

The Lord Chastens Whom He Loves

A Letter to a brother who asked for input concerning Paul's thorn in the flesh

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Hi Brother,

I am honored by your consideration of my feedback on the subject matter. I have not written in detail on this particular subject but have contemplated its meaning and application for New Covenant people and referred to it in some of my former writings. This presents a good opportunity to do so.

First, let me say, I do *not* disagree with your perspective of Paul's experience with the thorn in the flesh, but what I submit to you will stretch and challenge your perspective. Anyone that I have heard using Paul's thorn-in-the-flesh experience as justification for their wrong belief concerning healing really had little understanding of the Scriptures anyway. Those same people also quote *Job* when difficulty or loss comes their way: "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Sadly, no one ever taught them that the two main purposes for the book of *Job* was to unveil God's kindness even to those with whom He was not in covenant—who, like *Job*, walked in the light that they had at that time. *The book of Job serves as the backdrop for the need of fallen mankind to be in blood covenant with God.* It set the stage for His covenant with Abraham. Abraham did not experience what *Job* did because He was in a blood covenant with God. The accuser of the brethren could not legally touch him as he did *Job*.

The source of such erroneous doctrines that you are inclined to counteract (me too) are obviously religious spirits. To counter the wrong doctrinal influences being tolerated in the Galatian Church, Paul had to address the wrong ant-Christ beliefs. There is no indication that He spent a lot of time coming against the evil spirits behind the problem but extensively addressed and identified the false teachers, their doctrines, and the consequences of the church embracing such doctrine. He "travailed" for them *again* until Christ was formed in them.

As a Bible teacher, one of the things I have endeavored to achieve is accuracy in reference to Biblical interpretation, including the teaching of principles that help assure such accuracy among fellow believers. There is no excuse in the Church for becoming negligent in this area but in some ways we have. As God pours out His Spirit in these last days, we must make sure we maintain our spiritual bearings and remain humble before God and man. Emotional experiences (or any experience), human loyalty, persuasive teaching, and spiritual excitement should never be used as excuses to tolerate a departure from correct Biblical interpretation and application. It is possible, as God draws nearer to His

people and manifests His glory, for us to be subtly caught up in the excellence of what God is changing us into instead of who Christ is. This will open the door for naivety and hype in both teaching and manifestation. We must always remember that the excellence is Christ's and not ours. *Taking the scriptures to mean what they say in the normal sense of meaning is the solid foundation for interpreting God's Word. A reliable rule to follow is 'If the plain sense makes sense, seek no other sense, lest you wind up with nonsense.'*

Yes, I have heard a lot of "nonsense" being taught over the past thirty-four years of my walk with the Lord, ranging from the wrong fundamentalist beliefs you are addressing and to the other end of the spectrum. An example from the other end is when I heard a well-known Charismatic television pastor state that the Apostle Paul did not have to suffer all those things that he did. He was indicating that Paul had fallen short of God's perfect will for his life. The reason he stated for believing this was that his spiritual father taught it. The error here is quite evident. That stance is *at least* arrogant. We should never place any human being on the same level as the Truth no matter how much they mean to us. Another example is a teaching that came from this pastor's spiritual father that revelation from God can never puff someone up (cause them to be exalted above measure) as in the case with Paul. While revelation from God never puffs someone up itself, a person can be puffed up because of it. Anyone could fall into using such experiences to draw attention to themselves. It happens a lot with the public use of the gifts of the Spirit among the spiritually immature. The revelation and gifts of God are pure but can be used to fulfill impure motives.

Almost all false doctrine can be traced back to this one single failure: The lack of Church leaders who daily take up their cross of self-denial and follow after Christ. Consequently, they cater their beliefs to their own soulish human sentiments and loyalties and to that of the people who look to their leadership. By doing so, they set up obstacles causing many of God's people to fall short of New Covenant experience. Some of the doctrines that define certain Christian denominations and movements are derived from that. Recently, the Spirit inspired me to write an article entitled, *The Most Neglected Promise: The Leading Cause of Spiritual Impotency in the Church*. How much of the Church in America has encased itself in false doctrines that keep us from obeying Jesus command to "go tarry in Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on High?" Did Jesus suggest this or was it a requirement before becoming a New Covenant minister? What have been the results of the majority of the Church in America not doing so because of the belief that the promise of the Spirit is received upon being born again? For further explanation read the article.

The heart of the issue is this: Does the doctrine detract from God's people embracing the fullness of New Covenant experience and outreach?

The Holy Bible could be outlined this way. It is the record of man's experience with God (1) before sin entered – Genesis 1-2, (2) his experience apart from blood covenant - the book of Job, and (3) his experience in blood covenant with God - initially Abraham and then the Old and New Covenants. Today, we are not looking for the utopian experience Adam had before sin entered, or definitely not righteous Job's experience outside of an Abrahamic-type covenant, and neither that of the Old Covenant. According to the book of Hebrews, we have a better covenant, priesthood, monarchy, blood sacrifice,

hope, and, therefore, faith based on far better promises. The New Covenant is greater than the Old to the degree that Christ's greatness surpasses that of the angels who mediated the Old Covenant.

An excellent example that proves the greatness of the New Covenant over the Old was what happened one day in Jesus ministry at the pool of Bethesda (John 5). A lame man lay there waiting for an angel to come and stir the waters so that he could be the first one in to be healed. This was an obvious Old Covenant provision God had made for Israel during those days. Notice though that only the first one in the water could be healed. Why not everyone? Because this was all the provision the Old Covenant could offer. It was typical as in the covenant blessing being made available to the first-born male child of a family and rarely to anyone else. The Spirit of God normally only came upon and ministered through prophets, priests, kings, and judges in the Old Covenant. Then came Jesus, as the Anointed One who would make Old Covenant provision obsolete, who said to the lame man, "Do you want to be healed?" He was telling Him, "You know longer have to look to that angel that represents the Old Covenant provision. Look to me instead. All things are possible to anyone (not just the first one) who believes."

Because of this, the New Covenant minister must give all diligence to correctly represent New Covenant promise and experience. Clear distinctions must be made between the New Covenant experience in contrast to what is common or possible to human experience outside of covenant (righteous Job and the unrighteous) and that of the Old Covenant (righteous Israel).

What you are seeing with such false doctrine are attempts by naïve ministers to placate people with persuasive words of man's wisdom, who have either not submitted to Jesus' command to receive the power from on high or have received it and not continued in it. How can you represent the Presence behind the Veil having never been there? Is that not what New Covenant ministry is about—to correctly by the blood of the Lamb represent God's presence behind the Veil?

After much study and contemplation, having also heard all of the arguments and taking into consideration the whole counsel of Scripture, I am convinced that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was a form of chastisement from the Lord because of an open door of pride in his life. It must have been potentially quite serious in order for such means of deliverance to be employed. The "thorn" was described by Paul as a messenger from Satan sent to "buffet" (beat) him, producing some sort of "weakness." The "thorn" could not be overcome until the pride was properly dealt with—unto our Father's satisfaction. "God resists (opposes) the proud but gives grace to the humble." So, only the humble can receive grace and, thus, the reason the Lord told him that His grace was sufficient for him as opposed to any existence of self-sufficiency or self-importance within him. Until they repent, the self-sufficient and important cannot know the sufficiency of God's grace. Because of this, Paul had to dig deeper into the foundation of God's provision of righteousness and grace—he had to find and embrace the abundance of grace to overcome his afflicter. He found that his greatest problem was not the "thorn" but his own tendency toward pride. We must also deal with the worst of all evils in our own lives—pride. Did he overcome it? Most certainly. In the end, he stated: "I have kept the faith and finished my race." Even Job's trial, with whom God had not established blood covenant, only lasted about six months. He was then blessed

beyond anything he expected. Paul's "light" affliction, as he put it, in the end worked for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. 4).

One of the Biblical New Covenant principles not often taught within the Charismatic movement (particularly so in the Faith movement) is God's chastisement. Paul's admonishment to the Corinthian Church (1 Cor. 11:20-34) needs to be taken serious by the modern Church. He warned them that if they did not judge themselves that God would judge them to prevent them from being condemned with the world. (He also equates God's judgment of His people with chastisement in this text). Although Paul was addressing their receiving the Lord's Supper unworthily, this warning could have many other applications. He told them that some of them were weak, sick, and some had even passed away because of their failure to judge themselves.

There was a healing evangelist during the days of the early-to-mid nineteenth century who died before his time because he did not heed the warnings God gave him from another fellow minister. He was warned about his eating habits, the unkind ways in which he treated other people, and his issues with money. He pass away still in his prime at the age of 39. He was saved from eternal damnation through an early death. Several years ago, I received a very realistic dream from the Lord as a warning for someone I knew, but he never took it serious and died before his time a few years later. The Lord will judge (chasten) His people so that they will not be condemned with the world.

Someone might insist, "Well they brought it upon themselves. God had nothing to do with it." No, that is incorrect because the Lord loves whom **HE** chastens (Heb. 12). In Leviticus 26, the Lord promised Israel that they would rule over their enemies as long as He looked favorably upon them, otherwise, their enemies would rule over them until they repented. He warned Israel that He would incrementally increase (seven times) their punishment (correction, chastisement) for every time they refused to turn back to Him. Jesus alluded to this process in Matthew 11:43-45 referencing an evil spirit returning after being cast out with seven others more wicked than himself. It is obvious that *God* will use the devil (or tormenting, buffeting, and afflicting evil spirits) as a last resort to keep His people from being condemned with the world. This is usually the final step after many other attempts of the Lord to warn His people.

Another matter that needs addressed is a mindset that has snuck into the Church that wrongly misrepresents God's justice. Is the devil doing the afflicting in the chastisement process or is it God? Some people, in order to "make God look better" at least in their eyes will immediately say it's always and only the devil. I recall it was the "rod" in my parent's hand that afflicted me when I was a boy but they had complete control over what that "rod" accomplished. God can use whatever He desires as a "rod," including our enemy, to make us partakers of His holiness. I have also heard many people say over the years that God does not send you to hell but we do it to ourselves as if God's character needs protected by us or to justify and uphold our misguided understanding of His goodness. Tell me, does the criminal who is sentenced to incarceration and death by a judge and jury send himself to prison? No, his crime brought such judgment upon him but only the judge has the power to sentence him to prison and death. Such sentences can only be executed by a judge. The power of universal and eternal

judgment is God's alone and HE makes sure it is carried out. Scripture is clear: God is good all the time but must be severe sometimes (Ro. 9-11).

Paul never specifically identified the "weakness" caused by the afflicting messenger of Satan. Whatever the case, it was something he had to go through and not stay in. When he sought the Lord three times for it to be removed, the Lord did give Him the solution—sufficient grace. The excellent point you made about the actual meaning of the word "sufficient" reinforces the purpose for grace. We must receive (not achieve) the gift of righteousness and *abundance* of grace in order to reign in life (over all the works of the devil) through Christ Jesus (Ro. 5:17). This also means that we must quit trying to find security, comfort, and relief from the things of the flesh, sin, religion, and the world or reap the consequences.

Even if we are being chastened, we can repent from our self-sufficiency and prideful independence and will be delivered from those things that are causing affliction. People did not have to be weak, sick, or die before their time in the Corinthian Church. All they needed to do was judge themselves and change their behavior. They would have then overcome the weakness, sickness, and early deaths.

Yes, I am in complete agreement that we can overcome all things that sin, the devil, and the world throws at us. God's people, in fact, have already been given everything needed to overcome all the works of the devil in their lives (1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Pt. 1:3-4). Scripture states that we can successfully resist the devil without exception if we have first submitted or surrendered to God in the way He expects (Jas. 4:7). We would see far more healings in the Church if preachers would incorporate James 4:1-9 in their preaching and not just teach God's people about healing.

So, does God use sickness to teach us something as suggested by many? No, that statement is always made out of ignorance of God's ways. Such thinking goes along with other high-sounding statements like "God's works in mysterious ways." These mindsets attribute mystery to the ways of God but never motivate the suffering person to seek out the truths the Holy Spirit would use to make them free. God's desire in anything is that we learn to overcome everything short of His perfect will. Even if God has to be severe toward us, it is so that we can become eternal partakers of His goodness—so that we would be free from the underlying problem and the symptoms.

This is the main point: Whether the sickness is caused by genetics, personal sin, an outright attack of the devil, a form of chastisement, our ignorance, a lack of wisdom, or religious doctrinal stumbling blocks, Christ's finished work covers it all. He is touched by the feelings of our infirmities but is only moved to act in our behalf by our faith (Heb. 4:15 & Heb. 11).

May God give us, all of His ministers, the wisdom, discernment, and ability to minister healing and deliverance in every given situation. There is no record in the Gospels of Jesus giving people sickness, afflicting or oppressing them with demons, or subjecting anyone to poverty. On the other hand, there are records of Him judging people in the book of Acts and some of the Epistles. Some became weak, some became sick, and some instantly died. For this reason, the New Covenant message of repentance must be preached along with faith, healing, and deliverance. Apart from the fear of the Lord, strong confidence for healing and cannot exist both in the minister and the recipient. *In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and His children will have a place of refuge* (Ps. 14:26).

Jesus hardly ever rebuked anyone who needed healing or deliverance for their lack of faith. No, He emphasized the need for the minister of healing and deliverance to always be prepared. He rebuked His disciples for their little faith when they could not cast out a demon but He also gave them the key to effective ministry—prayer and fasting. In other words, the key to effective ministry is to yield complete control of our lives to the fruit of self-control.

The majority of the responsibility for people receiving what they need rests upon the shoulders of the minister. In addition, we must always remember that even Jesus could only lay hands on and heal a few sick people in a certain city because of their unbelief. He did not lay hands on those who were in unbelief but only those who could be or were ready to be healed.

Much grace to you and yours,

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