

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 (I Tim. 6:6). In a fallen world, however, even Christians can be ek

M:	ain Point:	•	-	oles us to point to Him as our		and
		as we	e endure faithfully as	His witnesses in circumstances	s beyond our cont	rol.
			2	Corinthians 12:1-10		
Co	ontext					
ng vh	g a different iich in realit	: Jesus and a different go ty are things that his opp	ospel. He has also aske oonents would conside	the criticisms of his opponents d the Corinthians to bear with h er shameful. Having done this, h nitations and weaknesses so that	iim as he foolishly e now turns to spe	boasts of his "accomplishment ak of a particular visionary
Ех	position					
I.		nse to the false teacher vision which was give		about ecstatic spiritual exper	iences, Paul refer	rs in general terms to a
	2 Cor. 12 2 I know a	2:1-2a— ¹ I must go on 1 a man in Christ who fou	boasting. Though the urteen years ago was ca	re is nothing to be gained by it, I nught up to the third heaven	I will go on to visio	ons and revelations of the Lord
	\Rightarrow The	e fact that Paul even bro	ought the matter up in	dicates that the false teachers we	re known to boast	of such things.
				tions and revelations (Acts 9:10, only in very general terms.	16:9-10, 18:9-11)). This particular vision is
	What we	know about Paul's visio	on:			
	(I) It ha		or to the writing of th	ais letter, before he had begun his	s missionary journe	eys and when he was in either
	(2) He v	vas unsure about the	in which he exp	erienced the vision but was sure	of he	experienced it.
	"the	third heaven"		"paradise"		
	(3) He_	things that he	was both unable and t	inwilling to repeat to others.		
	to fo	ortify him for his service	and sufferings, the Go	aggering sufferings, formidable or od of all hope displayed to the a for his soul in the roughest weat	postle a little more	of the glory to come than mos
	should w		t be a fool, for I would	out on my own behalf I will not to d be speaking the truth; but I ref		
	⇒ His	s insistence on speaking	in the	was because he was relu	ctant to draw atter	ntion to himself for such a thing
	"th	ough if I should wish to	boastI would be sp	eaking the truth"		
	\Rightarrow In σ	contrast to the false teach	hers, he was unwilling	to boast of things which others	were unable to	of him.

"What is important ae 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

aiwa	ays and only be in Christ. (12:7-8				
2 C	or. 12:7— So to keep me from bec Hesh a messenger of Satan to harass	oming conceited because of the me, to keep me from becom	he surpassing great ing conceited.	tness of the revelations, a thorn	n was given me in
=	Paul recognized in himself that t "conceited"	there could be a temptation to	owards	_ and that this 'thorn' prevent	red that.
	What we know about Paul's thorn:) The nature of	of what it was is never addres:	sed in Scripture.		
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(2	Whatever it was, it was truly"thorn"—σκόλοψ (skolops)—son	mething pointed that pokes or	impales; a thorn, or		
	"The metaphor carries 'the notion	on of something sharp and pa —David Garland		deeply in the fleshand defies	extracting."
(3	Paul recognized that the 'thorn'	was the work of			
	"a messenger of Satan"		"harass"		
(4	e) Paul understood, however, that t	this was	_ by the will of Go	od for His own purposes.	
	"[This is] almost certainly an insthe purpose of this 'gift' is to ke ests would be much better served God's: although the thorn is a murpose in giving it was benefice	ep Paul from becoming conce d if Paul were to become insu	eited. Satan would fferably arrogant.	certainly not be interested in t The stated purpose of the gift	that goal. His inte must therefore be
<u>Key</u>	<u>Point</u> : Just because the affliction mean that God is not sow	s or circumstances that we f ereign or that He does not l	ace are satanic (_ ave a higher pure	oose is us facing them.	nture does not
2 Co	l was assured that God's grace the or. 12:9— But he said to me, "My more gladly of my weaknesses, so the Double skyd that the Lord would to	grace is sufficient for you, for hat the power of Christ may 1	n him in his weak r my power is mad est upon me.	kness. (12:9-10) le perfect in weakness." Therei	fore I will boast al
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—— SECOND —— CORINTHIANS The Comfort of God FOR and THROUGH His People



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Introduction: Contentment or Indifference?

In Scripture, we are told that godliness with contentment is of great gain (I 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, is unbecoming of believers.

<u>Main Point</u>: The sufficiency of Christ's grace to us enables us to point to Him as our source of <u>contentment</u> and <u>strength</u> as we endure faithfully as His witnesses in circumstances beyond our control.

2 Corinthians I2:I-I0

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:

- (I) It happened <u>14</u> years prior to the writing of this letter, before he had begun his missionary journeys and when he was in either Anti-och or Cilicia (circa A.D. 40).
- (2) He was unsure about the <u>mode</u> in which he experienced the vision but was sure of <u>where</u> he experienced it. "the third heaven" "paradise"
- (3) He <u>heard</u> 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 <u>third person</u> 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.

"What is important ae 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)

<u>2 Cor. 12:7</u>— 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 **pride** and that this 'thorn' prevented that. "conceited"

What we know about Paul's thorn:

- (I) The **specific** nature of what it was is never addressed in Scripture.
- (2) Whatever it was, it was truly **bothersome** 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 \underline{Satan} .

"a messenger of Satan"

"harass"

(4) Paul understood, however, that this was <u>permitted</u> 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 (adversarial) 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)

<u>2 Cor. 12:9</u>— 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 "<u>no</u>."
- ⇒ The Lord, however, promised to sustain Paul by His grace as he continued to minister faithfully in spite of the 'thorn.'
 - The Lord promised that His grace was "<u>sufficient</u>" 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 <u>perfect</u>" 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 evident.

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 <u>limitations</u> made him even more aware of Christ's <u>provision</u>.

"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."

—David Garland

Key Point: Our 'thorns,' our sufferings, and our struggles are not just opposition, they are opportunities for Christ to display His power both in and through us.

Conc	luding	Tho	ughts
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- 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?