

God's All Sufficient Grace

2 Corinthians 12:1-9

It Took My Thorn in the Flesh To Understand God's Sufficient Grace

Jim Burns

I had spent for more than forty years sharing the gospel through teaching and preaching. I spent most of my life studying the Bible, theology, and practical areas of ministry. I received several accolades in ministry; had exceptional pastoral ministry. I produced & directed a large passion play with an audience from every state in the U S and twenty-five foreign countries of the world. I had a very fruitful ministry as a public safety chaplain - working with fire, police, sheriff, state police and coroner's; founded a state fire chaplain corps, directed the Great Lakes Region IL, IN, MI, OH and WI, and became Regions Director for the Federation of Fire Chaplains. God blessed me with some very important skills including speaking the Word – through teaching and preaching; good administrative skills and relational skills. It seemed I was on a roll, and had more success than I could have ever imagined.

Then, on November 5, 2009 I had a stroke which left me with a horrifying speech disability. I was barely able to speak at all for some time. I had speech therapy for several months, beginning forming one word at a time like a first grade child. I then progressed with numbers - addition and subtraction, organization practice skills, sequence- putting together sentences, paragraphs, etc

As I progressed, I began to share some of the classes I had previous taught with the FFC Institute program, utilizing Power Point presentations. Using the Power Point gave me a **cue** when I lost my train of thought or had lost something the stroke had taken from me. During those teaching experiences (with the help of the Power Point and my students), I did my teaching assignments with somewhat of an acceptable job .

Then, on June 20, 2010, a friend gave me the opportunity to preach in his church. I researched as I did in preparation for preaching for forty years; I had a good organized outline; good content value; and I had planned to apply the message to my audience as I had always done before. However, it didn't turn out as I had planned and hoped for. It turned out to be the most difficult time of my life. I never wanted to read a manuscript, I wanted to relate to the people in a conversational way I had done for so many years before. However, it didn't happen that way. I struggled with almost every word in the sermon. Things I had wanted to say turned out backwards as I stumbled, stammered and stuttered. So much of a command of speaking, and that loss for words, suddenly was not there. I had lost that tremendous edge. I had lost so much to my stroke. I felt very dejected, disappointed, and pretty well worthless as a servant of the Word after that experience. I wanted to walk out of that church and wanted to crawl under a rock.

As I reflected on that difficult experience, the Lord reminded me of the Apostle Paul – describing his “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7). The great Charles G. Finney described “Paul as a man who had been favored with many wonderful revelations of heavenly things, and tells him that lest he should be thereby exalted above measure, there was given him a “thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, to buffet him.” I thought about how much the Lord had given me so many opportunities to serve Him for forty years, and now I seem to have worthless. I have my own “thorn in the flesh” – a very difficult speech disability.

I'm sure God used Paul's thorn, and God is using my own thorn. God gave Paul a thorn in the flesh to keep his servant from being exalted unduly, to guard him against self-reliance, and to keep alive in his heart his sense of dependence upon God. Paul's uncomfortable thorn, prayed that God would remove it. In fact, Paul says he “*besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me*” (v.8). However, God had a *different* plan in mind. God did not remove the thorn, but He promised *abundant grace* to meet the thorn. It seems that when Paul came to understand God's plan, he accepts it with joy.

It seems to me that the principle of the divine plan was to destroy Paul's spirit of self-dependence. It seems like God's plan for my own thorn is much like Paul's.

I am so much like other Christian brothers, I am continually prone to trust in myself rather than in Christ.

I'm sure God used my stroke to teach me. My thorn in the flesh was given to me to teach me my true weakness and my false self-dependence. I believe the Lord wants me to learn that I am to die to all my dependence on myself and to enter my full dependence on God alone; under the anointing of God's Spirit; I am to speak His Word, not my words.

After Paul had dealt with his thorn in the flesh, the Lord told him "*My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*" Paul was now able to say, "**Let the thorn remain.**" "**Let the burden rest on Christ's shoulders, no matter what; His grace is sufficient.**" As I weather the thorn in my own flesh (my speech disability), I am understanding a great truth: "*my strength is made perfect in weakness*" (vs 9). I am realizing that I am experiencing weakness and infirmity, and great crushing responsibilities that I cannot do in the flesh, but He can now do all things in me by His sufficient grace.

In this difficulty (my thorn in the flesh), I have learned a great truth: **My grace is sufficient for me** (2 Corinthians 12:9). It took my own thorn in the flesh to fully understand ***God's All Sufficient Grace.***

"Life is easy when you're up on the mountain, and you've got peace of mind, but when things change and you're down in the valley; don't lose faith for you're never alone. For God on the mountain, is still God in the valley....God of the day is still in the night." **God's All Sufficient Grace stands firm.**