

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

2 Corinthians 12:7-10: *And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*

Please notice a few things about Paul's thorn in the flesh:

First, note that this "problem" of Paul's was in many ways a *good* thing. The revelations Paul had seen (**2 Cor. 12:1-6**) could have made it easy for him to become arrogant and/or be exalted too highly by others. Thus, **verse 7** begins and ends with the words "*lest I should be exalted above measure.*" While Satan brings hardships into our lives to tear us down, God often brings or allows hardships to build us up. Paul's thorn in the flesh exemplifies this.

Paul's thorn in the flesh also demonstrates that the source of permanent

joy is *not* having no trials or hardships, but rather trusting and obeying God *through* whatever we face. Paul may have thought, "without this hardship, I could serve God better." Yet, in truth, he could serve God faithfully regardless of circumstances that were beyond his control.

Paul's spiritual-mindedness helped him accept when things didn't "go his way," and even see his trials from a *positive* perspective (**Rom. 5:3-4; Phil. 1:12-14**).

Notice also what Paul's "weakness" was. Paul did not say, "I am living in sin and cannot avoid it, but I take pleasure in knowing that God forgives me anyway." The "weaknesses" Paul endured were not sins, but infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses for Christ's sake (**2 Cor. 12:10**).

We might ask what *specific* hardship(s) were referred to when Paul spoke of his thorn in the flesh.

Eye problems (cf. **Gal. 4:13-15**), speech problems (**2 Cor. 10:10**), harm from others (cf. **2 Tim. 4:14**), or other explanations may be proposed, but it is likely that none of us know for sure.

What we do know about Paul's thorn in the flesh is much more significant. Paul's thorn in the flesh was not sin he was guilty of, but a trial(s) he faced. This "thorn" was difficult for him, but he endured it joyfully and focused on the good it produced.

May we remember this when we face infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses in our lives.

“They Think It Strange”

1 Peter 4:3-4: *For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you:*

1 Peter teaches that following Jesus involves being a part of God’s “*peculiar people*” (1 **Pet. 2:9**) and living as “*strangers and pilgrims*” (1 **Pet. 2:11**) who are set apart from this world. The word “*peculiar*” refers to the fact that the church is God’s purchased possession (see *Strong G4047*).

As God’s people who are set apart for His purpose, Christians are different, and can even seem “strange” in the eyes of the world.

A person who has put off the old life of sin (1 **Pet. 4:1-2**) no longer fills his or her time with things like “*lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine,*” but with preparedness, soberness, and prayer (**verse 7**), fervent charity (**verse 8**), hospitality (**verse 9**), and service to God and others (**verses 10-11**).

Living this life is not viewed as “normal.” People may “*think it strange*” when a man and woman wait until marriage for sexual contact. “*They think it strange*” when one refuses to tell a lie, no matter how “small” the lie seems.

People may “*think it strange*” when one avoids gossip and murmuring, or when one is asked what plans he or she has for the evening and replies, “I have an hour set aside to pray,” “I’m studying the Bible this evening,” or something similar.

Telling people we are Christians doesn’t necessarily change this perception. Our society sees Christianity as a belief that Jesus is the Son of God (which is good) and a choice to assemble with saints (which is also good), but New Testament Christianity is a *lifestyle* of commitment to God (**Rom. 12:1**; **2 Cor. 5:9**; **Gal. 2:20**), and many find this depth of commitment strange.

God’s people have long been tempted to “fit in” with the world (cf. **1 Sam. 8:20**), but God does not desire this (**Jas. 4:4**).

This doesn’t mean we can’t fit in with the majority on things God is indifferent about (i.e., preferring chicken or steak). When it comes to spiritual matters, though, we must not be “*conformed to this world*” (**Rom. 12:2**). The lifestyle God commands is in many ways different from that of the majority.

Though the world’s opinions of us can be discouraging, may we remember that this world is not our permanent home.

On Judgment Day, we will either be glad, or wish, we took the narrow path that leads to life (**Matt. 7:14**) ...the path just a few seemingly “strange” people take.

-Michael Hickox (both articles)

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