

Paul's Foolish Boasting
2 Corinthians 12:9-10
Part Seven

In our study of **2 Corinthians** and the section of Scripture that we have entitled **“Paul’s foolish boasting,”** Paul, in attempting to protect the Corinthians from the improper boasting of his opponents, whom he considered to be false apostles, chose to engage in a very similar kind of boasting.

This is why we saw Paul boasting of his heritage in **2 Corinthians 11:21-22**. This is why we saw Paul boasting of his sufferings in **2 Corinthians 11:23-33**. And this is why we saw Paul boasting of his visions and revelations in **2 Corinthians 12:1-4**, where Paul speaking of his experience in the third heaven or in other words paradise, told the Corinthians that he had heard and seen things that he was not permitted to speak. So, what then did Paul tell the Corinthians?

Paul, after having spoken to the Corinthians about the surpassing greatness of his revelations in **2 Corinthians 12:1-4**, then went on to explain how he in spite of the surpassing greatness of the revelations was able to remain humble, and where did he provide us this explanation? He provided us this explanation in **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**. And this is the passage that we began to examine over a month ago.

So now let me read these verses for you once again. **“Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! (8) Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. (9) And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. (10) Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”** So did Paul in these verses provide an explanation of how he in spite of the surpassing greatness of his revelations was able to stay humble? Absolutely!

And this led us to the question that we are now in the process of answering. And what is that question? It is this: How did Paul in spite of the surpassing greatness of his revelations remain humble before God? And what did we discover the answer to be?

Paul was able to remain humble before God because God gave him a “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7). This is made clear to us in **2 Corinthians 12:7**. Where Paul speaking to the Corinthians told them, **“Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh.”** And what was this thorn in the flesh? As I shared with you, no one really knows, but most people believe that it was some kind of chronic physical ailment given to Paul by God in order to help him to remember how inherently weak and frail he was.

And was this a good thing for him to be reminded of how inherently weak and frail he was? Absolutely! For Paul tells us that it was this **“thorn in the flesh”** that kept him from exalting himself or in other words that kept him humble before God.

And why would that have been so important for him to remain humble before God? What does **James 4:6** tell us? **“God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”** This is why this thorn in the flesh, that kept Paul from exalting himself and therefore kept him humble before God, was so important. The **“thorn in the flesh”** acted like a doorstep to keep the door of God’s grace open to Paul as he prosecuted his work as an apostle of Christ to the Gentiles.

So could God use afflictions in our own lives to accomplish the same end? Absolutely! We, just like Paul, need to be protected from self-exaltation. We, just like Paul, must be kept low before God if we in fact are going to be the recipients of His grace. So, yes, God can use afflictions in our lives to keep us low and humbly bowed before God.

And if we have been humbly bowed before God by our afflictions, what should we do next? We should pray that God would remove the affliction. This is exactly what we should do. And this is exactly what Paul did. Let me read for you **2 Corinthians 12:8** and see if this is not so. **“Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.”** So did Paul, in

response to him being humbled before God, pray to God that his thorn be removed? Absolutely!

After Paul had been given “the thorn” and became humbled before God, he initially “implored” God three times or in other words prayed to God three times that “the thorn” might leave him (2 Corinthians 12:8). This is what Paul did and this is what we should do when afflicted if we in fact believe that God rewards those who diligently seek Him.

So now let me ask you this question. Was Paul rewarded after he had diligently and humbly sought the Lord in prayer? And the answer is yes he was rewarded. And what was that reward? Was his **“thorn in the flesh”** removed? No! This was not his reward.

Paul’s reward for having humbly and diligently sought the Lord in prayer was the promise of “sufficient grace” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Sufficient grace for what? Paul was given the promise of sufficient grace so that he might know that no matter how difficult his life might become, because of his thorn in the flesh or any other affliction, that he would be able by God’s grace to righteously endure his affliction and to effectively carry out his apostolic ministry in spite of it all.

So now let me ask you this question. Was Paul disappointed when the Lord rewarded his prayers in this particular way?

And what we will discover this morning? This is what we will discover. Paul was not in any way disappointed when the Lord rewarded him with a promise of sufficient grace rather than having his thorn in the flesh removed.

So why was Paul not disappointed when the Lord rewarded his prayers as He did? This question brings us back to our text and to our message this morning?

And what is my hope for this message: My hope is that we, like Paul, might come to appreciate that not all afflictions that are permitted to come into our lives have been permitted to come into our lives so that the Lord in response to our prayers might take them away, for there are some afflictions that have been permitted to come into our lives not to be taken away but to remain, so that His grace, His sufficient grace and His infinite power might gloriously

be displayed in and through us to the praise of His glory. So now understanding my hope for this message and the thrust of this passage, let us now go back to our question as we continue our study of **2 Corinthians 12:9-11**.

So why was Paul not disappointed when the Lord rewarded his prayers as He did? He was not disappointed because after the Lord, in response to his prayers, had given him the promise of sufficient grace the Lord went on to explain to Paul why this promise was such a good thing.

And what was the Lord's explanation? The Lord's explanation to Paul for why His promise of sufficient grace was such a good thing was this: "for power is perfected in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). This was the Lord's explanation to Paul for why His promise of sufficient grace was such a good thing.

So, what does this mean? First of all, whose power was the Lord referring to when He said, "**For power is perfected in weakness?**" The power that the Lord was referring to when He said, "**For power is perfected in weakness**" was not our power or some other person's power but rather His power.

And why was the Lord able to say this? The Lord was able to say that His power "**is perfected in weakness**" because it is "**in weakness**" that His grace and power can be most clearly displayed! This is what Paul meant when he spoke of His being perfected in weakness.

And as Paul listened to these words and understood these words that the Lord spoke, did these words impact how way he viewed his "**thorn in the flesh,**" as well as all his other afflictions? Absolutely! It totally changed the way he viewed his afflictions, for he was now able in light of the words spoken to him by the Lord, to see his afflictions as a wonderful vehicle to display the power of Christ in a way that no other vehicle could possibly display Christ's power.

And this led him to say at the end of **2 Corinthians 12:9** these words, "**Most gladly, therefore [in light of what I reported to you about what the Lord said to me], I will rather boast about my weaknesses [or in other words my afflictions], so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.**"

Why would Paul rather boast of his weaknesses rather than his strengths according to the end of **verse 9**? This is why? Paul knew that if he preferred to boast in his strengths rather than in his weaknesses, thinking that he was equal to any task or calamity, that the power of Christ would not be able to be unleashed in him nor through him, or using Paul's words, in **2 Corinthians 12:9**, that the **“power of Christ”** would not **“dwell”** in him.

But this was not the way it was it was for Paul was it? Paul preferred to boast in his weaknesses knowing that it was his weaknesses and his afflictions and not his personal strengths that made it possible for him to put the power of Christ most clearly on display. And what was the result of him preferring this? It brought him a wonderful sense of peace in the midst of whatever difficulties he found himself.

In other words, because Paul preferred to boast in his weaknesses rather than in his strengths, it made it possible for Paul to be well content with any affliction knowing that when he was weak he was strong (2 Corinthians 12:10). Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 12:10** and see if this is not so. **“Therefore** [in light of the fact that Paul took no pleasure in anything other than boasting in his weaknesses so that the power of Christ might be put on display he then says] **I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak then I am strong.”**

May we by the grace of God, when we are afflicted, seize the opportunity to put the power of Christ on display so that He might be glorified and that we might be identified as a genuine disciple of Christ.