

My strength is perfected in your weakness...

There are principles or ways by which God operates in our lives. For example, His way is always a way of faith. *"The just shall live by faith."* This is the way of the Lord. It is impossible to please God without faith. And whatever He does in our lives will require faith. It is the basic way of the Lord.

To this could be added hope. God is the God of all hope. His way is always to hope. Hopelessness is not the way of God. Hopelessness never comes from Him, nor does it lead to Him. Hope is the way of the Lord.

The greatest of His ways is love. God is love. Love is His way. Love is His way of thinking, His way of feeling, and His way of doing. It is to be our way of thinking, feeling, and doing as well. *"Let all things be done in love."*

The ways of the Lord are not so mysterious. They are the clearly revealed ways shown in His word, and they do not change, for He is the Lord, and He does not change.

Here is another great principle, or way of the Lord. *"My strength is made perfect in weakness."* (2 Corinthians 12:9) 2 Corinthians 12 is the discussion of the story of Paul's "thorn in the flesh". Many sermons have been constructed from this thorn. Some are preached to prove from this passage that God does not always heal, interpreting the thorn as sickness. This is usually put together with Galatians 4:13-15 which indicates that Paul had some problem with his eyes when he was with the Galatian church. Some preachers try to say it was a permanent incurable "thorn" of sickness given by God. **There is no evidence that the sickness continued, nor that God gave it; and there is no evidence that it was the thorn of 2 Cor. 12.**

Scripture interprets itself in the important matters, and it is so in the case of the thorn: Just look at what Paul says before and after he mentions the thorn in the flesh (which was given to keep him from getting proud). *"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, I am strong."* 2 Corinthians 12:10

Though "infirmities" can sometimes mean sickness, it can also mean weakness. Here Paul reports the list of infirmities in His life: ***reproaches, needs, persecutions, distresses.*** **This is not a list of sicknesses, but a list of troubles.** All we have to do is follow the story of Paul's life and ministry to see the "thorn". He was plagued with *continuous opposition*. This was the "messenger of Satan sent to "buffet" him.

He had been given great revelations, taken up into heaven and shown things that could not be uttered. So that he could not get big headed about it, trouble was allowed to continually bite at his heels. Some of that trouble consisted of the "Judaizers", who would try to tear down the gospel message Paul preached and to put people back into legalistic bondage.

Here is Paul's further report of His "thorn in the flesh":

"From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness-- besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity." (2 Cor. 11:24-30) His infirmity, his weakness, his thorn was this list of troubles!

Paul's thorn was not so different from what you and I may face in serving the Lord. Perhaps we may not get shipwrecked, or beaten with rods. But Satan's opposition will come, and we will probably feel very weak in the face of his opposition.

Much of Satan's opposition comes internally -- in our thoughts. That is where we can get "beaten" or "shipwrecked". It is in our thinking that Satan does his best (or worst) work. That is where he opposes us with the greatest force -- in our own minds.

Like Paul, if we ask God to take it all away, He may respond to us just like he did to Paul: *"My grace is sufficient for you..."*

The truth is this: God's grace will enable us to meet and resist the opposition. Though we feel weak and helpless in the face of Satan's intimidation and discouragement, God's strength comes into us (if we will simply receive it). It is to be said of us just like Hebrews 11 reports concerning the saints of old: *"out of weakness (they) were made strong"*. These are the ones *"of whom the world was not worthy."*

How often God's victory comes in our darkest hour, when all seems lost, and we seem out of strength and resources.

We have sung a song from childhood that starts with these words: *"He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater..."* One line says this: *"When we have exhausted our hoard of resources, our Father's full giving has only begun..."*