

Exegetical Notes – 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

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2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Verses 1-7

I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. ² I 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. ³ And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— ⁴ was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. ⁵ I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. ⁶ Even 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, ⁷ or 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.

- (See 2 Corinthians 11 and the notes prepared for that chapter.) Paul is speaking of himself in response to the criticism of the “super apostles.” He is speaking sarcastically to expose them.
- The “man” he speaks about is himself (see Acts 9:1-19). Paul cannot explain the workings of his own salvation experience with complete and accurate understanding. He does not know how it happened, but the reality of its happening is certain to him. Through these events, he came to know Jesus as Savior and Lord and through them his life was entirely changed.
- He does not mention his name in association with these things because he knows those who oppose him will say that he is bragging. But he is not bragging because he is telling the truth.
- He says that he was given a “thorn in his flesh” to keep him from becoming conceited. This “thorn” came from Satan. Its purpose was to “torment” him. We do not know exactly what the “thorn” was. We do know that it

was something physical because it was “in his flesh.” We do know that it caused Paul pain because he was “tormented” by it.

Verses 8-10

⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But 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. ¹⁰ That 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.

- Three times, Paul pleaded with God to take the “thorn” away. He prayed that God would heal him and relieve his torment.
- But each time, God refused. God told Paul that he needed to lean on God despite the “thorn.” Paul needed to learn that God was all he needed and that God would bring him through. God told him that His power and His grace were sufficient. Paul needed to lean on God’s strength completely and trust God even in his suffering. He was not to do anything on or in himself but was to trust God to bring him through no matter what he faced.
- This is an example of Romans 8:28 at work in the Apostle’s life. Even though Paul suffered some affliction, God was working through it. God did not cause it. Satan did. But God was using it to bring Paul good.
- As a result, Paul resolved that he would not be undone by whatever it was he suffered. He would rise above the affliction through the power of God, learning that his strength to do what God was calling him to do was not found in him, but God. God would enable him to do what he was called to do.

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