

PAUL'S PRAYER ABOUT HIS THORN

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In 2 Corinthians 12:7-9, the divinely inspired Apostle Paul says, "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." From these verses, we know for certain that 1) Paul was given "a thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor 12:7); 2) Paul's thorn in the flesh was "the messenger of Satan to buffet me" (2 Cor 12:7); and 3) Paul prayed three times for this thorn to depart from him, but the Lord did not grant Paul's request. We do *not* know what particular problem this "messenger of Satan" caused for Paul in his flesh, which means that God does not consider it necessary for us to know. But the Lord *does* want us to learn something about prayer from this account.

God's desire to grant the requests of those who obey him

Paul did not boast of his abundant revelations so that others would not exalt him, and he was given his thorn in the flesh to prevent him from being exalted himself about his abundant revelations (2 Cor 12:7).

Concerning his thorn in the flesh, Paul said, "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me" (2 Cor 12:8). God did not agree to remove Paul's thorn in the flesh. The Lord said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). God's refusal to remove Paul's thorn in the flesh in spite of Paul's three requests that He remove it demonstrates that we will not always receive everything we ask for in prayer. It is true that "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jas 1:17). It is also true that the prayers of God's saints come up to Him on His throne like sweet incense (Rev 5:8; 8:4). God is the source of all good things, and he has the power to give them, and he is pleased when we pray to him and ask Him for good things (Php 4:6). God desires to give good things to his children when they ask him (Matt 7:7-11). It is essential to ask, and ask with importunity, in order to receive (Matt 7:7-11; Luke 11:1-13; 18:1-8; John 16:23-24; Jas 4:2). It is also essential to please God and keep His commandments in order to receive what we ask of Him in prayer (Psa 34:15-17; 66:16-20; Isa 59:2; John 15:7; Jas 5:16; 1 Pet 3:12; 1

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(continued)

John 3:22).

Asking in faith for what God has promised

In Matthew 21:22, Jesus says, "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

But to ask for something with *faith* that we will receive it means that it must be promised in God's word, because faith comes by hearing God's word (Rom 10:17). The things God has promised we must still ask for, and show our faith that we believe God rewards those who diligently seek Him (Heb 11:6). For example, God has *promised* to give food, drink and clothes to those who seek first His kingdom and righteousness (Matt 6:25-33; Luke 12:22-31), yet Jesus instructs us to *ask* God for our daily bread (Matt 6:9-11; Luke 11:1-3). But since God has promised to give us our daily bread, when we ask for it we *must* believe that He will give it. Similarly, the Lord promises to give wisdom when we ask Him for it (Jas 1:5). But, since it is a promise from God, he says we must "ask in faith, nothing wavering" (Jas 1:6). If we doubt, we will not receive "*anything* of the Lord" (Jas 1:6-8). Therefore, Jesus' instruction to ask in prayer "believing" applies to what God has promised in His word, not to everything.

According to God's will

Paul certainly was a keeper of God's commandments, and he showed his faith in God by his three requests to have the thorn in the flesh removed. But in spite of all of that, it was still not God's will to remove Paul's thorn in the flesh. For those things that God has not promised, God still tells us to make our requests made known to Him (Php 4:6). But for those things he says, "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he hears us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him" (1 John 5:14-15). If God has not promised us something, we may ask for it, but we must ask *if it is according to His will*. But in those cases, it might not be his will and we might not receive our requests. For example, Jesus asked the Father to "let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt 26:39-44; Mark 14:35-39; Luke 22:41-44). In that situation, it was *not* the Father's will, and Jesus had to drink the cup. In Paul's case, it was not the Lord's will to remove Paul's thorn in the flesh. Certainly, if it was not the Father's will to fulfill certain requests by Christ and Paul, then there will be certain requests that we make that it will not be God's will to grant us.