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Paul's Thorn In The Flesh



Rev. Raymond M. Jackson

2 CORINTHIANS, CHAPTER 12

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED ABOUT THE STATEMENT MADE BY THE APOSTLE PAUL IN 2ND CORINTHIANS, CHAPTER 12, VERSE 7, WHERE HE SPOKE OF A THORN IN HIS FLESH? WE WILL TRY TO

ANSWER SOME OF THE QUESTIONS THAT MAY HAVE COME TO YOUR MIND ABOUT THIS SCRIPTURE AS WE DEAL WITH THIS MESSAGE. WE WILL JUST LET THE BIBLE SPEAK FOR ITSELF, AND TRUST GOD TO LEAD US TO THE SCRIPTURES THAT WILL MAKE THIS STUDY MEANINGFUL TO EACH OF YOU. CERTAIN SCRIPTURES ARE USED BY VARIOUS GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS TO PROJECT CERTAIN DOCTRINES, BUT THEY ARE USED OUT OF CONTEXT AND DO NOT CARRY THE THOUGHT THAT IS PROJECTED. WE BELIEVE THE BIBLE HAS SUFFICIENT SCRIPTURE IN IT TO COVER EVERY NEED OF HUMANITY WITHOUT PULLING CERTAIN VERSES OUT BY THEMSELVES JUST TO MAKE A PLATFORM FOR INDIVIDUAL OPINIONS. WE BELIEVE ALSO, THAT GOD WILL VINDICATE HIS WORD WHEREVER IT IS PREACHED, AND THAT WE DO NOT

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HAVE TO HIDE ANYTHING THAT IS
IN IT IN ORDER TO GET GOD TO

WORK. WE ASK YOU TO READ THE
ARTICLE WITH AN OPEN MIND,

AND WE TRUST THAT IT WILL BLESS YOU, AND HELP YOU TO BETTER SEE GOD AS HE IS. IN OTHER WORDS, EVERYTHING OPEN AND ABOVE BOARD.

TEXT: 2 CORINTHIANS 12: 1-10

Let us enter into this message prayerfully, trusting God to open our understanding of this very controversial subject which we desire to deal with. For a title, we will just call it Paul's Thorn in the Flesh, but it will deal with the subject of divine healing, and the questions of what Paul's thorn in the flesh actually was. As far back as I can remember, Christians have discussed among themselves, even argued at times, about this thorn in Paul's flesh, which he spoke of as being the messenger of Satan to buffet him, keeping him from becoming too proud and exalted as a result of the heavenly vision which the Lord had given to him. As I go into this message, I do so with the awareness that some will say, what is a man who has been in the hospital and had surgery, himself, tackling a message like this for? My answer to that is, I do not allow circumstances such as this to prevent me from preaching a message that the Lord gives me from his word. I may not use words of expression that some of you are capable of using, and some of you may have a lot more faith in some areas than I, but when it comes to establishing what the Bible has to say about a subject, then I will give no ground for any kind of a statement, sermon, or any human feelings. Ever since God led me into this Hold Ghost way of living and walking with Him, I have been concerned about this

thing of divine healing, for in the Methodist church it was never taught. Neither was it taught in the Church of Christ, for they, like the Methodist, did not believe in divine healing; they claim that all of that ceased when the apostles passed off of the scene. The only kind of healing they believe in, is that which can be accomplished through doctors, and medicine. They have their confidence in medical science, and the ability of man, and I want it understood that I am not speaking against these things; I thank God for what he has enabled man to learn about this very complex human body, but we need to give God room to deal with us as he sees fit to do so. The world is full of testimonies of God's sovereign grace in the lives of individual people, but let us try to understand that God did not write the Bible to fit your experience, nor mine, but somewhere, we will have to be able to see our experience in the Bible. That is the way we have to look at it. The truth of what God is, and what God will do for his creation, is all recorded in the book, and therefore, our experiences and ideas must harmonize with what the word of God teaches.

LET THE BIBLE SPEAK

I have read books through the years, of every sort, many of them by men who had outstanding ministries. I have read after Charles Price, Wigglesworth, F. F. Bosworth, and many others, books on how to have faith, what faith is, how to release your faith, what one must do to receive divine healing, etc., but I never did find one that actually set the scriptures straight, without leaving some

verses unexplained. Therefore I would like to start with Isaiah 53, laying a foundation for our text, and endeavor to make the message clear, and meaningful to all who hear it, or read it in the Contender. This is not meant to promote any kind of a healing doctrine; it is for the purpose of trying to help people look at the word of God in a mature way, rather than to play around with it like a group of children playing musical chairs. Isaiah prophesied concerning Christ Jesus, and what he would do for lost mankind, more than 700 years before his birth. He spoke of a child that would be born, upon whose shoulders the government of the people would rest; going on to say, "And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor. The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform it." Now we know that most of this is yet for a future date, but the child that was to be born was none other than Jesus who was called the son of Joseph and Mary according to the flesh. We know of his sacrificial death at Calvary, but I wonder if we really have fully comprehended all that was accomplished in the price that he paid when he laid down his life for the redemption of all lost mankind.

ISAIAH'S PROPHECY OF CHRIST

Let us turn now to Isaiah 53, and begin reading with the first verse. "Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the

arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, (talking about Jesus), and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." All of this was saying that when Jesus (the Messiah of Israel), comes, there will be nothing about his personal appearance that will be attractive to people. In other words people would not be attracted to him because of his good looks, nor by the way he dressed or combed his hair. Physically he would not look very much different than any other man around Jerusalem in those days. Certainly there was nothing about his looks that would draw a crowd, but Isaiah goes on in his prophecy to say, 3, "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: (He knew what it was to be belittled, humiliated, made fun of and ridiculed by people, but his ridicule and persecution did not come from the prostitutes, nor the criminals in jail; it came from the religious people. They had a fixed idea of what religion was to be like, and most of what he said and did was just the opposite from what they thought it should be; it did not match their seminary teaching, and therefore they could not accept him; neither could they just leave him alone; they criticized and persecuted him.) and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4, Surely he hath borne our griefs, (Have you ever just felt down in the dumps, and deeply distressed, full of anxiety and fear? I am not talking about feeling bad because we were unable to pay the electric bill, or anything like that; this word, as it is used here, comes from a Hebrew word that takes in calamity, sickness, disease, deep distress, unwholesome conditions, and anxiety, which goes far beyond our

not being able to pay the bills, and that sort of thing. Jesus suffered all of this for us. That is why the apostle Paul wrote, "We have not an high priest which cannot be touched by the feelings of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.' This takes in the rest of the verse we are reading.) And carried our sorrows." This word, S-O-R-R-O-W-S, as used here, comes from a Hebrew word which takes in affliction, anguish, grief, pain, sorrow and sadness, and Isaiah prophesied that Jesus, the Messiah, would carry all this for us. Now let us read the whole verse straight through. "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." This was when he hung on the cross at Calvary, (SMITTEN OF GOD), and his blood was spilled on the ground, not for his sins, but for ours. There is where he was heard to cry out, MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAS THOU FORSAKEN ME? That has caused many people, in trying to separate a trinity idea from the oneness teaching, to ask the question, "How could he be none other than God himself, and still be crying out to God as he did there? It was because the sins of the whole world were laid upon his flesh; he bore our sins in his flesh, not in his spirit. Therefore, when the sins of the whole world were laid upon the flesh man, God, who is spirit, forsook him. There is no other reason, but remember, he went to that cross willingly; he was not forced to do it. With his own words he said, "No one takes my life; I lay it down willingly." When that same vessel of clay walked on water, it was not because the virtue was in the flesh; it was because the life that was in that flesh, has power over every law of nature. When he turned the water to wine; it was not because he had some secret formula hid in the palm of his

hand. No, the virtue was not in the flesh. The flesh was only a means by which the Eternal God, (which is spirit, and is invisible), could have contact with man's senses. In the flesh of Jesus, God could be seen, heard and touched by mortal man. In the flesh of Jesus, God spoke healing to sick bodies, He spoke life back into the dead, He restored sight to the blind, walked on the water, turned the water to wine, and taught a new way of life to those who followed Him, but the virtue was not of the flesh; it was the life that dwelt in that flesh that had the virtue. Now, if God, who dwelt in that fleshly form, was on day, going to cause an innocent man to suffer for the sins of the whole world; then that man would have to be a sinless man, a perfect man, a man who had not sinful attributes within his flesh, completely without a nature to sin, yet he had to be free to make his own choices or he could not have set an example for us, he had to be tried and tested in every area of life without yielding to any of the devil's temptations, in order to show us the way to please our heavenly Father. There was not inherited nature in him to lust, covet, lie, cheat, steal or get drunk, yet he had to be able to make the choice, or his temptation would have been a farce. It was the same with Adam and Eve; they did not have a nature within them to sin against God, but they had the choice to make when temptation was presented. It was because of the choice they made, that it was necessary for the second Adam, (Jesus Christ) to come into the world and live a sinless life of obedience to the will of God. As for his walking on the water, and turning the water to wine, and other such things, we have to look at this as him establishing the fact that He is God over His own laws. It is not natural for mortal men to walk on water, the law of gravity is absolutely against that. Man

was put here on earth, and this is to be man's natural habitation, therefore the law of gravity keeps him where God meant for him to stay through all of His redeeming process. Yes, God has certain laws in effect, but He is not bound by His laws. He proved that when He walked on earth among men in the human form known as Jesus of Nazareth, but we see this man Jesus was smitten of God and afflicted, according to Isaiah's prophecy. Everything took place just exactly as it was prophesied to. The very man that for 3 ½ years had defied the laws of nature, even to the point of telling a storm to shut up, was now hanging on a cross with the life's blood running out of the wounds in His flesh. Hanging there is a man that from all appearances is helpless to do anything to help himself, yet His own words were, that, even then, He could call 12 legions of angels to help Him if He chose to do so. What is this all about? Why did He not try to help Himself at such a time as this? By His own words He said, "For this cause came I unto this hour." Even Caiaphas the high priest prophesied concerning Jesus when the council of chief priests and Pharisees were gathered together for the purpose of deciding what to do about this man who was doing all those miracles. John recorded it in this gospel, verses 49-52 of the eleventh chapter. "And one of them named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself; but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad."

JESUS DIED AS A MAN - NOT AS DEITY

Now if it was necessary for one innocent man to die one day, for the sins of the whole world, past, present, and future, and that man was to taste death for every man, then He must not die as DEITY, He must die as a man. That is why as he hung there on that old cross, with the nails in His hands and feet, His muscles drawn, spasms wreaking through His chest, plunging away at His heart, and moments when His brain was attacked by faint, to the point where someone dipped a sponge into a mixture of vinegar and probably certain types of drugs that would have taken away all the pain if He would have taken it, He refused to partake of it, knowing that He was to suffer death for every man, woman, and child of the whole human race. He was smitten of God and afflicted. In other words, He was stripped of all DEITY powers; not in the sense that He could not have rescued Himself, but since He was ordained to die for the sins of all mankind, He had to be left to die like any other human. He had to be able to feel the pain throughout His whole being or it could not have been said that He suffered the penalty for all of our sins. The critics passed by spitting at Him and crying out, "You saved others, why don't you save yourself." It was all for the sake of mocking him when they said, "If he is the king of Israel let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will save him." That sounds just like the devil, doesn't it? The devil knew who that was hanging there. He was no

stranger to Him, but there was one thing sure; it was not the second person of a trinity hanging there that day, it was none other than the very God himself, veiled in human flesh, taking upon that flesh the penalty for the sins of the whole world. While one of the prisoners that was crucified with Him hung there cursing and accusing Him, and the one on the other side was repenting, Jesus gave up the Ghost, life separated from Him and His head slumped over. "SURELY HE HATH BORNE OUR GRIEFS, AND CARRIED OUR SORROWS: YET WE DID ESTEEM HIM STRICKEN, SMITTEN OF GOD AND AFFLICTED." He was not afflicted in the sense that He was made sick as some might think. No, His affliction was in the form of abuse and torture. Think of the almost unbearable pain as the crown of thorns was rammed down on His head. I can just see the blood run from those thorn pricks, run down on His face and dry there, also his back, where He has been beaten until it is nothing but bloody bruises and gashes. Why? Did you ever ask yourself, why? "He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities." All of our disobedience, all of our ungodly living, all of our rebellious attitudes, and every wrong thing that we have ever done was all laid upon Him, (Jesus) at Calvary. "The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed."

DIVINE HEALING IS A SCRIPTURAL FACT

It is a positive fact that divine healing was in the atonement work at Calvary. A

person who would deny that, would have to deny the word of God. Isaiah prophesied about it, putting it in a future tense setting, but Peter wrote about it in his epistle as a finished work. In other words, it was already accomplished, right? You can read it in 1 Peter 2:24, "BY WHOSE STRIPES YE WERE, YE W-E-R-E, past tense, already healed." Who can argue with that, without being found arguing with God? Let us go now to Psalms 103, and try to get these scriptures all together which speak so positive about divine healing. In verse 1, we read, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases." The spirit of Christ speaking through David, the Psalmist, furnished us with the beautiful words which we have just read. Actually that is part of a song that David sung giving full expression of what the Lord is to mankind, but I want us to turn now to Exodus 15:23-26, "And when they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord shewed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters' were made sweet; there he made for them a, Now listen to what God's word says here. There he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them, And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, (that went with it) I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: FOR I AM THE LORD THAT HEALETH THEE."

I hear people quote that 26th verse often, but I never hear them mention the conditions which were set forth ahead of that promise. When God says that he will do a certain thing, if we do a certain thing, it is not right for us to expect God to do His part unless we do ours. What God told those Israelites to do went way beyond just trying to keep the 10 commandments, they were to keep all his statutes also. Very few people ever really understand just what his statutes were. You can read the Ten Commandments in Exodus, chapter 20, but you have to read Deuteronomy and Leviticus to find out what His statutes were. Now, what does that amount to in relation to the one verse of scripture which says so much? Simply this, even though he said, "I am the Lord that healeth thee," that promise was absolutely conditional. When He said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and will do that which is right in His sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians, He meant that their whole way of life must absolutely be centered around the entire word of God, not just two or three verses. The religious world is full of people who have grabbed two, three, or a half dozen verses of scripture which contain the promises of God for his people, and they have completely ignored the conditions set forth which must be met in order for us to come boldly before the throne of grace to receive the promise. God provided these benefits for his true children, those who would live just as true and clean after they are healed as they do before. You may say, "But Bro. Jackson, there are an awful lot of people getting healed that do not even serve God." I still say the promises and provisions in the scriptures are for the true children of God; they are

the only ones who have a legal right to them, but we do know that God is sovereign, and therefore He can bestow mercy upon who He will, then if they do not live for God, they will have to face Him in judgment. People are guilty of maneuvering the word of God to suit their own particular purpose, just like the Judiastic leaders had been guilty of doing before the first advent of Christ. The more some people study the Bible, the farther they get from the true revelation contained in it, all because they are studying it for the wrong reasons, not really seeking a holy walk with God.

WHAT DID PAUL PREACH?

I mean for us to take this message very slow, giving everyone a chance to look at the Bible, to see just exactly what it has to say on this subject. Let us turn now to 2 Corinthians, chapter 12:1-10 where we will begin to see something if we will watch closely. You must watch the man. I believe you will see something if you will just watch the man. The man is the apostle Paul who authored most of the New Testament letters to the churches. As we study the New Testament, there is not found anywhere, a sermon that Paul preached just on divine healing. You say, "Did he believe in divine healing?" He sure did, but he did not go around preaching divine healing messages, as such. This message may seem strange to some of you, but I am preaching it to clear out some of the cobwebs from people's minds. Remember, the apostle Paul was healed at Damascus. Is that right? Therefore he had every right to believe in the act of divine healing. How is it he never preached a sermon on the

subject, yet he had one of the greatest healing revivals that the Gentiles had ever heard about there at Ephesus? We read in the 19th chapter of Acts, how that God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul; so that from his body were brought unto the sick, handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them. No, it was not because he was preaching divine healing; it was because he was preaching the gospel and in doing so, he made the people to see that God would meet all of their needs. He never even left Ephesus, but they came from miles around to hear this man preach, and when they did, many of them became revealed. Then, as they received personal healing, they probably began thinking about grandma or grandpa or someone else back home who needed to be healed. I can just see them as they began to get the idea to have Paul pray over, or even, just touch a handkerchief or an apron, believing that if they laid that on their sick folks they would be healed. Needless to say, God honored their faith. He healed the sick and the evil spirits went out of them, but Paul still did not preach on divine healing, and neither did he furnish the handkerchiefs and aprons; the people brought them to him. They no doubt brought handkerchiefs from the men, and aprons from the women. This was not just a ten day or two week campaign, either; this meeting lasted for about two years, giving all the people of Asia, ample opportunity to hear of the meeting, and attend the services. I will say this, also, when people came to hear Paul preach, they did not have to sit there for two hours while he took an offering from them. You know how it is in our day; these modern day evangelists will get up when it out to be time for them to start preaching and say, "The Lord showed me that there are

three people in this building that should give one thousand dollars: you know who you are, now who will be first?" Then they will go right on down through five hundred, one hundred, fifty, twenty-five, and they will keep going until they get all the loose pocket change, and then they will preach a little twenty minute sermon on divine healing and call a prayer line, all in the name of the Lord. When the service is over with, the people do not know anymore about God than they did when they came in. Brothers and sisters, time is too short for us to play around with this gospel message that those early Christians loved enough to lay down their very lives for. It is time for us to hear it, and obey it the way they did. We are not going to get off the ground, in the rapture until we do.

PAUL DEFENDS HIS IMAGE

As we go into this 12th chapter of 2nd Corinthians, please remember, Paul has been criticized by the very people that he had established in the faith earlier. They had listened to a bunch of those roving preachers who drift from place to place teaching their private revelations, and their very purpose was to try to diminish Paul's image, casting a reflection on his revelation and his character. Paul knew that he had taught the people right, and that he had not tried to make a name for himself, but now he is facing a situation that must be dealt with; therefore, in chapter 11 we hear him say, verses 2-3, "For I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy; for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve

through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." He goes on to say, in verse 13, (speaking of these men who have stirred up the trouble) "For such are FALSE APOSTLES, deceitful workings, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." Now let us be sure we get the picture here, so we will understand why Paul speaks as he does of himself. These fellows are trying to change the grace of God, trying to change the revelation that God, through Paul, had delivered unto them so clearly. They have gone about it in such a way that it has, no doubt, come to a place where it is Paul's image and character, against theirs, and even though Paul does not like to boast of himself, (and he plainly says so), he finds himself in a situation where he is compelled to glory in his flesh in order to put the others in their place. That brings us up to the place where we will start reading chapter 12, where Paul says, "It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord." In other words, these other fellows must have had a very sweet, appetizing sort of revelation, but they could not hold a candle to the apostle Paul when it came to his, for there was one thing sure, what he preached ten years before, he would still preach, and if you heard him twenty years later, he would still be preaching it the same way. In verse 2 he said, "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago." Now some will say Bro. Jackson, was he still here on earth when all this happened to him? That is not the important part. We are not here to debate

that; that is like straining at a gnat, and swallowing a camel. No, he said, "Whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth." It did not matter to Paul that only God knew whether he was in the body or out of it. He just knew that when the spirit of God came on him, in this experience, he was taken up into glory; whether bodily, or visionary, it did not matter to him. He says, "Such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth);" Therefore if only God knew, and Paul did not, please do not expect me to tell you which it was. The important thing is that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words which were not lawful for a man to utter. We would say, he heard mysterious things. What he heard, were things that he knew it would not be good to talk about down here on earth among mortal, carnal minded beings. Therefore, (in the back of his mind), he just kept that which he had heard, and I am sure he spent much time recalling those words and musing over them, being thankful to God that he was allowed such a privilege, for he knew what they meant. He knew also that if they were told to anyone else it would just start a cycle of people playing with those words, and cause an endless string of questions, so he just kept all this to himself. But now the time has come for him to deal with the situation at hand and find him glorying in the experience that he had been keeping quiet about. Verse 5, "Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities." You must catch what he means here or it will sound confusing to you. What he is saying is, I will glory in the inner man; there is nothing wrong with him. Paul is in an area of dealing with the two natures of man, that which is

spiritual, and that which is natural; therefore, (by the help of God) I want to explain what he is saying, in common everyday language, and try to show you what it would actually lead to if you interpret it wrong. "Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities." In other words he could glory in the inner man for he was without fault, but when it came to the outer man, (the flesh) he said, I will not say too much for him; he doesn't look so good, meaning, of course, if he started talking about his flesh, he would be faced with how he appeared in the eyes of others. He might have been bald headed, rough skinned, snaggletoothed, and who knows what else. Remember now, as we read verse 6, this is Paul talking. "For though I would desire to glory, (Do you see? He said he would like to.) I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me." You can see here that he has dropped his whole line of thought down to a fleshly level. He says, I do not want to glory about that, realizing that it was his flesh that had been compared to these men who had caused the disturbance among these Corinthian people. No doubt these fellows had a way about them that, compared to Paul, they stood out and presented a better image in looks and personality and that sort of thing. Paul realizing just what was going on, and where he stood, he said, "For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool, for I will say the truth, but now I forbear, (or I will only go so far with it, lest some of you start thinking of me above that which you are able to see in me), or that he heareth of me." To see him, and to hear him, was to know him after his natural makeup, and it was Paul's desire for them to hear, "Thus saith the Lord," without having the human

vessel exalted. You know yourselves, that some very ordinary looking people (as far as the flesh is concerned) can go around talking of their spiritual experiences in the Lord, to the point where some will begin to look upon them as something special. They will begin to exalt them above other people, and at times, look upon them as deity, even to the point of bowing down to worship them. Paul avoided anything, and everything that could lead to a situation like that. He certainly did not want any glory that belonged to God, therefore he refrained from entering into any kind of boasting that might have caused some to stumble.

MESSENGER OF SATAN

Now as we go into verse 7, we find another thought opened up, a thorn in his flesh. I said earlier that this is a very controversial subject, therefore I want us to go into it thoroughly with the thought of getting our minds settled once and for all as to what this thorn in his flesh was. Let us read verse 7, "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, (not in his soul, it was in his flesh), the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." I will never forget reading what one man wrote on this subject. In his reasoning he made this statement, "If Paul's thorn in the flesh was a physical affliction as some say, just imagine him being so boastful, so disobedient that God would have to deal with him in that way." Now I just want to

leave that statement right there for now, and deal with what Paul said about it. In verse we find him saying, "For this thing I sought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me." I believe with all my heart that at least three times he had shut himself away, no doubt, with fasting and prayer for a number of days, where he cried out to God for deliverance from this thing. I believe it was more than just a little bedroom prayer at night. This was something that hindered him, and he felt that he should be rid of it, but look what the answer of God was to him, 8 "And he (God) said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for MY STRENGTH is made perfect in weakness." What was sufficient? God's grace. God did not deliver him from this thing, He just gave him sufficient grace to go ahead and do whatever he had to do. Brothers and sisters, consider this, the thing that plagued Paul to the point where he sought deliverance from the Lord had to be in only one of three particular areas, namely, PHYSICAL, SPIRITUAL OR MORAL; there is no fourth area for it to fall in. It was something that reminded him of himself, and no doubt, drove him to prayer many times during the course of his ministry. I am sure you know that I could just make a flat statement as to what I believe this thorn in the flesh was, but many of you would not be satisfied with that, therefore, we are going to look at this from every logistical standpoint, giving you the opportunity of discovering for yourselves just what the scripture makes clear to us. We will finish verse 9, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." This word infirmity or infirmities, did not mean that he was such a sick man that he had to be carried around on a cot all the time. Though this word infirmity is used in the plural, we still must remember that the word THORN is

singular, and by this we know that he had one particular thing that was constantly flaring up to give him trouble. We would say it was a pricking sort of reminder that he had his limitations. It was something that would gouge at him from time to time, and he has come to the place of recognizing why God allowed such a thing to be, so he has learned to trust in the grace of God without constantly feeling sorry for himself. 10, "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." Did you notice as we read that verse, that he mentioned many things that do not even fall in the category of infirmities? They are identities of God's dealings, and of Satan's harassment and accusations thrown against him. Some of these things do not even pertain to the flesh. The term, reproaches, for instance, that probably had to do with people telling lies about him. Who could say that was a thorn in the flesh? They lied about Jesus too. After reproaches, he mentions necessities. I hope you realize, Paul was not a rich man, material wise; he found himself broke many times, during the course of his travels. We can see that in some of the letters he wrote to other churches. He speaks of persecutions here, and certainly we have no trouble finding where he had persecutions. Every time he went into a Jewish synagogue, when he would get a little too deep in the word for the, and talk about the Messiah from his present day viewpoint, sure enough they would grab him, and his companions, whoever they might be, and out the door they would cast them. That was not infirmities: that was just plain persecutions. Unwelcome, unaccepted, unrecognized and hated by many, he continued to do what God had called him to do. I might say also that some of his

persecution turned out to be exceedingly rough on the flesh, but it still did not fall into the category of infirmities. On one particular occasion they waylaid him and Silas and took them before the magistrates making accusations against them because of what they taught, and the result was that, after they had laid many stripes on them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely. Do you know what they did? At midnight Paul and Silas began praying and singing praises to God. They did not have any fancy guitars, nor amplifiers, nor any kind of public address equipment; all they had was just two plain old crude voices, probably singing about the amazing grace of God, giving praise to him who is able to grant them victory in every situation. The more they sang, the happier they got, and the happier they got, the louder they got, until they could be heard throughout the whole area. The other prisoners got to listening, the angels got to listening, and it sounded so sweet in heaven, do you know what happened? The Lord sent an angel to shake those prison doors until they swung open, and at that time everyone's bands were loosed. I know what some of you are thinking, but Bro. Jackson, the Bible says it was an earthquake that shook that prison. You have heard me say it before, but I will say it again, whenever you find God intervening in the affairs of man, you will always find him working through angels, then when we look into the scriptures, we find many places where an angel came down, and there was a great earthquake.

GOOD NEWS FOR THE JAILER

I am sure most of you have recognized by now that we are talking about the events recorded in the 16th chapter of Acts, and we find that after the earthquake had shook all the doors of the prison until they swung open, and all the prisoners were loosed from their restraining bands, the old jailer awakened from his sleep, and discovered what had happened. At that, he drew his sword and would have killed himself, knowing that if he had allowed all those prisoners to escape, he would be killed anyhow, but the apostle Paul spoke just at the right time, saying, "Do thyself no harm: for we are all here." That was the best news the old jailer had heard for a long time. He called for a light, and came running down the corridor until he reached the cell where Paul and Silas were, then he rushed in and fell at their feet trembling. When he regained control of himself, he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? He knew who they were, and he knew why they were in there, and he had heard and seen enough to know that they had God on their side. They answered him, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

PRAYING FOR YOUR FAMILY

Right here is a good opportunity for me to answer a question that is often asked, "Bro. Jackson do I have a right to claim my household for the Lord?" Yes, claim them, hold them up before God in prayer, and do everything you can to set a Christian example before them, but remember, every last one of them is personally responsible to God for their own salvation. You cannot answer to

God for them. Therefore if you see circumstances farther on down the road that makes it appear that God is not going to work on behalf of one or two of them, do not become discouraged to the point where you throw up your hands in defeat. Remember God is sovereign, and he works according to his own council, but if you will claim your family members, and hold them up before God in prayer, you will have that special feeling toward them that will care for them and set a proper example before them. Nevertheless, I am persuaded that Paul answered the jailer as he did because of divine inspiration. It was not standard procedure for one member of a family to believe, and obligate God to save the whole family. I am thinking of what Jesus said in the 10th chapter of Matthew, "A man's foes shall be those of his own household." On the other hand we do have scriptural examples such as the household of Cornelius, where the whole house was saved, but it was because each and every one of them believed the gospel, and personally accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their savior. It was the same way here in Acts 15; God had the scene already set up, and he inspired Paul to answer the jailer as he did, but they preached the gospel to the whole family, and they baptized every one of them because they everyone believed. You will find that in the 34th verse; he believed in God WITH his whole house. Now let me admonish you, trust God, let your request be made known to him, and pray for your whole family, but do not find fault with God if everything does not go as you would have it to. Remember the words of Paul, spoken to the Romans, "Shall the thing that is formed, say unto him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour and another unto dis-

honour?" Yes, God will work out his plan for the ages, and he will do it with, or without, our individual cooperation, but I will go so far as to say this, If you are in the plan of God and you refuse to cooperate, you can expect Him to slap you around until you do start cooperating with Him. You say, "Will God do that?" I talk like this to get your attention; not to be silly, nor foolish, but God does know how to get your attention. When I was knocked off of my tractor by a drunken driver, and later, lay in that hospital with my head and face split open, I did not need anyone to tell me that God was trying to get my attention. It took that for him to get it, and I have been carrying the scar ever since, but I will say this, when God gets finished talking to you after an ordeal like that, you do not have any trouble remembering. I imagine Paul (if he was still alive) would testify to that. He could never have forgotten his experience on the Damascus road that day. I will only testify for myself on this next statement. When I came to my senses, there in the hospital, I did not need to ask anyone why that had happened; I asked them what had happened, but not why. When I became conscious enough to think, it was like a small voice deep inside me saying, "I know why this has happened; it is to bring my heart to God." Then I am reminded of the scripture that says, "And we know all things work together for good to them that love God, (not to the whole world, but to them that love God), to them who are the called according to his purpose." As we meditate on the things that have happened along life's journey, this scripture will, many times, give us new courage to face the challenge of life.

A THORN GOUGES THE FLESH

Now, back to Paul, back to the thought of his infirmities, and the thorn in his flesh. I have said many times before, there are only three categories for this to be fitted into; it must be one of the three. He refers to it as a thorn in his flesh. How many of you have ever had a briar stuck deep down in your finger? You who have will remember that, after it has been in there awhile, if you do not rub it the wrong way, it doesn't feel too bad, but every once in awhile you would pick up something in a way that would put pressure on the spot and you would feel the prick or gouge. At that you would think, "I wish I could get that thing out of there." The reason he spoke of this as a thorn in his flesh was because a thorn is a gouging thing; it gouges the flesh. You might say, he had to be careful how he conducted himself, for every so often he would feel a gouge, and he said God gave it to him. You may say, "I thought the devil was always the one who does things like that." The devil is only the instrument; look at the reason why it was given to him and you will know that it was God ordained. Verse 7 tells us that it was to keep him from being exalted beyond what he should be as a result of the heavenly vision which he had received.

PHYSICAL - SPIRITUAL - MORAL?

Remember now, in the beginning of the message I said, "watch the man." As we reason this thing out by the scriptures,

remember Paul wrote these letters, and he is the one who preached divine healing to the Gentiles as he preached the gospel to them with all of its benefits. If this thing was not a physical condition that flared up ever so often, then we ought to be able to establish by the scriptures just exactly what it was. Let us say, for the sake of exploring every avenue, that this was something that pricked his spirit every so often. His spirit in his soul, and we all know that a thing like that can be hid; it is not necessary for others to know of something that is not visible. Deep inside your heart you may be pressed down, burdened, very grieved; something may have your inner being in a turmoil, but that does not mean that others have to know. I know you have met, and probably could name someone right now that carries such a burden, but at the same time, that person, if asked, "How are you today," might say, "Just fine, never been better." Now, not everyone has that kind of victory, but the point I am making is this, if Paul's trouble had been in his spirit, it would not have been openly obvious to those he preached to. He would have kept it hid from them. We will consider this some more later, but right now I want to open up the third area of man's trouble, and see if we can lay Paul's thorn there. If it was not a physical condition, nor a spiritual problem, that leaves only one other area that it could be; there is no fourth area for consideration. If it was not one of the first two, then it would have to be a moral problem, something that pertained to his fleshly nature. It would have to be a human weakness that he was not able to overcome; something like a drinking habit, or some other human weakness. If it was something like that, then the other two categories are eliminated. We have to settle it by the scriptures; therefore we will read some

other scriptures to see what we can learn.

WHY GO BACK INTO BONDAGE?

You probably know that Corinth and Galatia were not too far apart, and that the Galatian letter and the Corinthian letters were written fairly close together, so let us turn to Galatians and read what Paul wrote to them concerning the same problem that he has been writing to the Corinthians about. The Galatian letter was written first. It seems that some one had gone behind Paul and perverted his teaching, telling these Galatians that now that they had believed, they could only be made perfect by keeping the law. He, or they, which ever the case was, had them trying to keep the law of Moses, and observing certain days, and so forth, which caused Paul to write to them using some very strong words. In the first chapter he said, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." We will hold those verses in our minds and go over to the 4th chapter where we will begin to read, starting with the 8th verse. Listen to what Paul says, "Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, (meaning, when they were still pagans, before they had the gospel preached to them), ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. (In other words, you

served all those pagan deities.) But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, (This is Paul's way of reminding them that it was his revelation that had introduced them to God, or made known to them who God really is, and how that they, even as pagans, could be reconciled to that God by grace, through the Lord Jesus Christ.) How turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?" Paul is taking this opportunity to remind them of who, and where they were, before he brought to them the gospel of grace. He is reminding them that they were just pagans, serving other gods which were not really gods at all. He calls their former ways, the weak and beggarly ways, and questions them for turning back to such, after having a revelation of the true God presented to them. He says, "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and yeas. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain." In other words all these things are vain, for those who have been accepted into God's plan of grace and mercy. He was trying to get them to see that they were placing themselves under bondage, and that all such effort is vain. But, after all of this admonition he still refers to them as brothers in faith. 12, "Brethren, I beseech you, (or I beg you), be as I am; for I am as ye are: (now notice this next statement), Ye have not injured me at all." Paul had received word that, because of these other teachings he was no longer highly esteemed as a great man of God. His image had been cut down to about 8 inches tall. Whoever those other characters were, they had purposely conducted themselves in such a way, as to diminish Paul's image, and influence on these Galatians, but Paul is telling them that they have not injured him. Praise God, he knew where he

stood with God regardless of what had been said about him. He is the one who said, "I know in whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him, against that day." This man knew what he was talking about. He told them right in the very beginning that the things he had taught them did not come by another mortal man, for he had been taught by the resurrected Christ himself. A man like that does not change his teaching every few weeks. You could hear him ten years later, and he would still hold to what he had taught the first time. Hallelujah! That is revelation. That is why he could say to them, If any man, or even an angel ever preaches anything contrary to what we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. He was absolutely sure that what he had preached was right; therefore he was not the least bit hesitant to reach all the way into the heavenlies and include angels in what he had to say.

PREACH THE WORD

We will now read verse 13, and I want you to notice exactly what he has to say in these next verses. 13, "Ye know how that through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first." Now he said, "THROUGH INFIRMITY OF THE FLESH, I PREACHED THE GOSPEL UNTO YOU," and some will say, "Now wait a minute, Bro. Jackson, if you preach like that, it will not stimulate faith in those who need healing." I beg your pardon; what I am saying is truth, and Paul taught it, and those Galatians saw his difficulty, or infirmity, and God still honored his ministry. You just do not

change the word of God to make it fit someone's expectations; you preach the word just like it is, regardless of circumstances, and God, who is sovereign, will see that it does not return unto him without accomplishing His will and purpose. Whatever God has done in our individual lives will never change his word; the word always remains the same. We have to find ourselves in the word; that is the important thing. Now, if someone should ask the questions, "Do you people at Faith Assembly believe in divine healing?" Absolutely, but we do not have to hide any of the word of God in order to have faith for it. We want to understand one thing: if we believe in divine healing, we want to get it straight, as we see it portrayed, and demonstrated, and lived, through the entire book, and not try to work it off of 2 or 3 verses of scripture. The fact of divine healing is established throughout the entire book. Here we find Paul reminding these Galatians that they knew of the infirmity of his flesh from the very first time he came to them: which takes us back to something I said earlier. If Paul's thorn had been in his spirit, why was it so plain for everyone to see, and know about? Why was he reminding them in this letter? If he had a spiritual problem, he certainly could not help anyone by constantly harping about it, but on the other hand, if it was an obvious infirmity of the flesh, it could not be hid, and therefore it would be alright to talk about it when deemed necessary.

PAUL'S THORN - EYE TROUBLE

I will ask you another question, if Paul's trouble was a moral problem, how could he speak to others with such boldness, and confidence, in dealing with moral issues, such as the one in 1 Corinthians, chapter 5, where a man was living with his own father's wife? He spoke as a man who was blameless before God, in dealing with every problem in the churches. Now we find him speaking of an infirmity of the flesh. Is that a sin? Should he feel guilty because of it? Of course not. You all know better than that. Now listen to verse 14. "And my temptation, (or testing), which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus." You all know how some people are; they will say, "I don't want a sick man praying for me." Shame on any brother or sister that would talk like that. That is being childish. Actually, it is very carnal. What has my infirmity got to do with the grace of God working on your behalf? Are you trying to get a free ride on some other person's faith? If you have your faith anchored in the finished work at Calvary, it will not matter what kind of infirmity the minister might have; that will not hinder God in the least. Paul said, (to use my own words), "Even though I have this trouble physically, when I came to you the first time, that did not make any difference at all. You even accepted me as though I were Jesus Christ himself, and in so doing, you gave me your full approval." Then, in verse 15, he says, "Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? For I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me." Why? Why would they have been willing to pluck out their own eyes and give them to Paul? We all realize that this could have been just a figure of speech; there is no argument there, but, on the other hand, if this thorn in his flesh was

occasional blindness, that would explain some other verses of scripture: one of which I will read to you from the 16th chapter of Romans, verse 22. "I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord." Do you see what I am getting at? This man Tertius, says he wrote the epistle to the Romans, yet it is written in the very verbal speech of the apostle Paul. Why did not Paul write it himself? He was there. I believe it was because the apostle Paul was blinded when the Lord met him in the form of that great light on the road to Damascus, and how that for three days he could not see until a man named Ananias put his hands on him and prayed for him to receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost. Now, I know some of you will say, "But Bro. Jackson, if the Lord healed him, why would you think he still had trouble with his eyes? I will answer a question like that, with this. I believe that God healed him so that he never went blind again, but there could have been a lingering weakness that would flare up from time to time, causing Paul to refer to it as a thorn in the flesh, something that would gouge him from time to time. Ananias prayed for him to receive his sight, and he received it, and as far as we know, he was never blind again, but that would not mean that he did not suffer some weakness in his eyes, causing him to have other men do his writing. It was not because he could not write, for you will remember, he was a member of the Sanhedrin Court, the supreme council of the Jews, during post-exile times. He described himself as a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and blameless, as far as keeping the law of Moses. It would be ridiculous for anyone to think he was not capable of doing his own writing, except for some physical hindrance. He went on to say that even though he had so many things to his credit, he counted them all

as dung (animal waste) that he might win Christ. In other words, even though his education had more or less gone to his head, in former days, he now considers obedience to Christ to be the most important of all.

REVELATION COMES FROM GOD

Many people try to interpret the Bible to fit someone's experience, but if we are to be scripturally realistic, we will have to interpret our experiences to fit the Bible. It is really the sovereignty of God that we read about in the scriptures; it is also the sovereignty of God that gives some people these outstanding testimonies. For instance, I read about one woman who had been taken with a disease since childhood; she had been prayed for by every Holy Ghost filled Christian that knew her, seemingly, to no avail; all the doctors had given up on her, having done all they could do. Then, God, in his sovereignty, came to her, and told her exactly what he would do, when he would do it, and that she was to let her friends and neighbors know about it. Many of them came, doubting that it would happen, but God is faithful; he does what he says he will do. That woman has traveled all over the world giving this healing testimony. Can we interpret the Bible by this testimony? Of course not; God is sovereign, the next case might be dealt with completely different from this one. One thing is sure though; the time is at hand for God's chosen people to gain understanding of what is written in this old black book, (the Bible). When we begin to get our minds clear from those

old hand-me-down, traditional ideas, we will discover that we do not have anything to boast about, for we are all subjects of God's bountiful grace. Nevertheless, some of us need a reminder, from time to time, and that is what we want to see from this little message. As we think back to our text, in 2 Corinthians, chapter 12, why do you suppose Paul talked in such terms as this, "AND LEST I SHOULD BE EXALTED?" Why would a Holy Ghost Christian man need something to keep him from being exalted above measure anyhow? You must remember that we all have an inherited nature that will exalt the flesh if we do not keep that nature under subjection to the inner man which is renewed by the spirit. In the case of Paul, remember, he was a Jew, and Jews had always looked upon Gentiles as dogs, something unclean. Paul himself stated that in his letter to the Romans, and here he finds himself faced with the responsibility of preaching the gospel of grace to them, telling them that they also, are to be partakers of the grace and mercy of the God of the Jews. It was not the purpose of God to pick up some pagan, fill him with the Holy Ghost, school him with revelation of the scriptures, and send him to preach to the Gentiles. No, when God was ready to present the gospel to the Gentiles, he chose a Jew named Saul, struck him blind, then healed his eyes, filled him with the Holy Ghost, changed his name to Paul, took him into the desert, alone, and taught him, by the spirit, what the Old Testament scriptures was all about. None of the New Testament had been written at that time, and Paul knew what was written in the Old Testament; all he needed was understanding of what it was all about. That is the reason he spoke to the Galatians as he did, chapter 1, verses 11-18, "But I certify you brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not

after man. 12, For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. 13, For ye have heard of my conversion in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: 14, And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. 15, But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, 16, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen: immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: (meaning, he did not enroll in a seminary, nor seek instructions from any other man). 17, Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, (alone with God, and his scrolls), and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days." From these verses, it is easy for us to see how a man that had growed up from childhood, looking upon the Gentiles as common and unclean, nothing but dogs, could still have a tendency to do so if God had not dealt with him as he did. Somehow, God would not let Paul align himself with the church at Jerusalem. It would have worked for Paul's convenience if he could have, but God had not called him to preach to the Jews in Israel. He was to go to the Jews in dispersion, and from that his ministry was to reach to the Gentiles. The Gentiles had always been a filthy people. Their morals were filthy; their religious ideas were blasphemous and filthy; therefore, every Jew looked down on them, and gouged them every chance they had, they could not help it; it was there nature to do so. For this reason we believe Paul would have done his share of gouging, especially, knowing

what he did, as a result of his heavenly vision.

PRAY - THEN TRUST GOD

Now, says Paul, "And lest I should be exalted above measure THROUGH THE ABUNDANCE OF THE REVELATIONS, there was given to me a THORN IN THE FLESH, (SOMETHING THAT PRICKS AND GOUGES) the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure," Tell me now, can we separate the thorn in his flesh from the messenger of Satan? Would we not have to say that the messenger of Satan, and the thorn in his flesh, are the same thing? If you will take a good look at verse 7, you will see that they are, and certainly, Paul is not saying that he has tuberculosis, nor heart trouble, nor arthritis, or anything like that. What he says does not mean anything like that at all. If this thorn in his flesh was the messenger of Satan, then it had to be a spirit behind some physical ailment. Paul said he had sought the Lord three times on behalf of it, and every time the Lord had answered him by saying, "My grace is sufficient for thee." God did not need to keep him humble by dumping a basket full of various diseases upon him: just something to remind him that he could be blind, groping for someone to lead him, if it were not for the mercy of God. After God answered him as He did, (the third time), Paul reconciled himself to the fact that this was something he was going to have to learn to live with, for God said, "My strength is made perfect in weakness." This caused Paul to say, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities." This did not make him a Catholic taking an attitude like that; it just

meant that after he had prayed about it the third time, he came to see that the very thing he was trying to get rid of was actually serving a purpose of God in his life. Now, to explain what I mean by what I said, How many times have you heard Catholic people say, "The Lord suffered for us; therefore we ought to suffer for him?" That is a very foolish way for a person to look at his health, when the Bible declares that, "By his stripes we were healed." If God does not show you that a certain infirmity is for a specific purpose, like He did the apostle Paul, then you have no right to take an attitude like that. I have notice also, that the people who say they believe it is the will of God for us to suffer are always going to the doctor, and taking medicine, in an effort to get rid of the suffering and be healed. Do you see any conflict there? In other words, if we really believe a thing is the will of God for our lives, then we are very foolish to fight against it in any way whatsoever. On the other hand, if we really are concerned about the will of God we ought to find out what the Bible teaches, and try our best to live by it.

BEING SURE

Brothers and sisters: I pray that we can get a proper understanding of the whole word of God, rather than just hold on to a verse of scripture somewhere. If we will examine the whole word of God, we will see how he has dealt with others; then we will be in a better frame of mind to let God work out the affairs of our lives. For, we see here that the apostle Paul could only glory in this one thing, and he knew why it was there. Realizing that this particular infirmity was given to him to

keep him humble, he could say, "I will rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." He came to the place where he realized that, if a man becomes proud and puffed up, if he gets to the place where he exalts himself, he is void of the anointing of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why, (in his letter to the Galatians), he could even call angels into account. He had so submitted himself unto the Lord that there was no question in his mind, as to whether the gospel that he preached was right or not. Brother, I want you to know, when you start calling angels into account of what you are preaching, you had better know what you are talking about. Up until that hour, no man had ever talked like that before. His boldness to speak like he did to the Galatians is one of the things that causes us to rule out the fact that Paul's thorn in his flesh was any kind of a moral problem. Now, while we are speaking of the Galatian letter, let me remind you once again of how he said to them, "YE KNOW how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first." 4:13. The thing I appreciate about the apostle Paul, is his consistent speech; if he called his condition an infirmity of the flesh in one of his letters, you can expect him to call it that in all of them. He did not have a half dozen different terms for the same thing. The only exception is in our text where he actually identified the accusing spirit that would gouge him at various times. In other words he had an infirmity of the flesh, something no doubt, that he had seen others healed of (by the power of God) when he preached the gospel to them, or maybe, when he just prayed for them, but instead of being healed himself, he had this satanic spirit constantly following him around, probably saying something like this, "If you are who you say you are, why is it

that you do not get healed? Or maybe he would hear something like this, "If this God you speak of is so great, why does he not heal your eyes?" You know, people are not too likely to exalt themselves when they have a constant reminder that they are only spared by the grace and mercy of God.

LEARNING THE TRUTH

Many people have a tendency to think the apostle Paul was a sickly person because he spoke of his infirmities, but let me point out to you that the life he lived was not that of a person with many different infirmities. He did not have tuberculosis one time, heart trouble another, and arthritis another. No, he had the one thing that aggravated him at various times, and for that reason he spoke of his infirmities in plural terms. Please notice also that right after he reminded them of his testing in his flesh, he goes right ahead in verse 15 to say, "You would have plucked out your own eyes and have given them to me." As I said before, that lets us know where his trouble was. They would not have been willing to pluck out their eyes and give them to him, if his eyes were good, and his heart was bad. That would not even make sense to talk like that. Some of you will no doubt say, (in your heart), what difference does it make anyhow? Some have said the same thing about the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and they have asked the same question about the Seventieth Week of Daniel, and the woman of Revelation, chapter 12, and many other things which we teach, but let me remind you that the Bible is not just a book full of stories, put

there to fill up space. The men who wrote these various letters of the New Testament, and prophecies of the Old Testament were inspired of God to do so, and our knowledge of God comes from that which is written in the pages of this blessed old book; therefore if we do not understand it right, we miss the picture all together. For too long now, people have had the idea that everyone ought to be able to interpret the Bible as each one sees fit to do so, but let me remind you that, even though the government of your particular country may grant you this privilege, God is not obligated to give you the same privilege. The word of God itself declares that there is no private interpretation of the scriptures, and 2 Timothy 3:16-17, plainly tells us that all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for DOCTRINE, for REPROOF, for CORRECTION, and for INSTRUCTION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS: That the man of God may be PERFECT, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. I will say also, the very people who say, "What difference does it make?" are usually the ones who you will find arguing the most, about these subjects. Brothers and sisters: knowing the truth about these various subjects, will enable you to move in the will and purpose of God in these areas. I have asked the question, Who wrote the book of Isaiah which speaks of the great promise of a deliverer who would bear our griefs, and carry our sorrows, and by whose stripes we are healed. The obvious answer is Isaiah, naturally. Then I asked the question, "Who wrote these letters in the New Testament that speak so clearly of the fact that Paul had an infirmity of the flesh?" You will say, "Paul, of course." Now, my point is this, God is not a fool, and neither is he confused; if he had wanted any other image established than what you see in the book, he would have

known how to get it done. If it had been the purpose of God for the apostle Paul to cover up the fact that he had an infirmity of the flesh, he would not have needed to speak of it as he did. It all boils down to the fact that he had nothing to hide; the power of God was present to vindicate the gospel Paul preached, and that is what it was all about anyway. Paul, like the others, went forth preaching the gospel, and the Lord went with him, confirming the word that he preached; therefore he did not have to hide his physical infirmity from the people in order to get them to believe. He left the believing part in the hands of God, realizing that if God was not drawing them by his spirit, it would be impossible for them to believe anyhow. Jesus made that clear in John 6:44, when He said, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."

A REMINDER

I realize that a message like this can get a little lengthy, but I would like to take a little more time to reason these things out with you, and try, by the help of God to set divine healing, and Paul's thorn in the flesh, in their proper place. When we are dealing with a subject like this, it is most essential that we get the truth of it planted in our minds and hearts, then as God deals with our individual lives, we will find ourselves walking right down through the middle of God's perfect will for us. I believe we have furnished enough scripture to prove beyond any doubt that Paul's thorn in the flesh was none other than a physical condition in his body, and we have showed you why we believe it was his eyes that caused his trouble; a

condition left over from the healing of them, after having been struck blind on the road to Damascus. I know some of you will say, "That just cannot be, but can you produce scripture to back up your opinion? I remember something that I heard Oral Roberts say while giving his testimony, years ago. He said that when he was a small child it was hard for him to say three words without stuttering; he just could not get the words out. We have all heard people like that try to talk; some of them go through life without ever being able to talk plain. That was not the case with Oral Roberts; God healed him, but in his testimony he told how that every once in a while he would catch himself right on the verge of stuttering. Then he said, "All I can say is, God just lets it happen for a reminder to me of how it could have been if he had not healed me." In other words he could say, (deep down in his heart), "Lord, I thank you for what you have done; This is 100 percent better than it used to be." I do not know if any of you have ever stuttered or not, but if you have, and if God has touched that condition, so that you no longer are troubled by it, you know how grateful a person can be for such a deliverance, even if you do find yourself right on the brink of stuttering every once in a while. There are many times that God actually heals people by a miraculous means, and yet those people, many times, will carry the symptoms of their former ailments for many years. Should we say that they are not healed just because they have a symptom every so often that reminds them of the condition they were in? Absolutely not; we do not treat the grace of God like that.

HARMONIZING THE SCRIPTURES

Let me call your attention back to a verse of scripture that we have read already, but did not finish dealing with. We have certain scriptures in the Bible that people use exclusively in an effort to establish a certain school of thought, but I want to remind you that a single verse of scripture will only carry you so far, and then you need another one to carry you the rest of the way. I do not mean to imply that God does not speak positive; he does, but we have a whole book (the Bible), that must harmonize with our understanding of each verse we like to use. Now, turn with me to Psalms 34:19, and I will show you how some people use this verse from all other verses of scripture that carry the same word, then we can use it for certain schools of thought, but that is not handling the scriptures as Paul told Timothy when he admonished him to study to show himself approved unto God, not man, but God. What, then, are we going to study in the scriptures. We realize of course, that the only thing Timothy had to study was the Old Testament; the New Testament had not been written at that time. What we are looking at now is the word affliction, (A-F-F-L-I-C-T-I-O-N) which people use to describe sickness, disease and such like. In our modern terminology the word is generally accepted to mean sickness, disease, infirmity and etc., but it was not used like that in the Old Testament. I looked up more than 30 times where the word affliction was used in the Old Testament, and every single instance, the word was used to express humiliation, debasement, ridicule, false accusations, persecutions, and so forth.

Now, you say, "Bro. Jackson, you will have to prove that." Well, that is what we intend to do. Turn back to Isaiah 53:6-7, "All we like sheep have gone astray; (That is you and I, we did not know the way, but he, the good shepherd, is the one who sought us, found us, and showed us the way. We did not seek him; therefore he used different ways to search for us and get our attention.) All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." How true that is. Every one of us, when we came into this old world, took on a mind of our own; we decided what we were going to do, and headed down the pathway of life. It is only by the grace of God that we did not destroy ourselves, but God is able to woo us, and turn us from our ways, into His ways, praise His name. In the foreknowledge of God He already knew what each one of us would do, and while mankind was running away from God, He laid on Him, (Christ), the iniquity of us all. While we were outside of His grace, the Lord Jesus Christ bore our transgressions in his flesh at Calvary; The innocent suffering for the guilty. He was our substitute; He took our place, and died for every one of us. Now, notice verse 7, (speaking of Christ), "He was oppressed, (pressed down, burdened, heavy hearted, lonely, etc.; He had to feel that way in order to know what you and I would feel like at times), and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth." Did you catch that: He was afflicted, not sick, but afflicted. How could a man who was perfect, be sick? I believe you can see that the word afflicted, as Isaiah used it here, had no physical sickness attached to it, but for the benefit of those who may ask, "What was His affliction," let me remind you of the times when He stood preaching, and someone would yell to Him in a way to poke fun at Him. For instance, one time when He was

preaching, a fellow yelled to Him. "Hey Preacher, is it permissible for a man to put away his wife for every cause? What do you suppose that pertained to? It had been noised abroad, that He preached a message that covered marriage and divorce, (in the Beatitudes), that had upset the whole social structure of Israel in that hour. To paraphrase even farther let us say it like this, "Hey Preacher, preach us another sermon on marriage and divorce." Those Scribes and Pharisees would do, or say, anything to gouge him publicly, trying to get the people to boo Him. Think of how many times He was accused of being an illegitimate child, and all the times that He was called a devil, or a false prophet. He was accused of being an insurrectionist, one who would not honor established authority, a trouble maker who defied the law of Moses, and such like. Those religious leaders would stop at nothing in their effort to destroy His character, belittle Him, and get Him ridiculed by the crowds that gathered around Him. Even so, you could never say that He was sick. As I said before, in our day, the word we are dealing with is commonly used in referring to sickness, disease, and infirmity, but the Bible was not written in our day; therefore we must study it with these things in mind in order to get a true picture.

NEW BIBLE OR HOLY GHOST?

I am constantly amazed at some of the modern day terminology that is being used in these liberal versions of the Bible. Many of them are detrimental to a true revelation of the original scriptures, and people do themselves an injustice when

these modern versions of the Bible are all that they study. I have always maintained that a person does not need a new translation of the Bible, for what they really need is the Holy Ghost, and a mind that will submit to him. If a man is looking for an easy way, then he needs one of those modern Bibles, but if he has the Holy Ghost, and is seeking truth, the old time tested book is all that he needs. You may say, "But, Bro. Jackson, some of those words in the King James version are not translated right either." Let me say this to you, if you have the Holy Ghost He will balance out the difference as you study different verses on a particular subject. Brothers and sisters: I could give you a long list of these scriptures dealing with the word affliction, and for the benefit of you who would like to check up on some of these I will name a few of them. Exodus 3:7, Deuteronomy 16:3, Psalm 119:50, Isaiah 30:20, 48:10, Jeremiah 4:15, Hosea 5:15, Mark 4:17. This one in Mark is where Jesus was explaining the parable of the seed sower speaking of those who fell upon the stony ground, he said, "They have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended." This is in reference to people who number into the thousands, which, when they hear the word they receive it with great joy, but when the persecution and afflictions begin to be heaped upon them they forsake their new joy and return to the world. Not because they are sick or diseased, but because they are AFFLICTED with ridicule and persecutions.

BONDS AND AFFLICTIONS

Let us turn to Acts 20:23. This is where Paul is bearing witness to something that the Holy Ghost has prophesied to him through other yielded vessels. We hear him saying in verse 22, "I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: 23, Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me." Now the Holy Ghost did not say bonds and sickness was awaiting him at Jerusalem; he already had the thorn in his flesh, but now he is finding out that imprisonment and AFFLICTIONS are ahead of him, meaning trials, tests, persecution, and all that he suffered at the hands of those who hated him. He had already learned to live with the thorn in his flesh; the messenger of Satan that buffeted him to keep him humble. One might ask the questions, "Why would God entrust such a revelation to a man that was likely to give himself over to boasting, and become a little too proud of himself?" The reason is this, Paul was called of God to be the apostle to the Gentiles, and any Jew that God would have chosen would have been subject to that same temptation, for that is the way Jews reacted to Gentiles in that day. If they were walking down the street and happened to see a Gentile somewhere, it was like they had seen a skunk; they would head for the nearest way that would allow them to avoid contaminating themselves by getting too close to him. If God had not allowed Paul to have this thorn in his flesh as a reminder of the grace of God bestowed upon him, do you think he would have given his life over to ministering to the Gentiles? They (the Jews), had the law; they had the prophets; this gave them a feeling of security which caused them to be proud and boastful, and for centuries they had looked down upon all Gentiles. Now the

apostle Paul is faced with the responsibility of ministering the gospel to these dogs, these people who were looked upon as scum of the earth. He is to stand in the place of exemplifying Christ Jesus, who had suffered and died for all mankind. How could he have compassion for the people that were such a reproach to every Jew, expressing love and concern for their souls, unless God did something to humble him? If you will think upon these things, you will answer your own question. Paul was raised to observe the strictest letter of the law. He knew the law was given to the Jews, and he was very proud of his accomplishments as a Pharisee, but then he met the Master on the Damascus road. After that, God gave him a revelation that the Gentiles were to be partakers of the gospel without the deeds of the law, being saved and filled with the Holy Ghost without knowing anything about the law of Moses. When Paul got that revelation down in his soul he was ready to fight for it, and stand for it against any odds. What better man could the Lord have chosen than Paul? He was raised in a Gentile environment. He knew what their lives were like, and he knew about their heathen ways of worship. We would have to say (from a natural standpoint of course), that Paul was well equipped to fulfill the apostleship to the Gentiles. Fulfilling that office brought him much persecution from those, who formerly, were his colleagues. They would get so mad at him that they remind you of some of these steers that get mad in these feed lots. I have seen people mad myself, but I have never seen anyone so mad that they would paw the ground and throw dirt in the air. That is the way this one particular bunch reacted to Paul when he went to Jerusalem, after having received those prophecies that bonds and

AFFLICTIONS awaited him there. They accused him of being a heretic, of speaking against the holy place, (the temple), and accused him of polluting the temple. This was AFFLICTION, and when they cast him into prison, there was his bonds. This bunch even plotted together to kill him while he was in custody after his arrest.

BEING MADE A GAZINGSTOCK

Turn with me to Hebrews, chapter 10, verses 31-33, where we find the apostle Paul speaking these words, "It is a fearful thing to fall in to the hands of the living God. 32, But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of AFFLICTIONS: 33, Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and AFFLICTIONS; and partly whilst ye became companions of them that were so used." Did you notice (in those verses), when the AFFLICTIONS started? It was after they had been illuminated, meaning, revealed. He said they were AFFLICTED, and made a gazingstock. Do you know what it is to be made a gazingstock? In this particular sense, it was to be publicly ridiculed and debased until all eyes were upon them. It is the devil's business to AFFLICT every true child of God. From the day the new birth takes place, until the Lord calls that person home, the devil puts forth every effort to make that person a gazingstock. You will hear people of the world say, (when a Christian makes a mistake), "He is supposed to be a Christian, just look at him, he did so and so. That is all designed by the devil, to make the child of God a gazingstock. Paul really broke it

down in verse 33, "Partly whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by REPROACHES and AFFLICTIONS: and partly, whilst YE BECAME COMPANIONS OF THEM THAT WERE SO USED." To me, that verse of scripture seals it up. The devil always uses people to accomplish his dirty work. He will always try to make every child of God look like a big hypocrite to every other person. His greatest delight is to humiliate Christian people, but that is where the fight comes in. Our battle is not with flesh and blood; it is with spiritual forces. That is why Paul told the Corinthians that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds. We do not use submachine guns, hand grenades, high explosives, or anything like that. The only thing we have is the sword of the spirit, and too few people know how to use that. You cannot avoid persecutions and afflictions, but if you will learn to use the sword of the spirit you will not be beat down so low that a mole can crawl over you without ever breaking the crust of the earth. Paul spoke of Moses in Hebrews 11:24-25, in this way, "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; 25, Choosing rather to suffer AFFLICTION with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." I am sure that even though we could go on and on with these scriptural examples, we have said enough to provoke your thoughts, and cause you to examine these various scriptures that people use to establish their particular line of thought. I certainly do not have any objection to people using the word affliction, in connection with sickness and disease, and I am aware that you will find it used in such a way in the scriptures, but the point I am desiring to make is that, most of the scriptures

that people quote, using that word, do not apply to sickness at all. Then, for the benefit of you who may think we are placing too much importance on our clarification, let me remind you once again, that if you read the book wrong, you will miss the mark. Every scripture must be used in the light of what it pertained to when it was uttered, and written. It is a shame the way people take the Bible and pick out certain scriptures, using them out of context to establish their own little ism, but God will not tolerate his bride people doing such things. We must realize that God is sovereign, and that he is not bound by our ideas and opinions. He can do whatever he chooses to do whenever he chooses to do it, but one thing is sure, he will not contradict his own word. Furthermore, every promise in the Bible is a positive promise on the part of God, but too many people are trying to reap the benefits of his promises, without submitting their lives to him who is the author and finisher of all things. God does not have to check with anyone when he desires to do a particular thing for someone, like healing a blind man somewhere, and allowing other blind people to remain so. For instance, the man we spoke of earlier that Jesus healed when he came to Jerusalem on one occasion, was not the only blind man around at that time. Then we notice here that His disciples were just like too many people are today; they said, "Lord, or Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" Look how Jesus answered their question. John 9:2-3, "Neither hath this man, sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." Now, did Jesus mean that this man, nor his parents, had ever committed any sin: of course not; He was simply pointing out to them that the man was not born blind

because of someone's personal sin, yet there are people who will take a verse of scripture like that, and interpret it literally, to prove something that they want to teach. The main point I want to make from this verse of scripture though is this, even though this man was not blind because of sin in his family, there are times when people are afflicted physically because there is something wrong between them and God. If God cannot get you to pray and seek His will without it, it is not uncommon for Him to allow something to strike your physical body that will get you to pray. Please remember, the fact that I said that, does not mean that you can apply it to every case. This should be an individual thing; it is not for others to go around pointing an accusing finger. A thing like that is for self examination. Please do not ask your preacher if you are sick because of sin in your life; if there is any question in your mind about it, ask God.

EVERYTHING HAS A PURPOSE

Brothers and sisters: we are in the hand of a mighty God who does all things well, and He allows certain things for His glory. The man that was born blind was one of them. Jesus said it was that the works of God might be made manifest. Some of you will say, (at least in your heart), "Isn't that unjust for God to allow some to suffer like that unless they need to be punished?" The apostle Paul answered your question on another occasion. In Romans 9:20 "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why has thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the

same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another one unto dishonour?" This just points to the fact that God is sovereign, and that He can do things for His own honor and glory, and we, who are partakers of His grace, and do not deserve anything except to be cast into hell, have no right to find fault with Him.

FULFILLING GOD'S PURPOSE

For another example of such, consider Lazarus, a personal friend of Jesus. When he took sick, his sisters sent for Jesus saying, Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick. Jesus answered them by saying, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." One might think that Jesus should have dropped everything and gone to help his good friend whom he loved, but what did He do? He was beyond Jordan preaching, and instead of running to Lazarus, He remained two more days where He was. Then He said to His disciples, "Let us go into Judaea again." (Reading in the 11th chapter of John) verse 11, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go that I may awaken him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, 'Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well.' Howbeit, Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking a rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead.' I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe: nevertheless let us go unto him." Jesus waited until Lazarus was dead, wrapped in burial attire, and buried before he arrived. By that time Lazarus was stinking, but Jesus called him forth and had him unwrapped.

Why? Why did He let it go that far? It was for the glory of God. Does that mean that everyone who dies is another Lazarus? Absolutely not. We have just read of a preacher who kept his dead mother in a freezer for many days, praying over her, trying to get enough faith to resurrect her, but a thing like that is not necessarily for the glory of God. Even though they said that if she could be resurrected, it would cause many others to believe, I am reminded of the rich man who was tormented in hell, and asked that the beggar who was comforted in Abraham's bosom be allowed to return from the dead to testify to his brothers, in the hope that they would believe and avoid coming to the place of torment where he was. It was said to him, "They have Moses and the prophets, if they will not hear them, they will not hear one who has returned from the dead." Brothers and sisters: we must check our motives first of all, and then we must make sure that they line up with the scriptures

Have you ever heard anyone say the reason Job got sick was because he feared the thing that eventually came upon him? I have heard people say that, but it makes me wonder if they have ever read the first chapters of the book of Job. The man was stripped of everything he had, and he, himself, was nothing more than a big running boil, sitting there in the ash heap with some old burlap wrapped around him. You might say, he was just about gone. Even his friends criticized him and found fault with him. They all told him what was wrong, or shall I say, each one tried to diagnose his case, but instead of helping him, they only made matters worse. There came a day when Job became so discouraged that he even cursed the day he was born; he

wondered why he did not die in infancy. He did not know why such tragedy had befallen him, but one thing was sure, he did not turn against God because of it. This brings us to the real reason for his trouble. By the Lord's own words, Job was a perfect and upright man that feared God and hated evil, but the devil challenged God to test Job and find out if he would remain faithful in the midst of calamity. As you will discover by reading the book, a contest was set up immediately, for the devil accused God of having a hedge around Job for his protection, giving him a good reason to pray and live for God. Satan said to God, put forth your hand and touch all of Job's substance, and he will curse you to your face. That was the beginning of Job's trouble, for God gave Satan permission to destroy all that Job had. Then when that was not enough to get the man to curse God, he asked for, and received permission to torment the physical flesh of Job. I call this to your attention mainly to get you to consider all of the scriptural examples before jumping to any hasty conclusions with the judgments you would pronounce upon people who are sick, diseased, or afflicted. In some cases it really is the chastening hand of God, in others, the trouble may be self inflicted through lack of wisdom, but there could also be a few cases like the one with Job, and we do not always know which one is which; therefore we had better keep our hands off, and let God handle the situation instead of us. God knows us when we are young, and He knows us when we are old; He knows everything about us all through life, and the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:28, "That all things work together for good to them that love God, (not everyone, just those that love God), to them who are the called according to his purpose. 29, For whom he did foreknow, he also did

predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." Brothers and sisters, we could go on and on with this, but my real point is that we should mind our own business and leave all of these positive promises in the word of God, in His capable hands. He knows how to minister them to us; all we have to do is keep ourselves in a place spiritually, and mentally, so that God can get our attention when He desires to. Every born again child of God ought to know that the promises contained in the Bible are for those who believe.

ONLY GOD CAN HEAL

Many times when the doctors have done all that they can do, that is when God takes over and brings about a miraculous healing. Now some will say, Oh, Bro. Jackson, do you believe in doctors? It is not that I have my faith in medical doctors, but I have sense enough to know what they are put here for. Surely we all know that a doctor cannot heal us; they do not even claim to be able to do that. A person who thinks that they can is just about as foolish as he can be. I was talking to my wife about this little surgery I had sometime back; they sewed me up with some plain looking, old thread, and put a little Merthiolate on the incision. I suppose that is what it was; nevertheless, the thread is gone, and the incision is healed up perfect as it can be. What caused it to heal? Thread? Merthiolate? You all know good and well that is not what brought about the healing. The Creator set a law in your flesh, if it gets wounded, and is cared for properly, it is supposed to heal. On the other hand, if the old devil is permitted to,

he will cause an infection to set up in a physical wound. The place will not heal as long as it is infected. This gives the doctors something to do for they have the means to fight infection, but the healing must come from God.

In former days as God began to lead us out into the light of truth, only He knows how I began to study the promises and provisions of His word. I wanted to believe it the Holy Ghost way, the way the Bible teaches it. Do not ever think that we have not tried everything that we felt the Bible would uphold. We have tried to believe everything that we felt a true child of God should believe, but through it all, we discovered that you cannot put God in a mold and expect him to do everything just exactly like you would have it done. He deals with everyone of us as individuals, and He knows just exactly what we each need at all times. I have observed through the years, as I have tried to stand for the truth of God's word, that when God does a particular thing for some people, they immediately make a concrete mold, and that is the only way they want God to do anything for anyone else. Let me tell you: when we begin to take an attitude like that, God will not have any part of it. You can expect him to move on somewhere else, and deal in a different way with someone who will not try to tell Him how to bless them.

GOD MOVES IN HIS TIME

I am reasonably sure that we all agree on the fact that when we are dealing with an earthly doctor he may be as carnal as

anyone could possibly be, but are you able to see that some preachers in our day are just as carnal as any doctor of the medical profession. As a matter of fact, a lot of them are doing a much better job of what they are called to do, than some of these modern day preachers are doing on the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ which they are supposed to be standing for. If you wonder why I said that, it was to make a point of something that I am going to mention. The word of a doctor can be wrong, but the word of the Lord will never be wrong. We all agree on that, do we not? Now we come to another point that causes some folks a lot of trouble, it is that of a prophecy which someone feels inspired to give. While some have no confidence whatsoever in a prophecy given out by a brother or sister, others will go to the opposite direction and try to make every prophecy fit into their own personal lives. I just want to say this to you, "You must leave God free to move in your lives as he sees fit; if you try to put him into a mold, you are just hindering him as he tries to work on your behalf." Brothers and sisters, I am not going to tell the story again now, for most of you already know how we had to wait eleven years for God to fulfill a prophecy that was given to us concerning our son David. God allowed circumstances to make it look impossible for us to have any more children, (according to the doctors), yet we had this prophecy hanging there which said that we would have a son and call his name Davis. You all know the story; eleven years after the prophecy, with one daughter born to us while we were expecting a son, God saw fit to fulfill the prophecy and grant us the son. By the time you read this in the paper, he will be twelve years old. I am telling this mainly to show you that you cannot put a time limit on God. I do not mean to be

preaching my experience to you, but I have learned through experience, that God fulfills His word, and His purpose, in His own time, and for His own glory.

SOME WERE HEALED

Take the case of Lazarus, who Jesus raised from the dead; we have preachers, as well as other people, that would have told Martha and Mary, If you will just believe hard enough, Lazarus will not die, but it just so happened that it was not that bunch of people that God was going to vindicate; He had a preacher over there across the Jordan that He was going to bring there, to raise him from the dead. Do you catch my point? It was God's purpose for Lazarus to die, and then be raised from the dead four days later; therefore, all the praying and believing that anyone tried to do would not have changed that situation. However, I beg of you, please do not try to apply these words to every person who gets sick; pray for them and commit them into the hands of God, who will work all things in harmony with his word. If you, as an individual, do not know how to interpret the situation, it is better just to lay your hand on the sick person and say, "May God, in his mercy, touch you, and make you well." On the other hand, if God has inspired you to say, "You shall not die, but you shall live and be made well," and you know that it is God beyond any shadow of doubt, then say it; God will vindicate whatever He anoints you to speak. In that early church those men did not speak until they knew what they were to say. Peter knew exactly what to speak to Ananias and Sapphira when they came in that day, and we have no record

that those words were ever spoken again. You could not conjure up another Ananias and Sapphira if you wanted to, ever so bad. God is not a vending machine that you can drop a thirty second prayer into, and make your demands. We must consider the ministry of Jesus, for a closer look at how God deals with people. He had the power to heal every sick person in the land in His day; for He was the God man, but did He do it? Look how many times He healed just one person when there were sick and infirm people all around Him. Then consider the other times when He healed the multitudes. Was He a respecter of persons? No, He was just obeying the will of the Father. You may ask, why? But let me remind you that God was working out a perfect plan. Some of those very same people that were passed up by Jesus, were, no doubt, healed by the ministry of his disciples after the day of Pentecost. Some of those who turned back from following Jesus when he said, "Except ye eat my flesh and drink my blood, ye have no life in you," probably reconsidered, and became Christians after Jesus had departed and left the ministry to His disciples. Many of them had probably wondered why Jesus had passed them up when they were just as sick as some others that He healed. That is the way people react even today. Many times, it is probably that very attitude that keeps them from touching God for their need. They come up for prayer, time after time, and still do not get healed. What is the trouble? Why do they not get healed? Is God still a healer? HE ABSOLUTELY IS, but He is not a vending machine. Remember that when you feel tempted to find fault with God. He will do what His word says He will do, but He is not obligated to cater to our whims; there are some conditions that must be met if we are to enjoy the full benefit of God's

provision. When you are reading the book, searching for the promises that God has made to believers, do not forget to look for the condition that the promise applies to. I thank God that He is the same, yesterday, today, and forever, but I know that we have a generation of people who treat God's word just like some of these teenagers do a certain record album they like. They will play it, and request it, until it becomes No. 1, all the way to the top, then back down until it fades out of the picture. Have we not seen the same thing in religion in our day? Has God changed? No, he is not just a record that you put on and play until you get tired of him, and then get something else. He is God, and He requires the Number 1 spot in your life. If He does not get that place, He will not take any other place. If you ask me, "Bro. Jackson: are you saying that God has quit doing anything?" I will have to say, "No, but we are going to have to have more respect for what He does, and recognize Him in the little things of life, as well as the big things." If we fail to do that, we will find ourselves, discouraged and confused to the point where we will not know where to go or what to do next. That is what comes from failing to give God His proper place in our lives, but praise God, I am not discouraged, I find every day to be full of expectation, as we draw closer to the end.

OBEDIENCE OR TRIBULATION

Let me say something personal to you who read this, for I am sure this paper will be read by many of you that I have never had the opportunity to meet and talk with. We are living in a sick old world, and it is

going to get worse; therefore you had better buckle down and run this race, praying sincerely that you are not left behind when the rapture of the bride church takes place. The tribulation that follows is going to be worse than the wildest nightmare you have ever experienced when all hell is turned loose here on earth. People talk about epidemics of different kinds, but the worse that any of us has ever experienced will be mild compared to what takes place in that hour. The devil will not have any mercy for anyone when he is in full control for that allotted period of time. There will be no place found for a decent, law abiding citizen. Sickness and disease will run rampant and morally there will be nothing but filthiness and corruption, a rotten mess. Thanks be unto our blessed Lord who has made a way for us to escape all these things that are to come upon the earth; if we will live right, and walk with him while we have opportunity to do so, we will be enjoying the marriage supper during that dreadful period of time. I have always looked at life like this, "When the lord is through with me in this life, I am going to have to leave here one way or another." How we go is not the important part; for the important part is the sad part; too few people are actually ready to go. There is still too much of this old world hanging onto us. When we are truly ready to leave this world, in our hearts we can say, "Lord, if you take me tonight, I am ready to go." That is when we are finally ready to start living, for it means that we no longer love life more than we love the Lord. On the other hand, if you love life, and the things of the world, more than you love the Lord Jesus Christ, Brother, he is liable to let you be tormented by a lot of things that will be just like a boomerang; no sooner than you are able to get free from one bad situation, here

comes another one. After all, if you are a child of God, you are not your own, you are bought with a price. The life you live is not your own, it is His. If He cannot get you to live for Him; He will not let you go your merry way without tripping over a stone somewhere. God is faithful; He chastens His disobedient children by letting the adversary take a whack at them to keep them in line. Think of it like this, saints, even in these perilous times, life can be beautiful if we will just get our priorities lined up right. I now that some of you who read this message are likely to say, "Bro. Jackson; you sound like you are in a hurry to get out of this world." If anything I have said has left you with those thoughts, let me say this to you, "There are two ways to look at it. From the standpoint of working toward a goal for the future, there is not much left to look forward to, for everything you set before you as a goal in life, seems to get knocked all to pieces, leaving everything in a turmoil with anguish and heartache. That is probably what the apostle Paul was seeing in his day that caused him to say what he did to the Philippians in chapter one. His desire was for Christ to be magnified in his body, whether it be by life, or by death. Then in verse 21 and following, we read this, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." He really had a desire to be with the Lord more than in the world, but he was surrendered to the will of the Lord; therefore he went ahead to say, 22, "But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I want not, 23, For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: 24, Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. 25, And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith." He heard the cry of a people wanting help. That was all it took

to make the decision for him. It was not that he had the choice of ending his life: that choice is in the hands of God. It was just one of those times when he was feeling a little homesick to be with the Lord. Most of us have times like that, but we, like Paul, leave that decision in the hands of God.

NEW COURAGE

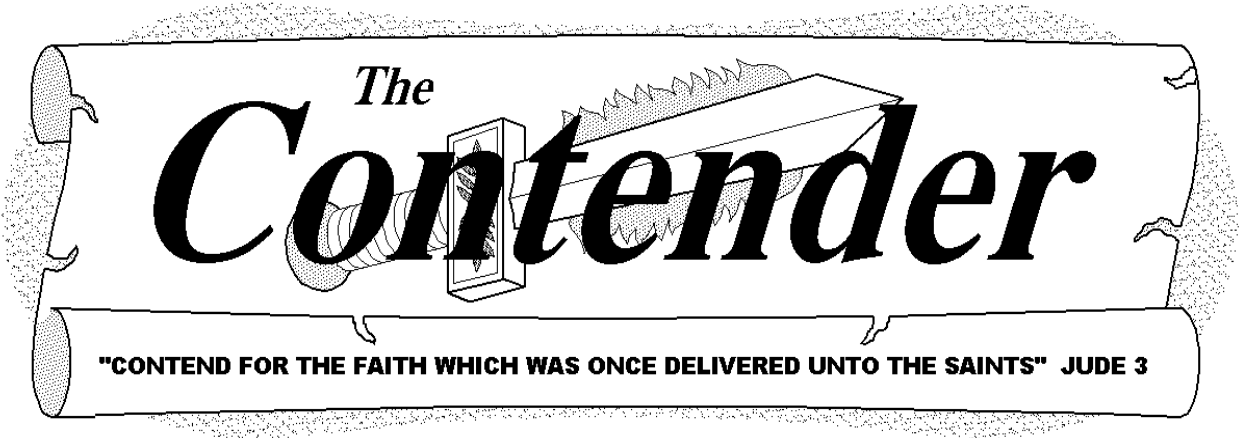
I want to say a few words now, that I feel will furnish you with new courage for the days ahead. I have always felt, and believed in my heart, that God has an end time move of his spirit, ahead for His children, but conditions will have to be right before we see it. When He gets the conditions in the world just right, it will come, but it will not be a commercialized rat race like we have going on right now. It will be God working with His bride people the way He has purposed to do. In our day we are seeing things done under the cloak of religion, that is actually worse than the mafia tactics. The power of God is being sold and traded for everything under the sun. It seems more for a commercialized show than for the benefit of a needy people. Please do not get me wrong; I am not against advertising, and letting a certain element of the world population know what God can do, but did you know that when God walked on earth in human flesh, His most effective advertisement was to tell those who were healed not to tell it. Before too long, everyone for miles around knew what had happened. If you really want something to get around, just treat it as a secret, and before long the whole world will know about it. Brothers and sisters, you know what I mean, I would never try

to hide anything that God does, but I certainly do not believe in putting on a public show with the precious things of the Lord. God has a certain way to do things that He wants done, but the devil is always forerunning Him, like in the case where Paul and his company were ministering the gospel to the people of Macedonia. Everywhere they went, there was a certain young woman that followed them, and announced that they were the servants of the most high God which had come to show them the way of salvation. As we said before, this was the truth, and to some it probably seemed like a right thing for her to do. Even Paul did not do anything about it at first, but as she continued to do it for many days, he began to realize that this did not have the right spirit of advertisement about it. It was then, that he turned to her, and said, (to the evil spirit that possessed her), I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. The spirit obeyed, and the girl was set free, but it landed Paul and Silas in jail. Now, there are two points that I want to make from this. First of all, even though what she was saying was the truth, there was a wrong motive behind it, for the scripture plainly tells us that she was demon possessed. That ought to help you examine some of the things that you are faced with right now. I say this to whoever it applies to. Then, the second point is this, even though Paul did not like what was going on, he had to wait a little while until he knew what God's will was, before he acted to stop it. That lets me know that we ought not be too hasty about some things. We need to take time to examine them in the light of our present day understanding of the word of God.

PRAYER - SUPPLICATION - THANKSGIVING - ASK

In closing I want to say this, "I have said some things in this message that may have sounded a little strange to some of you, but that does not mean that I have said anything in a negative way. There are just some things in the scriptures that need to be set straight. It does not detract from what God is doing, nor take anything from what he will do. It just give us a better opportunity to see the sovereignty of God in operation. He doesn't have to have everything all painted up, and smoothed over, in order for Him to fulfill His word. The fact that Paul had trouble with his vision at times did not keep God from healing every person that believed, when Paul preached and prayed for them. Even though I have taught this scripture as I believe God has revealed it to me, that does not mean that I believe we all should have some physical infirmity to keep us humble. We will leave that in the hands of God. I still believe Him to be a healer, and I believe He will honour faith that is based upon his word wherever he finds it, but I do not agree that we should try to cover up something that the scriptures make so clear, in the fear that it will hinder someone's faith. Our faith ought to be grounded upon something more solid than that. As for what we said concerning the word AFFLICTION, Just use the word where it fits, but do not try to make it fit the scriptures according to your modern day understanding of its definition. Learn to weigh scriptures against scripture until you get a proper balance. Do not go to seed on one particular verse that you find comfort in at times. The Bible is full of comforting

truths, and there is something in there for every need that a child of God may have. Remember Paul's admonition to the Philippians, chapter 4, verse 6, "Be careful for nothing; (in other words, do not allow yourselves to worry, nor be fearful), but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." You will find three key words in that verse, P-R-A-Y-E-R, S-U-P-P-L-I-C-A-T-I-O-N, and T-H-A-N-K-S-G-I-V-I-N-G, and with that, remember the words of Jesus, "ASK, and ye shall receive." He did not teach us to beg. He taught us to believe His word first of all, and then, to ask is sufficient. Regardless of what some may say, God is still the author and finisher of our faith, and He is still the God of His book. He is not dead; He is very much alive. I want to restate this also, I am not the least bit discourage, nor am I the least bit ashamed of what I have taught and stood for through the years. I am patiently waiting for God to vindicate His truth, and at the same time reveal every false witness, and deal with them as He sees fit. That is out of my hands. I am only called to stand for truth as long as God gives me the privilege to do so. Pray for us, and may He keep each of you in His love and care. Amen.



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