



## Undeserved Suffering, Paul's Suffering to Demonstrate God's Grace

### Paul's Boasting

There are two types of boasting, the mental attitude sin of pride and the confidence produced from Bible doctrine in the soul. There is nothing to be gained by either type. The next time someone speaks decisively, it doesn't mean they are proud. You can't really tell when someone speaks with arrogance, pride, or with confidence. People in this life may speak in absolute confidence. Their critics will always say they are proud. 2 Cor. 12:1.

*"Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord." (2 Corinthians 12:1, NASB)*

In 2 Corinthians 12:1, "visions" refers to visions in which God revealed Himself to some in the Old Testament. In that dispensation, Bible doctrine was taught in picture form. This was a Pre-Canon method. "Revelations" refers to Bible doctrine taught directly.

In 2 Corinthians 11:16-17, Paul had been boasting, not complaining. Paul was boasting that he was more of a minister of Christ than others were and that he had endured far more suffering than others.

*"Again I say, let no one think me foolish; but if you do, receive me even as foolish, so that I also may boast a little. What I am saying, I am not saying as the Lord would, but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting." (2 Corinthians 11:16-17, NASB)*

In 2 Corinthians 11:23-25, Paul recounted the suffering he had endured. "Once I was stoned" refers to Paul's stoning in Lystra 14 years earlier in 43 AD. Paul wrote 2 Corinthians in 57 AD, 14 years later.

*"Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep." (2 Corinthians 11:23-25, NASB)*

In 2 Corinthians 12:2-3, "whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know" means that Paul wasn't certain whether he was unconscious and saw a vision, or dead and in heaven and got revelation. There was no way he could tell at the time. "Such a man" is a very dramatic demonstrative pronoun.

"Was caught up" is the aorist passive participle of ἀρπάζω (harpazō) and means to be taken by force. Paul doesn't tell us he died because he was accurately relating the experience. The aorist tense means Paul's soul and spirit left his body. The passive voice means a force greater than Paul snatched his soul and spirit out of his body.

*"I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—" (2 Corinthians 12:2-3, NASB)*

In 2 Corinthians 12:4, "Paradise" refers to the place (a compartment of Hades also called Abraham's Bosom) where all Old Testament believers' souls and human spirits went when they died physically before the ascension of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ transferred all Old Testament believers to the third heaven in a Triumphal Procession after His resurrection and ascension where His perfect humanity was



accepted by God the Father and seated in the Throne Room at the Father's right hand – the place of honor. Paradise is a Persian word that means a fenced off hunting preserve where a Persian king brought in fine trophy animals for his personal hunting pleasure. A garden of pleasure.

*“was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.” (2 Corinthians 12:4, NASB)*

“Heard inexpressible words” is an oxymoron. Very rare. An oxymoron is a combination of contradictory or incongruous words such as a femme fatale being described as “cruel kindness.” “Which a man is not permitted to speak” is a phrase that could have possibly given Paul a slight case of pride.

In 2 Corinthians 12:5, Paul brings out the two meanings of the term “boast.” “I will boast” from my confidence in the Word of God in my soul. “I will not boast” from pride which is a mental attitude sin. “Weaknesses” refers to situations where you are helpless, weak, totally unable to cope with some trial, heartache, or disaster in your life. Paul was constantly in a hopeless situation even as a mature believer with many spiritual gifts. He used the *epignosis* Bible doctrine in his soul in the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. He relied on God's grace to the maximum.

*“On behalf of such a man I will boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses.” (2 Corinthians 12:5, NASB)*

In 2 Corinthians 12:6, “For if I do wish to boast” is a third class condition - maybe he will and maybe he won't. “I will not be foolish” means I will not be as one who does not think. Our emphasis in this life is not to be on our experience, but on the Bible doctrine in our soul. “For I will be speaking the truth” means that Paul didn't want anyone to think he was some kind of super Christian. Neither was Paul being self-effacing.

*“For if I do wish to boast I will not be foolish, for I will be speaking the truth; but I refrain from this, so that no one will credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me.” (2 Corinthians 12:6, NASB)*

### **Paul's Thorn**

In 2 Corinthians 12:7, Paul was getting all tangled up in his painful experiences as many Christians can and became arrogant from his old sin nature. “Thorn” is σκόλοψ (skolops) and is not the ordinary word for thorn, like a crown of thorns. This is anything that is pointed like a sharpened stake, a splinter, or a real thorn.

“A messenger of Satan” is ἄγγελος (aggelos) and was a demon from the source of Satan who was allowed by God to bring some kind of serious ailment to Paul such as eye trouble, malaria, migraine, headaches, epilepsy, insomnia, etc. “To torment me” means to punch someone with your fist, to maltreat. In what way Paul was afflicted we do not know, but it was a horrible pressure.

*“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!” (2 Corinthians 12:7, NASB)*

In 2 Corinthians 12:8, Paul was not even composed. Paul intensively prayed three times that God would remove the thorn or demon that was allowed to afflict him.

*“Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.” (2 Corinthians 12:8, NASB)*

2 Corinthians 12:9 defines the principle of grace in undeserved suffering. “My grace is sufficient for you” means that God's grace keeps on being sufficient or satisfactory for you. We rely on and use God's



grace resources. What is greater than maximum pressure? The function of the mature believer under God's grace.

"For power is perfected in weakness" is δυνάμις (dunamis) and refers to the inherent power of God being applied from the believer's edification complex in the right lobe of their soul. The believer remains constantly operational under maximum pressure. This is being totally weak in human abilities and helpless to do anything about the "thorn" or problem that you have. Whatever your thorn is, relying on the enabling power of the Holy Spirit and application of the Bible doctrine in your soul means you are responding to the thorn with God's grace resources, not your own.

*"And He has 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." (2 Corinthians 12:9, NASB)*

"Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast" means that to the greatest of degree, Paul boasted or expressed confidence from spiritual maturity. There is a bona fide confidence and boasting. Paul expressed boasting or proud confidence in Bible doctrine in his soul. This bona fide boasting.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9, "so that the power of Christ may dwell in me" refers to the power of the Jesus Christ as the Shekinah Glory dwelling within a tent. The power of Christ was resting on Paul just as the Shekinah Glory of God was within the tabernacle. Phil. 1:26.

*"so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again." (Philippians 1:26, NASB)*

In 2 Corinthians 12:10, Paul demonstrates the transmission of divine power through reliance on God's grace. "I am well content" means he had great mental stimulation. "Weaknesses" means want of strength or infirmity. The answer is grace orientation. "With insults" means to be a victim of mental attitude sins where jealous and bitter people try to put you down. The answer is faith-rest and the mastery of the details of life. "With distresses" refers to calamities. The answer is a relaxed mental attitude.

"With persecutions" refers to religious persecutions. The answer is your capacity to love God that motivates your unconditional mental attitude *agapao* love toward mankind regardless of how nice or troublesome they are. "With difficulties" means narrowness of place, a narrow place, dire calamity, extreme affliction. This means to be squeezed into something you can't be squeezed into. The answer is the inner happiness from application of the *epignosis* Bible doctrine in your soul under suffering.

"For when I am weak, then I am strong" refers to being in a hopeless situation where human solutions appear impossible and yet being strong in your reliance on and trust in God's grace resources. This is the testimony of a mature believer with a well-constructed edification complex of the soul and significant divine wisdom from application of Bible doctrine.

*"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." (2 Corinthians 12:10, NASB)*

Paul's conclusion from his undeserved suffering can be found in Philippians 4:11-13.

*"Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:11-13, NASB)*



While prayer is a weapon for the maturing believer to use on behalf of others who are suffering, it is not correct to pray for God to remove suffering or to pray for strength during suffering. If you are filled with the Holy Spirit, the suffering you are enduring is for blessing. God has brought the testing to help you grow spiritually by using His grace resources instead of human solutions.

Just as Paul prayed three times for God to remove the thorn of suffering, God's answer was, "My grace is sufficient for you." This is because removing the suffering would remove the blessing. God's blessing from testing is in the solution, not in the suffering.