**Session 12: Review and a Promise:**

**What does the statement……“All through life it must happen that man’s bodily strength fades away, but all through life it ought to happen that a man’s soul keeps growing” mean?**

**God promises to help you grow…**

**What would change that promise for it not to be fulfilled?**

**The answer is the answer to life’s most perplexing question.**

## 2 Corinthians 12:1-10, *“I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. 2I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. 3And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— 4was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. 5I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. 6Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, 7or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9But 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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. 10That 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.”*

## The Thorn and the Grace

**“The Glory and the Pain”**

# First…Paul continues to give his credentials…

*I think the man that Paul speaks about that was caught up to the 3rd heaven was Paul himself (remember that he is trying to show the Corinthians his credentials as a servant of the most High God…a follower, yet an authorized speaker for Jesus Christ in his time).*

*For the person that tries to understand beyond what man can comprehend, it is more than one can imagine. For a person like this, the great aim of all religious experience is the vision of God and union with him.*

**For this type of person he/she always aims at that moment of wonder when “the seer and the Seen are one.”**

**Traditionally, the Jews stated in historical documents that there were four (4) rabbis that had this vision of God:**

1. **Ben Azai….had seen the glory and died**
2. **Ben Soma beheld it and went mad**
3. **Acher saw it and went on a rampage to tear up the Garden of God…Paradise. He became a heretic.**
4. **Akiba alone ascended in peace and in peace came back.**

**We can’t even guess what happened to Paul…**

 **How many heavens…Paul just mentions the 3rd heaven….**

He simply means that his spirit rose to an unsurpassable ecstasy in being near the Most High God.

**However, it’s important to make a distinction between the** [**eternal state**](https://www.gotquestions.org/eternal-state.html) **and the current heaven. When a believer dies, he or she goes to heaven, but that is not our final destination. The Bible speaks of “**[**a new heaven and a new earth**](https://www.gotquestions.org/new-heavens-earth.html)**” (Revelation 21) as our eternal, permanent home.**

**My interpretation: Paul speaks of the 3rd heaven.**

* **1st heaven = The heaven created by God called “heaven” (Genesis 1, KJV)… “firmament called heaven.”**
* **2nd heaven = where we will go until the end of the 7 year tribulation**
* **3rd heaven = the new heaven and new earth spoken of in Revelation 21**

**Note**: Paradise comes from a Persian word meaning “walled-garden.”

When a Persian King wished to confer a very special honor on someone, he made him a companion of the garden…and gave him a right to walk in the royal gardens with him in conversation and companionship as a friend.

**In this experience, as never before, Paul had been the companion of God.**

**However, after the glory came the pain!**

**What was the “thorn in the flesh” Paul experienced in his life as a Christian…maybe before he was a Christian?**

*“Thorn”….can be interpreted from the same Greek word as “Stake.”*

**There have been many theories as to what the “thorn (stake) in the flesh meant.”**

**Some of those theories are “out there”…while others are possible (why we do not know for sure is that it does not say in the Bible what the “thorn in the flesh” is.**

**Theories as to “the thorn in the flesh”:**

1. **Spiritual temptations---**the temptation to doubt his mission…and to shirk his duties…sting of conscious when temptation conquered. (Calvin’s view)
2. **The opposition and persecution which he had to face, the constant battle with those who tried to undo his work. (Luther’s view)**
3. **Carnal temptations….**when monks and hermits locked themselves up in their monasteries, they found that the last instinct that could be tamed was that of sex. This was the view of the Roman Catholics.
4. **Paul’s physical appearance. “**His bodily presence was weak” 2 Cor. 10:10….but what about the pain that was there…true pain in the flesh?
5. **Epilepsy…painful and recurrent…sometimes it produced trances and visions.** People literally turned from the epileptic stating this was demonic….and Satan had control of the person that had it. People spat upon the epileptic in those times.
6. **Severe headaches….migraine type headaches.** It will put you down for a while.

Tertullian and Jerome believed that.

1. **Eye trouble….when he was blinded, he never fully recovered.**

Paul stated in Galatians…that they would have plucked out their eyes and would have given them to him (Galatians 4:15)…End of Galatians Paul writes “See in what large letters I am writing to you” Galatians 6:11….as if he was saying of himself…I am having a difficult time seeing.

1. **Suffered from chronically recurrent attacks of virulent malarial fever which haunted the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean.**

This was an extreme pain….”like the grinding, boring pain in one temple”…like the dentist’s drill…or “the red-hot bar thrust though the forehead”…sometimes reaching the extreme point of human endurance.

**Paul prayed that it may be taken from him…but God answered that prayer as He answers so many prayers…..he did not take the thing away but gave Paul strength to bear it….**

**Is this not how God works? He sometimes does not spare us things, but makes us able to conquer them.**

To Paul came the promise and the reality of the “All-sufficient grace.”

**Some of the things in which that grace was sufficient:**

* **It was sufficient for physical weariness.**

*John Wesley….preached 42,000 sermons, averaged 4,500 miles a year. He rode 60 to 70 miles a day and preached 3 sermons per day on the average.*

*When he was 83…he wrote in his diary, “I am a wonder to myself. I am never tired, either with preaching, writing, or travelling.”*

**That…my friend, was the work of the “All-Sufficient Grace.”**

* **It was sufficient for physical pain.**

*Once a man went to visit a girl who was in bed dying of an incurable and a most painful disease. He took with him a little book of cheer for those in trouble, a sunny book, a happy book, a laughing book. “Thank you very much,” she said, “but I know this book.” “Have you read it already?” asked the visitor. The little girl answered, “Yes sir, I have…I wrote it.”*

**That was the work of the “All-Sufficient Grace.”**

* **It was sufficient for opposition.**

All his life Paul was up against it and all his life he never gave in. No amount of opposition could break him or make him turn back.

That was the work of the “All-Sufficient Grace.”

* **It made Paul able, as this letter shows, to face slander.**

**There is nothing so hard to face as misinterpretation and cruel misjudgment.**

*Once a man threw a pail of water on a mighty man of God. The man of God said nothing at all. And when a friend asked him how he could bear it without wanting to counter act, he said, “He threw the water not on me, but on the man he thought I was.”*

**The “All-Sufficient Grace” made Paul care not what men thought him to be but what God knew him to be.**

**Remember, in every opportunity there will be problems…but it is also true, that in every problem there are opportunities.**

**Do you have the desire to be a Christian soldier no matter what the cost?**

**Do you understand the consequences of being a “faithful to the end” follower of Christ Jesus?**

***God wants you to know that He never fails you…that no matter what you are going through, His grace is sufficient for you.***

**2 Corinthians 12:11-18, “***I have made a fool of myself, but you drove me to it. I ought to have been commended by you, for I am not in the least inferior to the “super-apostles,” even though I am nothing. 12I persevered in demonstrating among you the marks of a true apostle, including signs, wonders and miracles. 13How were you inferior to the other churches, except that I was never a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!*

*14Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. 15So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less? 16Be that as it may, I have not been a burden to you. Yet, crafty fellow that I am, I caught you by trickery! 17Did I exploit you through any of the men I sent to you? 18I urged Titus to go to you and I sent our brother with him. Titus did not exploit you, did he? Did we not walk in the same footsteps by the same Spirit?”*

**…Paul Defends to the End…His Character and Ministry.**

**Paul is now weary of having to defend his “reason for being”…his “reason for being “a servant of the Most High God.”**

**He is not weary of “the Gospel.” He is weary of having to “Show the Proof” of his Love for the Lord to the church at Corinth…and his love for them.**

**After a while, you get tired of babying grown adults who continue to drag and lag behind the rest of the crowd who desire to move on. Paul is at that point.**

**That Paul might be discredited might be a small thing….but that the gospel he preaches should be rendered ineffective is something that cannot be allowed.**

 **Self-justification…the last of it:**

1. **He claims that he is an apostle….as good of an apostle as the “so-called super apostles” they were referring constantly to. Paul’s claim is based on one thing—the effectiveness of his ministry.** *Effectiveness is the proof of reality. Reality is based on how long the effects last. Paul was very troubled that the Corinthians were such “babes in Christ.” The “effectiveness” Paul was looking for was “the life changing grace of Jesus Christ to human kind (God’s creation).*
2. **Again, Paul states that he did not accept anything from them because, “it is not the money I want…it is you!”**
3. **Paul reiterates that no one in his camp took money that did not get to the needy in Jerusalem…not Titus…nor anyone else. Paul jumps to defend all whom he sent to collect money for the Church in Jerusalem.** *Paul’s loyalty to his friends in the ministry was not small. He would lay down his reputation on those that represented his ministry and his Lord.*

**The Characteristics of an Unchristian Church:**

**2 Corinthians 12:19 – 21, “***Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening. 20For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. 21I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.”*

**Paul’s supreme aim was to stand right with God no matter what men thought or said.**

*After an important decision concerning the country’s future, a counselor to the President, Abraham Lincoln, said… “Mr. President, I hope that God is on our side.” Mr. Lincoln calmly replied, “What I am worried about is, not if God is on our side, but if we are on God’s side.”*

**Paul stresses what the marks of the unchristian church might be….**

**A church with strife, with envy, outbursts of anger, facetious spirit (work done for what one can get out of it), slanderings and whisperings, conceit…disorder, uncleanness, fornication, and a selfish (self-righteous) spirit….**

 **All to the shameless disregard of God and man.**

**Let’s check our attitudes…**

**Do we look for the positive things in life…in our church…or the negatives?**

**Are we looking out for ourselves…more than we are looking out for others?**

**Are we bickering and snickering instead of praising and practicing God’s grace?**

**Happiness is knowing that our actions have blessed someone!**

