on speaking in the _____ _____ was because he was reluctant to draw attention to himself for such a thing.
“though if I should wish to boast...I would be speaking the truth”
- ⇒ In contrast to the false teachers, he was unwilling to boast of things which others were unable to _____ of him.

Key Point: There can be a place and time for sharing our deeply felt spiritual experiences, but it is the things about us which can be _____ and _____ by others that ultimately form the basis of our public testimony.

“What is important is not the transcendent moments when [one] has become spiritually airborne, but [one’s] obedience in the daily chore of preaching the gospel faithfully...” —David Garland

2. Although Paul was given this ecstatic spiritual experience, he was also given a 'thorn' in his flesh so that his boasting would always and only be in Christ. (12:7-8)

2 Cor. 12:7— So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

⇒ Paul recognized in himself that there could be a temptation towards _____ and that this 'thorn' prevented that.
"conceited"

What we know about Paul's thorn:

(1) The _____ nature of what it was is never addressed in Scripture.

(2) Whatever it was, it was truly _____ to him.

"thorn"—σκόλοψ (*skolops*)—something pointed that pokes or impales; a thorn, or stake.

"The metaphor carries 'the notion of something sharp and painful which sticks deeply in the flesh...and defies extracting.'"
—David Garland

(3) Paul recognized that the 'thorn' was the work of _____.

"a messenger of Satan"

"harass"

(4) Paul understood, however, that this was _____ by the will of God for His own purposes.

"[This is] almost certainly an instance of the so-called divine passive, i.e., 'there was given me by God.' Lest there be any doubt, the purpose of this 'gift' is to keep Paul from becoming conceited. Satan would certainly not be interested in that goal. His interests would be much better served if Paul were to become insufferably arrogant. The stated purpose of the gift must therefore be God's: although the thorn is a messenger from Satan, it was nonetheless simultaneously given to Paul by God himself, whose purpose in giving it was beneficent..."
—D.A. Carson

Key Point: Just because the afflictions or circumstances that we face are satanic (_____) in nature does not mean that God is not sovereign or that He does not have a higher purpose is us facing them.

3. Paul was assured that God's grace through Christ could sustain him in his weakness. (12:9-10)

2 Cor. 12:9— But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

⇒ Paul asked that the Lord would take the 'thorn' from him, but the Lord's answer was "_____."

⇒ The Lord, however, promised to sustain Paul by His grace as he continued to minister faithfully in spite of the 'thorn.'

(1) The Lord promised that His grace was " _____ " for Paul.

ἀρκέω (*arkeō*)—to be enough, sufficient, adequate ("you need nothing more than this")

(2) The Lord promised that His power would be "made _____" in Paul's weakness.

τελέω (*teleō*)—to complete an activity or process, bring to an end, finish, complete

⇒ Paul understood that his own weaknesses and limitations meant that Christ's power could be all the more _____.

2 Cor. 12:10—For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

⇒ Awareness of his own _____ made him even more aware of Christ's _____.

"content"

"...he accepts the way Christ's power works in his life through his weakness. That does not mean that he does not groan under the load of suffering (5:2,4) and long for the mortal to be swallowed up by life...But he knows that his suffering follows the precedent of Christ's suffering."
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Key Point: Our 'thorns,' our sufferings, and our struggles are not just _____, they are _____ for Christ to display His power both in and through us.

Concluding Thoughts

- Do I truly desire to be Christ's _____ in the world?
- Do I _____ in the Lord's goodness as I deal with my 'thorns' in the flesh?



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- (3) He **heard** things that he was both unable and unwilling to repeat to others.

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- ⇒ His insistence on speaking in the **third person** was because he was reluctant to draw attention to himself for such a thing.
“though if I should wish to boast...I would be speaking the truth”
- ⇒ In contrast to the false teachers, he was unwilling to boast of things which others were unable to **observe** of him.

Key Point: There can be a place and time for sharing our deeply felt spiritual experiences, but it is the things about us which can be seen and heard by others that ultimately form the basis of our public testimony.

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Key Point: Just because the afflictions or circumstances that we face are satanic (adversarial) in nature does not mean that God is not sovereign or that He does not have a higher purpose is us facing them.

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