

# The Problem of Satisfaction PART 1

## *The Paradoxical Christian Life*

II Corinthians 12:7-9 *To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.<sup>8</sup> Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.<sup>9</sup> But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.* <sup>(NIV)</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

- The problem of satisfaction is basic to the human experience. Satisfaction appears mysterious and elusive. Any sense of satisfaction is illusory, momentary and fleeting.
- The harder the world seeks for satisfaction, the more elusive it seems.
- The problem is not any better among most professing Christians in the West.
  - *The church knows that the world's quests for satisfaction are futile.*
  - *Many make the mistake of thinking Christians will succeed where the world fails.*
- According to Scripture, true satisfaction is not achieved by human effort; it is a gift.
- To expose the problem of satisfaction we must see that the Christian life one of paradox.

### A PASSAGE OF IRONY

- The irony in the Apostle Paul's words in this passage are evident in at least three respects.
  - 1) Paul speaks of boasting, but not in strength but *frailty*.
  - 2) Paul refers to a power that finds its fullest expression in human *weakness*.
  - 3) Paul describes two gifts: one of remarkable glory, the other of persistent torments.

### ***A Paradox of Gifts***

- The first gift Paul describes is one for which many people have longed, identified as "surpassingly great revelations."
- The accompanying gift was one for which no one hopes, described as a "thorn in his flesh" in the form of a continually harassing messenger of Satan.
- According to the Apostle Paul, this second, undesirable gift was nonetheless necessary.
  - *Man has a penchant for pride.*
  - *"Surpassingly great revelations" could easily lead to arrogance and self-exaltation.*
  - *As Jesus told James and John, one should carefully consider that for which he asks.*
- A good lesson for God's people is to be careful what they pray for.
- With limited perception and finite perspective we do not realize the implications of requests.
- If God always gave us what we desired it would likely be our undoing.
- We should be careful that our desires do not overreach our ability to survive them.
- Because we are not aware of the unforeseen implications of our desires, we may well be more satisfied with the way things actually are than with how we would like them to be.

### ***A Paradox of Power***

- According to Paul, God's power in His people is displayed on the stage of human weakness.
- The world incorrectly assessed Jesus as weak when He was crucified.

- *Jesus did not suffer at the hands of the Romans and Jews because He was helpless.*
- *However, no one took Christ's life, He laid it down willingly.*
- *The true demonstration of strength was in the fact that Christ resisted the temptation to ask for twelve legions of angels to rescue Him.*
- *Through what the world perceived as weakness, Christ conquered all of His enemies.*
- To a much lesser degree, that paradox is present in the lives of God's people.
- The weapons of our warfare are not fleshly. God's power in us:
  - *is not displayed through the strength of the sword.*
  - *is not witnessed through external coercion.*
  - *is not made evident through the human reason and worldly philosophy.*
  - *is seen in the Gospel whereby we destroy the strongholds of human arrogance.*
- God's power is not made evident through human ability but through God's grace in us.
- For the present time we possess the treasure of God's glorious power in fragile jars of clay.
  - *The world sees the outward man perishing.*
  - *Nonetheless, the inner man is being renewed day by day.*
- And the strength of God finds its fullest expression when our weakness is most evident.
  - *This is the point at which the contrast is greatest.*
  - *This chasm between our frailty and God's indwelling power ensures that people will not confuse God's strength with our own.*

### **A Paradox of Boasting**

- When Paul boasts, the subject of his rejoicing is not his strengths but his weaknesses.
- The world calls attention to oneself for the purpose of parading one's accomplishments.
- The contrast could not be more striking:
  - *Paul calls attention to the things that humble him, emphasizing that his accomplishments flow from the power of Christ.*
- Paul refuses to follow this path for it is tantamount to stealing God's glory.

### **GOD'S GRACE IS SATISFYING**

- At one time it seems that Paul himself was perplexed by the paradoxes he enumerates in this passage.
- The answer came in response to earnest prayer.
  - *Paul repeatedly sought God for deliverance.*
  - *The Lord was not willing to remove the thorn.*
- The Lord tells Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you."
  - *The answer employs the perfect tense indicating that the request has been definitively answered.*
  - *Paul does not need to have this thorn removed. All he needs is God's grace.*
- All any Christian needs is what God in His grace has determined for us. He is trustworthy, His assessments are right, and all that He does is right (cf. side bar).
- Regardless of how we may perceive our current circumstances, they are just and good.
- Objectively, God's grace is all we need. Every circumstance He brings is just and right.
- There is also a subjective element in God's words to Paul.
  - *The word translated "sufficient" also carries the connotation of contentment.*
  - *God instructs Paul to be content (satisfied) with His grace.*
- Clearly, Paul would rather have had the thorn removed. But the thorn was itself God's gift.
- To the human mind it seems paradoxical that God would grant the Apostle "surpassingly great revelations" and then seemingly impede his progress with such a hindrance.
- God was not only concerned about how much Paul could do for the Kingdom, but the character with which that ministry was discharged.

Ps 19:9 *The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.* <sup>(NKJ)</sup>

Deut 32:4 *He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.* <sup>(NIV)</sup>

Dan 4:37 *Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.* <sup>(NIV)</sup>