

OUR SHIELD AND PAUL'S THORN

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We should invest in good quality time in the Word of God.

The 5 physical senses don't help us to live by faith and not by sight. Remember: Faith comes by hearing and hearing ... continually hearing the Word of God ... not "having heard".

We need to become good, regular "Bible students" ... especially familiar with the scriptures helping us in our spiritual combat.

More often than not ... people are more dependant on their experiences and the experiences of other church members. Most are "seeing is believing" people.

We are going to go over a particular passage today that has been abused endlessly ... in an unbiblical manner. This particular illustration shows how subtle "deception" can be. We need to be alert.

James 5:14-15 (NKJV)

14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

15 And **the prayer of faith will save (heal) the sick, and the Lord will raise him up.** And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

If we had no traditions ... no expert teachers ... to fall back on ... and we had read this verse ... then we would do as it said ... we would regard it as "The Plain Truth". But ... the majority don't expect it to happen that way.

Mark 16:14-20 (NKJV)

14 Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.

15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

16 He who believes and is baptised will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

17 And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues;

18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." *(These are the word of The Messiah)*

19 So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.

20 And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen.

Did the commission stop when Jesus went back to Heaven? No ... it still continues today. If healing isn't taught ... then God can't back up His words with accompanying signs. Jesus expects people to lay on hands ... and see people recovering. Maybe the truth has been watered down. Perhaps the wine of God's Word has been turned to water?

Let's raise our Bible reading. Once you have false teaching in your brain ... in your mind ... it's hard to get it out!!

2 Peter 3:13-18 (NKJV)

13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

14 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, **be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless;**

15 and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also **our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you,**

16 as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. *(There are individuals out there that twist the scriptures to their own destruction. Be alert to that!)*

17 You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, **beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked;** *(Be alert!)*

18 but **grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.** To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

2 Peter 3:16 (Amplified)

16 Speaking of this as he does in all of his letters. There are some things in those [epistles of Paul] that are difficult to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist and misconstrue to their own utter destruction, just as [they distort and misinterpret] the rest of the Scriptures.

2 Timothy 2:14-16 (NKJV)

14 Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers.

15 **Be diligent (KJV ... Study) to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.** *(Spend good time in The Word of God)*

16 But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.

2 Timothy 2:15 (Amplified)

15 Study and be eager and do your utmost to present yourself to God approved (tested by trial), a workman who has no cause to be ashamed, correctly analysing and accurately dividing [rightly handling and skilfully teaching] the Word of Truth.

We can read through the whole Bible in a year if we spend just 12 minutes per day doing so. Or ... if we spend 48 minutes per day reading The Bible ... we can read it through 4 times in a year.

Here is one of the most incorrectly used key passages ... the one people use to say that God doesn't always heal today.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (NKJV)

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

What is Paul's thorn? Is it a literal thorn? No! It's a figure of speech ... an idiom. It is popular to say that it is some sickness or disease. One particular translation even says so (an appalling mis-translation!) ... 2 Corinthians 12:7 (GNT) "But to keep me from being puffed up with pride because of the many wonderful things I saw, I was given a painful physical ailment, ..."

Some of the wild ideas are: Paul had a severe stammer ...
2 Corinthians 10:10 (NKJV) "For his letters," they say, "are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible." Was it epileptic fits? An eye disease? No. Paul had headaches ... earache ... malaria? Repressed homosexuality? Carnal lust? Based on what scripture?? Was Paul a sick man? Roderick Meredith, Living Church of God ... in his latest editorial quotes these verses to state that God doesn't always heal! Really!???

So then. What is a "thorn in the flesh"? Let's look at some examples.

Joshua 23:1-13 (NKJV)

1 Now it came to pass, a long time after the Lord had given rest to Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua was old, advanced in age.

2 And Joshua called for all Israel, for their elders, for their heads, for their judges, and for their officers, and said to them:

"I am old, advanced in age.

3 You have seen all that the Lord your God has done to all these nations because of you, for the Lord your God is He who has fought for you.

4 See, I have divided to you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from the Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, as far as the Great Sea westward.

5 And the Lord your God will expel them from before you and drive them out of your sight. So you shall possess their land, as the Lord your God promised you.

6 Therefore be very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, lest you turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left,

7 and lest you go among these nations, these who remain among you. You shall not make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause

anyone to swear by them; you shall not serve them nor bow down to them,

8 but you shall hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day.

9 For the Lord has driven out from before you great and strong nations; but as for you, no one has been able to stand against you to this day.

10 One man of you shall chase a thousand, for the Lord your God is He who fights for you, as He promised you.

11 **Therefore take careful heed to yourselves, that you love the Lord your God.**

12 Or else, if indeed you do go back, and cling to the remnant of these nations—these that remain among you—and make marriages with them, and go in to them and they to you,

13 know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. **But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes,** until you perish from this good land which the Lord your God has given you.

These people will be “thorns in your eyes”? No, no, no ... it is an idiom ... about how much these nations will be a trouble to you. “Thorns in your eyes” ... hostile people that will hinder your walk with God.

Numbers 33:50-55 (NKJV)

50 Now the Lord spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho, saying,

51 “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan,

52 then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places;

53 you shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land and dwell in it, for I have given you the land to possess.

54 And you shall divide the land by lot as an inheritance among your families; to the larger you shall give a larger inheritance, and to the smaller you shall give a smaller inheritance; there everyone's inheritance shall be whatever falls to him by lot. You shall inherit according to the tribes of your fathers.

55 But **if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell.**

There aren't real thorns in the sides of Israel but other unconverted people around them will oppose them and harass them. It's trouble ... harassment ... difficulty ... from people!

2 Corinthians 12:7 (NKJV)

7 **And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet (to beat ... over and over) me, lest I be exalted above measure.**

(Weymouth New Testament) "Satan's angel dealing blow after blow, lest I should be over-elated".

A "thorn in the flesh" is hostile people that will harass you and trouble you. Who gave Paul the "thorn in the flesh". Answer: SATAN!! To oppose him. To stop him!

2 Corinthians 11:1-4 (NKJV)

1 Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me.

2 For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

3 But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

4 **For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!**

2 Corinthians 11:13-15 (NKJV)

13 **For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.**

14 And no wonder! **For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.**

15 **Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers (SATAN) also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.**

Now ... on to Paul's personal experiences.

2 Corinthians 11:16-33 (NKJV)

16 I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little.

17 What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting.

18 Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast.

19 **For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise!**

20 **For you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face. (Some of the "top dogs" are taking God's people into bondage today)**

21 To our shame I say that we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold—I speak foolishly—I am bold also.

22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I.

23 Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: **in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.**

24 **From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.**

25 **Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;**

26 **in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;**

27 **in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—**

28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?

30 If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.

31 The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

32 In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me;

33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

2 Corinthians 12:8 (NKJV)

8 **Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.**

Lots of the Churches of God are using this verse in their "core doctrines". If you have asked God 3 times to heal you ... and He hasn't ... Then that's it. But ... this passage has nothing to do with healing. Paul wanted this buffeting from satan's angel moved from his life.

God didn't say, "No". See the next few verses.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (NKJV)

9 And He said to me, "**My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness**" (*the same word as infirmities ... Asthenia ... means weakness not sickness or disease. Paul felt his weakness or frailty under the continuous assaults from satan's spirit emissary*). Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10 **Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities (weaknesses), in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

God's grace was sufficient for Paul to overcome. God's grace should help us too as it did Paul.

2 Timothy 3:10-12 (NKJV)

10 **But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance,**

11 **persecutions, afflictions,** which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. **And out of them all the Lord delivered me.**

12 **Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.**

It is quite obvious that Paul didn't have any grievous sickness.

Wrong belief leads to wrong behaviour that leads to a wrong destination. Keep your belt of truth on. Keep your shield of faith up!

Galatians 4:12-20 (NKJV)

12 Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you. You have not injured me at all.

13 **You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first.** *(Paul did have an infirmity at the first)*

14 **And my trial which was in my flesh** you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.

15 What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, **you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.** *(Is this not just a figure of speech?)*

16 Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?

17 They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them.

18 But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you.

19 My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,

20 I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.

Do we have to speculate what this physical infirmity was? Have a look at the next few verses.

Acts 14:1-7 (NKJV)

1 Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed.

2 But **the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren.** *(Might this have been this "messenger of satan"?)*

3 Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

4 But the multitude of the city was divided: part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles.

5 **And when a violent attempt was made by both the Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to abuse and stone them,**

6 **they became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding region.**

7 **And they were preaching the gospel there.** *(These were provinces of Galatia)*

What happened?

Acts 14:19-22 (NKJV)

19 Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and **having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.** *(What did Paul look like?)*

20 **However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.**

21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

What did Paul look like after being stoned ... almost to death?

Probably bloodied ... purple bruises ... wounds ... inflammation ... puffy black eyes ... limping ... swollen fingers. You are going to look a bit of a disaster. That's what he looked like when he first preached in

the region of Galatia. So. Let's go back to that scripture in Galatians 4 ... understanding the background.

Galatians 4:13-15 (NKJV)

13 You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first.

14 And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.

15 What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.

No doubt Paul healed over time. Did they actually "pluck out their own eyes"? It's a figure of speech. It means that they would have done anything to help him.

So to conclude. Although it's extremely popular to accuse God of being unwilling to heal Paul ... there is zero evidence in the scripture. This is people just reading their preferred view or bias into the scriptures ... eisegesis not exegesis :)

So we must find the time to read and reflect on God's Word. Let's all do our best to take the reading and studying of God's Word seriously. One day it may save our lives.

It's our belt of truth ... provides our shield of faith and is also the sword of spirit.