



Gain Without Pain?

“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.” — 2 Corinthians 12:9

Imagine fellowshipping with some Christians, and having the apostle Paul show up among you all. How cool would that be? Then, as you each began to share your spiritual experiences with each other, someone might say, *“I remember a time when I sensed God’s presence as He was guiding me through some tough choices in college. It was so real to me. He really helped me.”*

The next person says, *“I really needed to pay my rent, but some unexpected bills left me with empty pockets near the end of the month. And then after feeling all worried and after a brief time of prayer, Jesus just came through for me with precise timing – so precise in fact that I knew it was Him and now I feel even more love for Him.”*

Another says, *“I can remember the time when God healed me physically. The doctors didn’t know how to deal with it, but He did such a great job to resolve that ongoing, painful malady in my life. I didn’t even need a faith-healer-preacher-dude.”*

“But what about you, Paul?” another person asks.

Then Paul responds, *“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words.”*

Can you imagine having a beyond-terrestrial-experience like that? When he wrote to the believers in Corinth, Paul talked about having been caught up into the third heaven into the very presence of God Himself (see 2 Cor. 12:1–4). But Paul wasn't boasting or trying to impress people like some televangelists do. He was referring to a time when he had been given *“a thorn in the flesh,”* -- *“a messenger of Satan to buffet”* him (v. 7). What was that thorn? It was probably painful. It was a messenger from the dark side. And we may wonder at times why the Lord simply didn't remove that thorn after hearing Paul pray for this to happen. It's normal to want to be free from the piercing of thorns. Contrary to what some so-called Christian groups teach, God doesn't want us to want

pain. Did you know that word “pain” appears thirty four times in the Bible (KJV)? So many people suffer, but one day Christians will be completely free from it.

Paul had a valid reason regarding this problem being there -- ***“that the power of Christ may rest upon me”*** (2 Cor. 12:9). Man, that’s what we all want while on this planet – the power of Christ on us to serve Him better. You know you desire that ...and God’s power is there for you too. Who wouldn’t want it? Do you ever ask God for this, as you seek to do His will?

You see, when the enemy attacks, harasses or hassles Christians, either we will cave in, or we will cling to the Lord that much tighter. Paul understood that as he allowed the thorny pain to chase him again to Jesus, he would walk closer to and be more dependent upon God ...than he would be if his circumstances were totally comfortable and luxurious. His choice to keep on seeking the Lord regardless of what he suffered actually kept him humble before the Lord and able to receive more grace for the purpose of getting the Gospel out further. Paul zealously wanted more and more people to be born again spiritually so they could spend eternity with him, together with Jesus and with all the saints. His heart beat hard daily for the plundering of Hell and the populating of Heaven – the rescuing of the children of darkness so they could enter the Kingdom of light! Are you that determined in spite of all the trials? Do you petition God for this inconceivable passion?

Maybe you don’t have a thorn in your flesh today, but you experience some other kind of pain? Maybe you still smart after an ugly divorce or the loss of a job? Maybe your teenagers are telling you off every other week for no good reason? Maybe a friend has let you down. Well, whatever the case, turn to the Lord and you will gain. It might not be money or material things that you gain, but you will receive what you really need and when you need it. You will gain, righteousness, peace, love and joy in the Holy Spirit as you put Christ first. Remember what that pained Psalmist said, ***“It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes”*** (Ps. 119:71). ***“O LORD my God, I called to you for help and you healed me”*** (Ps 30:2 NIV). Some people go away from God and away from Christian fellowship when they hurt. Don’t do that! Affliction in the will of God, when we accept it with humility, can be instructive. It can turn into a huge blessing! Remember Job with all his sores? God can use it to bring about discipline that leads us into a deeper, fuller life. ***“Before I was afflicted I went astray,”*** David said, ***“but now I keep Your Word”*** (Ps. 119:67). Peter would agree: Affliction leads us not to live for ourselves ***“but for the will of God”*** (1 Pet. 4:2).

*By faith a Christian can have poise and rise above all that annoys—
Sustained and strengthened by God’s power to live in victory hour by hour.
—Hess*

We always need to remember this when we look at those whom God is using. They may be under an attack that we can't see. Instead of envying them or criticizing them, we should be praying for them, because genuine, red-hot, uncompromising, spiritual leadership always has its cost. Things aren't always as they seem with so called

Christian leaders. We need to take a closer look and stand by our friends. Are people becoming better soul-winners under their watch care?—or how many have been left behind in their destructive wake?

Lives are at stake for many and there is no time to lose! Paul certainly knew this. He was more committed to Jesus and the Kingdom of God than he was to one certain denomination. You know he was back then. Be done with religious fools who keep lying and pulling your strings. Don't constantly hang with the lost, the carnal, the nominal, the lukewarm, the controlling people so much that you get pulled down. Isn't Jesus enough for you? The Bible says we are to pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call on the Lord from a P-U-R-E heart. We are to look for the fruit of God's kind of love – fruit that abides!

Today mean-spirited, control-freak, religious leaders who masquerade as children of love might point the finger, accusing you. But even though they keep trying to thwart your noble plans, or cause confusion and distrust, remember how determined Paul remained with his thorn in the flesh. He remained totally determined to glorify the Lord! As you continue to reach upward and outward to others as Paul did, God's purposes will ultimately prevail! So hang in there with Jesus Christ! Don't be ashamed of Him or of the righteous. Yes, God wants you to win. So keep your eye on the Prize and don't be influenced away from your real friends who just want to see you grow. Let's love all people, and not forsake fellowship with sound brethren.

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