

A Dozen Applications From A Study Of Paul's Thorn In The Flesh

"There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me" — 2 Cor. 12:7

1 The Christian today can imitate Paul in overcoming temptation. Although Paul had many problems, he had one bigger than the others in living the Christian life, that is, his thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7). Nowhere in the New Testament writings does Paul suffer so much with a problem. In the context of the above mentioned scripture he has already mentioned his physical persecutions which had caused physical pain (2 Cor. 11:16-33). However, his thorn had caused him confusion. The Christian today may have one particular area of weakness in living the Christian life. If this is the case he should follow Paul's example in overcoming temptation(s). The three-fold solution in overcoming temptation is to do as Paul and:

- 1) Recognize the problem.
- 2) Admit you cannot overcome it of your own strength.
- 3) Then lean on God in prayer and an appreciation of God's will (the New Testament today).

2 Some things are private, that is, between the Christian and God. Paul's thorn in the flesh was between him and his God alone (private). Note he did not identify his thorn to them, though it would have been so easy to have done so.

Likewise, your greatest weakness is private, between you and God. Beware of the cultic tactic of some who advocate that one must confess *every* weakness to another, but this practice is designed by wicked men to control the lives of unsuspecting victims.

3 In order to draw strength one may desire to inform his fellow Christians about his weaknesses. This does not necessarily mean *all* weaknesses as explained above. However, Paul shared his burden with his fellow Christians. Likewise, we should at times tell trustworthy brethren of our problems, being open, realizing we enjoy a close relationship with our brethren. **"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ"** (Gal. 6:2). **"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much"** (James 5:16).

4 The Christian can learn to appreciate the purpose our loving Father has in our trials and tests. The apostle realized the purpose of his thorn and did not become bitter at God. The intent of the problem was to keep him humble in his work and life. Likewise, we can follow Paul's example of humility and realize the purpose God has for allowing us to be tried and tested. Romans 8:28 still says, **"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."** Remember that God allows things to happen to us to keep our perspective clear so we might always have a healthy appreciation of

Him and of our need of Him.

5 Persistence is necessary to salvation. Paul was persistent in living the Christian life. When he faced an obstacle in the way, he looked to God for an answer. He prayed to God **"thrice"** that the obstacle might be removed (2 Cor. 12:8). Likewise, we should possess this persistent spirit in living for Christ! The exhortative words of our Lord are definitely applicable here: **"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock ..."** (Mt. 7:7-8).

6 The Christian can turn stumblingblocks into stepping stones. Note that Paul said concerning his thorn in the flesh and other problems:

"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." — 2 Cor. 12:9-10.

These statements remind us of Paul's tremendous faith in God to be content in whatever state he found himself. He gloried in *anything* that drew him closer to his heavenly Father. He was in prison for Christ's sake when he wrote the words:

"Not that I speak in respect of want: For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:11-13).