

Paul's Thorn In The Flesh

"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 Cor. 12:7.

Why was Paul given the thorn and what was it?

Starting back around 2 Cor. 10:12, we see that Paul is defending himself against others who were boasting about themselves. In 2 Cor. 11:3-5 he says that the Corinthians were being led astray by these 'super apostles'. He further defends himself against those people and in 2 Cor. 11:13-15 he calls them false apostles. In 2 Cor. 11:16-33 he states that he is no fool but then goes on to boast as though he was a fool and then, in 2 Cor. 12:1-6, he continues on to boast of great revelations. In this defence of his ministry, he speaks against the false 'super apostles' and in his boasting he shows that he was indeed far superior to them. Then, in 2 Cor. 12:7, he says that the reason he was given the thorn was *"to keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations"*. The context of receiving the thorn was that he really was a super apostle (2 Cor. 12:11-12), greatly used by God, and to keep him from becoming conceited God gave him a thorn to keep his pride in check so that he could be further used by the Lord, as it says in 2 Cor. 12:8-9.

What was the thorn? One thing that it was very unlikely to be was sin. The thorn was not given until AFTER the surpassingly great revelations as it says in 2 Cor. 12:7. It was something God introduced into Paul's life to keep him reliant on God and prevent him from getting puffed up. God does not give us sin (note James 1:13), rather He wants us rid of it; nor does He use sin to discipline us but instead uses discipline to bring us to repentance in order to cleanse us of sin. If the thorn was sin then it means that God used Paul enormously, gave him the light of great revelations and then introduced darkness into his life. It also means that Paul, who preached holiness and deliverance from sin, was himself plagued by sin and this would give us an excuse for sinning. God hates sin so to say He would put it into a person's life to check a man's pride is contrary to His desire to have men walk in the Light. He works within us to deliver us from darkness and it is unrealistic to say He would introduce it into our life for any reason. He wants sin out of, not in our life, and I am sure that He can come up with 1000 ways to discipline us without using sin which he hates and which required the death of His Son to reconcile us to Himself. Having said all this, James 1:13 denies outright the possibility that God would give someone a 'thorn of sin'. It says, *"When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me'. For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone"*.

The term 'thorn in the flesh' intimates a physical malady. It makes sense to see the thorn as some problem, possibly noticable, which would cause people to look and question that such a person could be used so greatly by God when the person is seen to be in a pathetic condition. It is possible that Gal. 4:13-15 is along the lines of what the thorn was as it mentions contempt and scorn for an illness Paul had. Such contempt would temper anyone's pride.

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