***Triumph out of Trouble, No. 3 - PH17-01  
  
Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 1:12-14***

We have been looking at Philippians 1:12-14 which have been describing for us triumph out of trouble. This is the third in that segment. This is a period in Paul's life (as in ours) which called for his personal understanding of the resource of God when we are under pressure and when we are under a period of suffering. That's what we're talking about it. It is a commonplace experience for mankind to suffer. The reason for that is because Satan is running the world. Christians experience a special suffering at the hands of Satan because they are producing divine good service.

**2 Corinthians 12:1-10**

Therefore, we have paused to look at 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. Just to review verse 1 briefly, we pointed out that the translation should be here, "Boasting is necessary though it is not profitable." Paul boasts from confidence in the reality of the working of doctrine. He is not boasting in terms of the mental attitude sin of pride. This boasting is the word "kauchaomai." This word will be reoccurring again and again in these ten verses. There is a boasting which is legitimate in terms of confidence in the working of Bible doctrine. There is a boasting which is illegitimate in terms of an expression of pride. Paul himself has indicated that he could boast more of his service for the Lord and of the information that he has received and of the suffering that he has experienced in the Lord's service than any of his critics and any of his enemies.

He does not consider it profitable to be boasting in this way, but he says it is necessary--his enemies (his critics) have forced him to this in order to keep the record straight. Paul has always been under a certain attack as an apostle because he was not one of the original twelve. So he has had to declare from time to time his authority as an apostle and the fact that his service was used mightily of the Lord. Paul had visions and revelations from God which were second to none of the other apostles. Therefore, now he is going to tell us about one of those magnificent experiences that certainly marked him as an outstanding (if not *the* outstanding) apostle of all the apostolic contingent.

Verse 2 says, "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago." The word "new" is the Greek word "oida." This word is for knowing something not by experience, but something which you know inherently, and it also means therefore that he knew him well. The man to whom Paul is referring to in this verse is himself, and he is referring to an incident in his life which took place 14 years prior to the writing of the book of Philippians in the city of Lystra on his first missionary journey. This incident is recorded in Acts 14:19-20. At that point, the apostle Paul was attacked by a group of Jews and was stoned. That is, he was struck with rocks and boulders of various kinds until he collapsed on the ground, and he was left under a pile of rocks. This was the Jewish way of executing those who were guilty of blasphemy and other crimes which were worthy of death under the law system.

Therefore, the apostle Paul said, "I knew a man fourteen years ago, and I knew him well" because it was Paul himself. "This man was in Christ," he says, meaning that he was a Christian man. Therefore, what we are studying here is the experience of a believer. Paul describes his stoning incident, and then he tells what happened after he was stoned. What happened was (we may conjecture here with considerable justification) was that Paul was actually killed. You have to understand what a rough deal stoning was. This was people striking you with rocks. They eventually knocked you unconscious; they broke bones in your body; and, they literally crushed the life out of you. Therefore, it is very unlikely that anybody could stand under a legitimate bonafide stoning execution and survive alive.

The evidence that we have here as you shall see as we go along is that the apostle Paul, upon that occasion at Lystra, actually died under that stoning. The result of the stoning was the same as anybody's death. That is, his soul and spirit were removed from the body and immediately went into the Lord's presence in heaven. However, the experience, as he viewed it at the time, was hard to distinguish from a vision. He didn't know whether he was having a vision, or whether he was actually literally in his soul and spirit walking in heaven itself. Subsequently, he realized that it was not a vision, but it was an actual experience that he had. However, he's describing it to us, as of this point, the way it appeared to him when it was taking place as the rocks were flying upon him and his life was slowly ebbing out of his body.

Therefore, he says in verse 2, "I knew a man (Paul himself) in Christ, and I knew him well" (14 years ago in Lystra). Then he says, "Whether in the body, I cannot tell, or whether out of the body." In the phrase, "Whether in the body," uses the Greek word "en;" that is, whether the soul and spirit were in the body, and he was simply unconscious, or whether he was out of the body. That's the word "ektos" which means that the soul and spirit were outside of the body, and the body itself was actually dead. He says, "As I experienced it, I couldn't tell which it was." Again, the word "tell" is the word "oida," which means I didn't know. I didn't really know from what was happening to me at the time which it was. "But," he says, "God does know," and again he uses "oida" (inherent knowledge). "Whether out of the body, I cannot tell. God knows. How that he was caught up to the third heaven." The phrase, "How that he" is the Greek word "toioutos." "Toioutos" is an expanded demonstrative pronoun. That is, it's pointing. It's a dramatic kind of word so that it is dramatically emphasizing Paul's situation. It is pointing to Paul under a dramatic situation: namely, dying in the city of Lystra as the result of stoning in 43 A.D.; leaving his body; and, entering heaven.

He says that at that time he was caught up. This is why we know that he died, because it uses the word "harpazo." "Harpazo" means "to carry off by force" or "to snatch away." What he is describing here is in the aorist tense. This means that at the point of death, his soul and spirit were snatched from his body, and taken into heaven. It is in the passive voice which means that this separation of the spirit and the soul from his body was beyond his control. When death comes, you and I have no control over it. We cannot grit our teeth and say, "I will not die." It is a passive situation. There comes a certain point when the inner man is removed, and the outer body dies. It's a participle, which is simply a way of stating a principle. Paul says, "My inner man was snatched right out of me. I couldn't stop it. I had no control over it. The rocks came flying down upon me; I was pulled out of my body; and, I was taken into the third heaven. This word is describing the death experience of Paul. At the time, it seemed like a vision to him. He couldn't tell: "Was this actually happening to me? Am I really dying, or am I just having another kind of vision and revelation from God?"

He was taken to the third heaven. The third heaven is the dwelling place (the throne room) of God. The second heaven is the interstellar space where comet Kohoutek is now flying. That's the area which is the abode of the angels. The first heaven is the atmosphere cover of the earth itself in which you and I now move.

Verse 3 says, "I knew such a man, whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell. God knows. And I knew (again, it's the word 'oida') such a man." Again, that's that dramatic emphatic pronoun "toioutos." "In the body" means physically alive, but unconscious, using the word "en." He says, "I can't tell whether I was physically alive with my soul and spirit in my body, or whether I was unconscious" (or out of the body). This time it uses a different word for "out." It's "choris." "Choris" means "parted from" or "apart from." He says, "I can't tell whether I was apart from my body at the time." It seemed to him either a vision or actual experience. He could not know which. However, he says, "God does know." Again the word is "oida."

Verse 4 say, "How he was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter." "How he" refers to the apostle Paul. "Caught up" is again our word "harpazo." It is aorist--at the point in the past when he was stoned at Lystra. It is passive--where death overtook him and took his soul and spirit out of his body. It is indicative--a statement of fact. Paul says, "I was snatched away out of my body into paradise ("paradeisos)." Paradeisos is a Persian word taken over into the Greek language. It was the word that the Persians used for "a pleasure park" or "a garden of delight." It was used of the places that had been prepared for kings and nobles to enjoy themselves in. It is a word, in other words, for happiness, and it is used here as a synonym for the third heaven. Before the crucifixion and before the resurrection of Christ, paradise was part of Hades. After the resurrection, paradise (which was the abode of the believers) was removed from Hades and placed into heaven itself.

There, in this place of paradise, Paul says he heard, "unspeakable words." Grammatically, "unspeakable words" expresses words which are contradictory. It's an expression of words which contradict one another. They are words which one cannot speak. How can you have words that you cannot speak? That's like "thunderous silence," and grammatically it's called an oxymoron. We don't have very many of these in the Bible. This is rather unusual. However, we do have one here. "I heard unspeakable words (contradictory terms). The word "words" here is an important one because it is the word "hrema." "Hrema" is not "word," but it is "saying" or "utterances" or "something spoken."

Therefore, Paul walks into heaven and there's conversation going on in heaven among the believers who have died and preceded him into the Lord's presence. There he is listening to these people talking to one another. There he is perhaps listening to something that somebody that he knew historically was saying. Perhaps he recognized King David. Perhaps he recognized Moses. Perhaps he recognized someone in his own family that was in heaven. But in any case, he was hearing things of the saints among themselves, perhaps in a way of praise to God, or perhaps in description of what heaven is like--of what it is like to live in heaven. He heard things which are described as unspeakable. The word "unspeakable" is "arretos," and it simply means "not repeatable." Therefore, Paul says, "I heard things in heaven which are not repeatable now that I am alive again back here on earth. I saw and heard such fantastic wonders that those who are living on earth, for some reason, could not live with this information."

**Heaven**

You will perhaps notice that the Bible has very limited information concerning heaven. It tells us it's there. It gives us some description concerning its happiness. However, there is limited information concerning what heaven is really like. Here again this is confirmed by the experience of Paul that God did not allow him to tell what he saw or to tell what he heard because mortals could not live with this information. Perhaps the implication is that even believers would be tempted to treat their lives more carelessly; would be more ready than would be normal for them to welcome death; and, would perhaps even seek it out because they would prefer to be in this place if they had this information. Paul obviously had far more to boast about than any of the finks who were opposing him and who were giving him a hard time while he was in prison.

So, he says that it was "not lawful" for him to utter these things. That is, God said, "Now you have seen things, Paul. I have given you an experience of the reality of what you are preaching about. I have given you an experience of reality of what Christians are believing in that nobody has ever had before. However, I'm giving it to you. I am giving you this confirmation because of the work to which I have called you and because of the trial and suffering that you are going to have to bear for me. However, what you have heard and what you have seen must never be repeated. That's pretty hard, even if you are the apostle Paul, and even if you are a godly man. That's pretty tough not to get into a conversation and pretty soon get carried away and start telling about what heaven was like. Therefore, consequently, the apostle Paul had to be given a reminder that stayed with him for the rest of his life. It was something that he was always conscious of, and which was deliberately designed to prevent him from a slip of the tongue.

Verse 5 says, "Of such an one will I glory, yet of myself I will not glory, but in my infirmities." "Of such an one" is the Greek word "huper," and it means "in behalf of such an one." That is, in behalf of a man who had an experience like this. Again we have the word glory "kauchaomai." This is future active indicative. Paul says, "Whenever I think about boasting of my work for the Lord, I am going to use this Lystra thing that has happened to me as the area in which I will boast. His boasting here is from confidence in the Word of God. It is not pride in himself. He says, "Of myself I will not glory." He is not really boasting in the experience as such. What he is boasting in is the reality that the experience has brought to him--the information. This was a distinct kind of revelation. Paul was used to having God speak to him and to give him information, which is recorded now in the New Testament Scriptures. However, here was information brought to him in a way that he had never received information or revelation before: namely, personal on-the-scene observation. Paul said that if he didn't mention this incident, no one would know the matter, and no one would know of his qualifications as an apostle, and his qualifications to teach about the wonders and the glories of the eternal life to which we've been called.

In other words, while Paul was in the third heaven, what was happening to him? The same thing that is happening to you right now. While he was in the third heaven, the grace system of learning spiritual things was operating. He was taking in divine viewpoint information, and he was believing it. He was taking in Bible doctrine, in other words, and going positive toward it. That is the very thing that you are doing at this moment as we review the revelation that he has recorded for us.

Back on earth, Paul consequently had a segment of "epignosis" in his human spirit which was fantastic. He had an area of full knowledge which was stored in his human spirit as the result of the information he received on this occasion. It was the knowledge of doctrine that counted with Paul--not the experience itself. He did not go around bragging, "Do you know what happened to me? I went to heaven." He could have put an advertisement in the paper as the charismatic people like to do, "Come and hear brother so-and-so who died and returned from heaven. He is going to describe to you his experiences in heaven." If you've never seen that ad, I can assure you that they are placed in the newspapers. It is not uncommon for charismatics to feature somebody who has been to heaven. I always thought that this was rather peculiar that some goof ball grinning idiot type of mentality is standing up to give an exposition of what he saw in heaven when the magnificent apostle Paul was told, "You can't tell it. It's an oxymoron. It is constituted of unspeakable words." This shows you something about the charismatic movement today.

Paul says, "Of such an one will I glory. Yet of myself, I will not glory." Of a man who has this information--this Bible doctrine--I will glory in that. But of myself, as one who had this experience," Paul said, "I will not glory. However," he says, "I'll tell you what I will glory in. I'll glory in my infirmities." "Infirmities" is "astheneia" which means "weakness" or "frailty." This word is another one that is going to keep reappearing in these ten verses. He plays back and forth on these two words. "What I will brag about are my weaknesses." Therefore, this word means the trials; the heartaches; and, the disasters that he experiences. He has described these in 2 Corinthians 11:23 and the verses which follow. Paul carried through these hopeless, helpless, trying situations because there was something in his soul with which to meet his troubles. That something was spiritual maturity. He prefers to boast about these infirmities as he is going to now explain to us that his sufferings release the maximum blessings of God upon his life. His sufferings (his weakness) enabled the grace orientation of his spiritual maturity structure to function in a maximum way. The word "but" is "eime." It is the strong negative. He will boast about his troubles and his failures because they make real the grace and love of God. However, he will not boast about his experience.

Verse 6: "For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool." The word for "though" is "ean" which is an "if" word. It is one of those four classes of "if" words in the New Testament. This is a third class condition which says, "Maybe I would, and maybe I wouldn't. For though I would desire. Maybe I want to brag about my experience. Maybe I don't." The word for "I would desire," or "I wish" is "thelo." "To glory," again is "kauchaomai." This time it's aorist--at any particular point in his life when he thinks about this when he is in a situation of suffering, pressure, or attack. It is active. He might want to boast about his experience. It is infinitive which expresses purpose. But he says, "If I do wish to boast, I shall not be a fool." In other words, he will not. "I shall not be" is the word "eimi." It is future active indicative. At no time in the future will I choose to do this. He uses the word "ou" for this negative. "I will not." This is the strongest negative in the Greek language. "Me" is another negative in the Greek language, but "me" means, "I don't think so, but I'll think it over." He uses "ou:" "I wouldn't under any condition boast and brag about my experience of having gone to heaven and come back alive to this earth again."

However, he is going to boast instead in his weaknesses; in his pressures; in his sufferings; and in all that was associated with his imprisonment. He says. "If I did boast in my experience, I would be a fool." The word for "fool" is "aphron." This word comes from "phren" which means "mind," and the "a" in the Greek language makes it a negative--an "aphren" or an "aphron." In other words, it means "mindless" or "without a mind." Paul says, "I would be non-thinking; I would be mindless; or, I would be a fool to be bragging about some experience I had." Yet, Paul had the unique experience of all times, and he refuses to brag in it. He had the greatest experience that you could imagine of going to heaven and coming back, and he's not going to boast about it. He says that if he would, it would be the fact of a mindless fool.

What does this tell us? Certainly, this should make it very clear to us that the Christian life is not built around any experience. A lot of Christians have not yet learned that their walk with the Lord and the confirmation of God's blessing upon them is not dependent upon experience. It makes me feel a little creepy when I hear people say, "Oh, I look back upon this year, and the Lord has been so good to me." That always seems to imply that sometimes He has been bad to you. The Lord is always good to us, and what you mean is, "I've had some experiences that I welcome, and I've had some experiences which I do not welcome." You are evaluating your walk with the Lord on the basis of experience. The devil is standing in the background wringing his hands and saying, "Hot dog! Go to it, Christian. Let's talk about experience." This is because the devil is the greatest experience producer of all times. If there's anything he likes for a Christian to do, it is to glory and to ooze and to get warm about his experiences.

The apostle Paul says, "No, I will not glory in my experiences. I will glory rather in my sufferings and weaknesses and pressures." He's going to show us in a moment why this is the case. That is because he has within himself a spiritual maturity structure which Bible doctrine has built up. His capacities are turned loose like a tidal wave when he is weak and under suffering and under pressure. Experience glorying is an emotional orientation to the Christian life. Satan manipulates that to serve his plans. There is no experience, real or imagined, which any Christian has that makes him something special. We are forever running around looking for celebrity Christians who have had some great and wonderful marvelous experience from God. The apostle Paul says instead, "I am going to say the truth," which is the Word of God. This is the doctrine of the Word of God.

**The Charismatic Movement**

Again, we cannot help but notice what a contrast this is to the monstrous disorientation and the satanic origin of the charismatic movement today--the tongues speaking; the healing; and the Oral Roberts' prayer tower 24-hours-a-day apostasy. This is what is behind the charismatic movement: Experience; experience; and, experience. And the devil loves it. It all originates with him. He is the one who sends charismatics hustling after their special experiences. Then he obliges them with the emotional manipulation that they are looking for. Remember that the charismatics attribute their experiences to God. Do you see what that means? It is not God who is doing this with them. It is not God who is producing the gibberish nonsense. It is not God who is healing at the hands of a faith healer. It is Satan or a demon agent of Satan. Therefore, what they are doing is calling Satan God. They're calling some demon the Lord Jesus Christ. They are boasting in the demon and calling him the Lord.

**Matthew 7:21-23**

You find this clearly taught in Matthew 7:21-23. If you have not read those verses, you better read them, and you better read them carefully. You better recognize that here you have a group of people who will stand up some day before the Lord Jesus Christ, and in this case, they're not even saved. They say, "Lord, what do you mean You are sending us to the lake of fire and brimstone? Do you understand, oh Lord. Do you understand that we are the people who delivered prophecies and they came to pass? We made predictions, and they were fulfilled. You gave them to us, Lord. We praised you for these predictions. Do you realize, Lord, that we cast out demons? We saw people who were in a frenzy of demon possession: foaming at the mouth; enraged; and, spilling out their venom. We went up to them in the name of Jesus; we cast out those demons; and, we praised you Lord. We called upon Your name to cast this demon out. What do you mean we're going to the lake of fire? We created miracles. We healed people. People came up to us all crunched, broken, and sick, and we drove out the demon. We commanded them to be healed in Jesus name; they were healed; and, they walked off. Then everybody in the auditorium praised God and clapped. What do you mean you're sending us to the lake of fire and brimstone?" Then you get that thunderous reply from the Lord Jesus, "Depart from me. I never knew you."

If every charismatic would memorize Matthew 7:21-23, it would be a lot harder for him to chase his experiences, and his confidence would be cut down tremendously. He is arrogant and confident because he does not realize that he is calling Satan or a demon God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says, "I am going to speak of the truth." The truth is doctrine and that is what I store within my being. The Christian life is designed to be built around that spiritual maturity structure with all of its facets. This is built as we learn the Word of God, and in no other way. The charismatics are so lacking in the truth (that is, in reality) that they miss the whole point of what Paul is saying here, that "I won't brag about experience. It isn't worth a thing. The thing that I will brag about is the doctrine that God gives me because that is the thing upon which I can base my life. That's the thing which is going to come to my aid in the moment of my trial and suffering."

We have the high-powered promotion of the tongues movement, and I'm sorry to say that you have it dignified by evangelical leaders who have cast their weight behind it. I notice now at the grocery stores, at these little paperback book sections, that they're selling a book by Oral Roberts called The Call. In it he describes his own life experience in his call into the charismatic healing / tongues movement. If you'd like to buy the book and read it through, he delights to reveal for you how he got his start in the big time in acceptance with evangelicals through the underwriting and the promotion of Billy Graham. Until Billy Graham came along, he was not accepted by the evangelicals. Billy Graham gave him the dignity by placing him on the platform and calling upon him to pray, much to the amazement of those who were there. Oral Roberts delights in relating for you in that book how he went to the big time under the sponsorship of Dr. Graham.

Dr. Graham justified his action by saying that he had an aunt who had been healed through the ministry of Oral Roberts. He was thus suggesting that, sure enough, Oral Roberts can heal people. Sure enough, Oral Roberts can put the enamel back on the cavities in your teeth. Sure enough, Oral Roberts can put your broken bones back together. At least he has improved since the time when his tent blew down and they were hauling people off to the hospital in ambulances instead of Oral just going around and healing them and saving all that trouble and expense. Apparently he must have improved considerably.

This has resulted in thousands of believers being placed on the road to spiritual poverty and away from the truth of doctrine. Evangelical leaders have dignified those who call Satan and demon God and the Lord Jesus Christ. That is a monstrous monstrous thing. While we do not deny that the gospel truth is preached in these campaigns, we can neither deny the fact that a great deception has been placed upon Christian people by dignifying somebody like Oral Roberts and all of the charismatic movement which he represents, which is so amply summed up in Matthew 7:21-23.

The apostle Paul says instead that he will forbear: "For though I would desire to glory in my experience and brag about that, I will not be a mindless 'aphron.' I will not be a fool, for I will say the truth. I will declare doctrine. But now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he sees me to be or that he hears of me." The word "forbear" is "pheidomai." It is present active indicative. The word means "to abstain" or "to restrain." Paul says, "I will abstain from bragging and telling you about my experience. I will restrain myself." It is present: I will always do it. It is active: I will make this choice. It is indicative: a statement of fact. I will not boast about that Lystra experience. Why? Because, Paul says, "I don't want anybody to be making a celebrity out of me, and I don't want anybody to be putting upon me something more than what he sees in me, and something more than what I am." Paul does not want anybody to get the idea that he's some kind of a real special Christian just because he went to the third heaven--so that he's now ready to go on speaking tours to relate his experience.

God is not impressed with human celebrities. I hope you will finally learn that if you have not already done so. Our God is not impressed with anything about any one of us; nor is He impressed with anything that we do; and, He is not waiting for us to do anything for Him. He is only waiting for us to allow Him to do something for us. The only thing that God is going to be impressed with in you is that spiritual maturity structure with its five facets in your soul. That's what impresses God, and that alone. And the reason that impresses Him is because it is His grace that produces that. It is His grace that puts that together within us. God doesn't want or need our image-making of any kind.

Most of the impressions that you have of some super spiritual celebrity Christian are the result of the fact that you don't know that person. He's at a distance from you. If you could get up close and get to know that person, you'd discover that he's no celebrity at all. In some respects, he has you downright conned. I mean that goes for preachers too. I would be very careful of the preacher who puts on spiritual airs, especially the preacher who conveys the impression that he's a humble sinner. If there's anybody who knows how to be a good first rate sinner, it's a preacher. He's got so much more information about the whole game and how it's played. So don't let him go around giving you the idea that he's some kind of a super celebrity spiritual person. Very frequently, the one who speaks in his pontifical voice is the one who's most loaded with mental attitude sins that people don't see. He's nice and OK on the outside in his performance, but within is where the real loathsome raging of sin lies. Image-making and experience is not what counts with God because Satan can make images. Satan can give you experience. However, there's one thing that Satan can never produce, and that is spiritual maturity in your soul. Spiritual maturity reflects the glory of God in you. That's what Satan cannot produce, and that's what God is impressed with.

So, Paul says, "I'm not going to turn to some kind of phony humble routine which is a front for pride." Paul is going to be taken on the basis of what people hear him say; what he does; and, on the basis of the truth that he presents to them. Therefore, in verse 7, Paul comes to this fascinating area of the Word of God that we're just going to give you a little introduction to here, and then we're going to pick it up in the next session. Here he tells what God did to him to prevent him from a slip of the tongue to let people know what took place in heaven. Paul says, "I'm not going to brag about myself. I'm not going to go around and make a big issue over this experience I had--that I was killed; I died; I went to heaven; I came back; here I am alive; I can tell you what I heard up there; I can tell you what it's like; and, it's magnificent. However," he says, "instead I'm going to brag about how weak I am; how helpless I am; how much I suffered; and, how much I stumbled. I'm going to show you that the reason I'm going to do that is because something very wonderful happens within me (within my life as a believer) when I glory in these things and not my experience. In order to make sure that I don't get fouled up on my experience, God did something to me," and he tells us about it in verse 7.

**Paul's Thorn in the Flesh**

"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." Paul realizes that his experience at Lystra was a potential source of a great deal of arrogant pride. He had to be careful not to violate the fact that he had things that he could not tell people now. So, lest he should be exalted above measure, and the word here is "huperairo" which means arrogance or arrogant pride. He says that he should not be exalted above measure. It's present--that this could become his attitude. It's passive--that it should creep up on him as a result of this experience. It is subjunctive, and that means that it was potential. This is not like the word "kauchaomai" that we have had which can be a boasting in confidence in the Word of God. Paul said he is in danger of disregarding or neglecting doctrine because of his experience.

Therefore, he says, "Lest I should be exalted above measure in my experience, and start forgetting the Word of God because of the abundance of the revelations given me" (the trip to Heaven). "Was given" is "didomi." It is aorist--that point in Lystra in the past. It's passive--a thing he received--the death he could not control. It's indicative--a reality situation. "Given to me"--this was an advantage situation. It's called a dative of advantage. "Given to me, for my advantage, a thorn." The word thorn is "skolops." This is not the usual Greek word for thorn. The usual Greek word is "akantha." "Akantha" is like the crown of thorns that they put on the head of the Lord Jesus Christ. The "skolops" here was rather something in the form of a pointed stake. It was what was used in fortifications in ancient times to repulse attackers. After you cut the head off of your enemy, it was used as the pointed stick upon which they stuck the enemy's head. They impaled the head, and put it out there as an example to others. Really the word connotes an irritant. We would say "a splinter" which is painful but extremely noticeable.

He says that this pain was in his "sarx." "Sarx" is his flesh. Something physically was there distressing him. The physical thing was in the form of an "aggelos." Your translation may say "messenger," but in the Greek it is "aggelos," and you recognize immediately that that's the word for angel. What we have here is a demon. It is an angel of Satan. It is a demon from the source of Satan. We can only speculate about what this demon did to Paul physically that caused him a constant awareness of pain such that he was constantly reminded of his experience in heaven that he was not to relate. What this demon did was to "buffet" Paul. This is "kolaphizo." "Kolaphizo" means to take your fist and ram it against somebody. This demon, in a splinter-like physical pain, was constantly punching at Paul, and he never forgot that he was not to slip with the tongue and tell what he saw. It is present. The demon was always on Paul. It was active, and it was subjunctive. He was always there, and anytime Paul had a moment to perhaps tend to forget and to start telling, the demon was there to punch him.

"Lest" introduces a negative purpose clause meaning "that not." Lest he should be exalted above measure. This is "huperairo" again--sinful boasting. So this is very interesting. It indicates to us that it is possible for a demon to have power over your body. It is possible for Satan to have power over your physical body. In the next session, we're going to go into the details of this particular fact in the life of a Christian--how a demon can move in and create physical effects upon you. We will examine how Satan can move in and create effects upon your physical structure.

The apostle Paul had a magnificent experience. He died at Lystra, and he went to the third heaven. He saw things and heard things that he could never repeat. God told him that he could not tell this. In order to be sure that he never slipped and did tell, He gave him this particular demon agent to constantly jab at him as a splinter in his flesh in some form of some physical ailment that constantly reminded him, "Don't tell what you've heard and seen." It also reminded Paul that he was not to glory in his experience because now he had a suffering that his experience could not carry him through. This suffering was intense. It was painful. It was constant. It was an irritant. He could not carry through because of his experience.

However, Paul said, "There is something that this very weakness and suffering is drawing out of me in such a magnificent way that I can't believe it. What is happening to me is that I am taking this suffering in stride. Then he goes on to describe how that happens. What happened to him in bearing his trial in this particular respect is available to you and me. It is the same way that you and I meet the moments of pressure and suffering. Therefore, don't miss the sessions coming up on the rest of this passage.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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