

## Chapter Twelve

### THE PROBLEM OF WEAKNESSES (12:1-21)

#### IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. Why does Paul hesitate to say he is the “man” who was caught up into Paradise?
2. What is “Paradise”? Where is it? Why couldn’t Paul tell about it?
3. Why, after all he had to suffer, was Paul given a “thorn in the flesh”?
4. Why did Paul refuse to “burden” the Corinthian church to support him?
5. Was there still impurity, immorality and licentiousness going on in the Corinthian church? What would Paul do about it?

#### SECTION 1

#### Weaknesses in the Body (12:1-10)

**12** I must boast; there is nothing to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. <sup>2</sup>I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. <sup>3</sup>And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—<sup>4</sup>and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. <sup>5</sup>On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. <sup>6</sup>Though if I wish to boast, I shall not be a fool, for I shall be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. <sup>7</sup>And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. <sup>8</sup>Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; <sup>9</sup>but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is

made perfect in weakness." I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

<sup>10</sup>For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

**12:1-4 Ecstatic Experience:** Paul "*must* boast" (Gr. *kauchasthai dei*, "to boast it behooves me"). If he is to rescue the Corinthians from the false teachers, he must engage in the "boasting game" although it is not *expedient* (Gr. *sumpheron*, gains nothing). As far as spirituality is concerned, comparing the credentials of one human being to another, little is gained except to prove who is a true teacher and who is a false one. That is a necessary "evil" that has to be settled at times (as it was here in Corinth). Paul must not only engage in the contest, he must *win* it! It came to that point in Corinth! So Paul cites credentials that *no* other human being could claim (except, perhaps, the apostle John). He cites *the* vision and *the* revelation no other had experienced — being caught up into the "third heaven" — into "Paradise." Paul undoubtedly had *many* visions and revelations. We know about four of them. The first was his conversion experience on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6; 22:6ff; 26:12ff). The second is simply referred to in Galatians 1:11. The third would be his call to Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10). And the fourth would be the one he cites here in II Corinthians 12. We would probably have heard nothing about any of them had not the defense of his gospel message necessitated their telling. We note that it had been fourteen years *after* the event that he finally decided he must tell of his being caught up into Paradise. And even here he is using this unique experience only as an introduction to the event in which he is *really* going to boast — the "thorn in the flesh."

Why does he speak of himself in the third person? The Greek verb *oida* is present tense, meaning, "I am knowing a man." It was not so mystical and ethereal that he could not remember it. But it may have been so *totally spiritual* (disencumbered of all that is material and physical) that he simply did not *know* whether he was there in his earthly body (or any kind of body) or not! Some think Paul uses the third person to down-play any possible implication of egotism on his part. Twice he says he does not know — but that God knows. Evident-

ly, the *mode* of his existence in Paradise was one of those things he was not supposed to know or utter.

"Fourteen years ago" would place the event about 43 A.D., about 10 years after his conversion near the time he was helping Barnabas at Antioch (Acts 13:1ff). The "third heaven" (Gr. *tritou ouranou*) is Paul's best way to express in inadequate human language a reality which is outside space and time and human experience. Paul was speaking in terms contemporary with his age. The "third heaven" was the way the Jews talked of God's dwelling place. They believed the "first" heaven was the atmosphere around the earth, the clouds and the air man breathes. The "second" heaven was beyond the clouds out where the stars and planets were. The "third" heaven was the invisible realm where God's throne was. Modern man may be amused at this, or scoff at it, but it is still difficult to improve much on this language in spite of the fact that "space" is at least 6 billion light years away at its *known* limits. Every time the Bible speaks of someone having come from or gone to "heaven" (God's immediate presence) it is simply talking about the realm of existence which is invisible to the human eye. It is *as real* as anything that is visible to the human eye. It does not mean that "heaven" is away "out there" beyond the 6 billion light years of space. It just means it is a sort of fourth dimension of life and reality that is not visible to the physical senses. (see Heb. 4:14).

Paul "is knowing" (Gr. *oida*, present tense) that "this man" was caught up into Paradise. He knew *where* he had gone, he knew he had *heard* things, and he knew he was *not permitted* to utter them. There was no fuzziness in his memory about the reality of the experience even after fourteen years! It was not a dream; it was not an imagination — it had actually happened.

*Paradise* in the Greek text is *paradeisos*. It is an oriental word, first used by the historian Xenophon, denoting the parks of Persian kings and nobles. It is an old Persian word *Pairidaeza* akin to the Greek compound, *peri*, "around," and *teichos*, "a wall." The *Septuagint* (the Greek language Old Testament, translated about 250 B.C.) has the Greek word *paradeisos* (Paradise) in Genesis 2:8 to describe Eden as God's "garden." The LXX (Septuagint) also uses the word in Num. 24:6; Isa. 1:30; Jer. 29:5; Ezek. 31:8-9. In Luke 23:43; Jesus promised the penitent thief that he would be *with Christ that very day*

in "Paradise." Jesus sent a letter to the church at Ephesus to tell all who "conquered" they would be *granted* to eat of the *tree of life* which is in the *Paradise* of God (Rev. 2:7). We assume "Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:19-31) is the same as *Paradise*. There the "beggar was comforted" while the unbelieving "rich man was in torments" separated from Paradise by an impassable gulf. Paul was caught "into" (Gr. *eis*) the "third heaven." The Greek text does *not* say he was caught "up." He was "snatched away" (Gr. *harpagenta*) *through* the dimension of space and time or *outside* the physical realm immediately into the realm of the totally spiritual where the living Christ dwells. What do we know about "Paradise"? It is (1) a beautiful, perfect "garden" (like Eden) where man is surrounded by everlasting goodness, perfection, enjoyment, satisfaction, accomplishment, companionship, dominion and participation with God; (2) where the loving, powerful, compassionate, forgiving, tender, faithful Jesus is, having finished man's justification before God and where he takes all who trust in him; (3) the city of Almighty God, beyond this created universe, not subject to its futility and doom — where there is no hunger or thirst, no scorching heat, no tears (Rev. 7:15-17). It is a place of eternal joy, eternal life (no death there). There is no mourning, no sorrow, no pain, no ugliness, no cares and no darkness there. It is a realm of reality that will last forever in which, by the grace of God, forgiven sinners may express their gratitude to God, serve him, and bask in his grace and goodness.

While we are in his body of "dust" we see Paradise by faith. But is nonetheless real, for faith makes "sure" what we hope for by God's faithful promise, and faith is the "conviction" of things not seen by the physical eye (Heb. 11:1). We understand it is unseen (II Cor. 4:16-18), but we also understand it is as real as Jesus Christ's triumph over the tomb (Acts 17:30-31).

Paul's experience in Paradise was indescribable (Gr. *arreta hrematta*, "unspeakable words"). He also says it was "not permissible for a man to speak" of it (Gr. *ouk exon anthropo lalesai*). Perhaps he was so captivated by what he saw and heard he could not remember whether he was in the body or out of the body. He was undoubtedly *overwhelmed* or *awe-struck* with the majesty, perfection, holiness, power and beauty of God. He probably paid no attention to whether he had a body or not! That is how marvelous it will be in paradise.

Here, we pay so much attention to the body we cannot enjoy life — but there it will be just the opposite. He was like Isaiah (Isa. 6:1ff) (only a million times over). He was like Daniel or the apostle John who fell down as if dead when in the presence of heaven's occupants. Furthermore, he was not "permitted" to speak of the things he saw and heard. God assigned certain persons the job of speaking of Paradise and God assigned only certain aspects of it to be described. God has his reasons for keeping knowledge of Paradise limited to the Bible we now have. In the first place, it is "beyond all comparison" (II Cor. 4:16-18). We could not comprehend it had God given permission to describe it. There is nothing in human experience or language by which to make a comparison, thus, no adequate description. Second, we might not be "able to bear" what God could tell us about it (see John 16:12ff). Should God tell us more many might neglect the spiritual exercises and necessities of this life of preparation as those did in Thessalonica (see I Thess. 4, 5; II Thess. 3).

We rest secure in the absolute faithfulness of God's revelation through the apostles that it is the place where we shall be "at home" (secure, happy, fully ourselves, surrounded by love) with the Lord; that it is "very far better" than this vale of tears; and endures forever. It is better than we can think or imagine. It is beyond what human language can describe. The best that can be done is Genesis chapter one, and Revelation, chapters twenty-one and twenty-two. Beginning and ending, God's word talks about Paradise! And Paul saw it and heard it, and would *not* boast about having such an unparalleled experience!

**12:5-6 Enigmatic Explanation:** If you saw Paradise and were told you could not tell anyone else about it or brag about being the only person ever to have seen it, could you keep it a secret? How would you explain your dilemma? Paul's dilemma was that he needed to "boast" about his credentials as apostle, while at the same time he desperately desired that the Corinthians know him only as a simple christian believer who was no "super" saint, who had his weaknesses and sufferings just as they did.

That is the reason his explanation of this tremendous experience in Paradise in these two verses (12:5-6) are so enigmatic! He wanted the Corinthians to be his friends, his brethren, and his "flock" because of his personal integrity, his love for them, and the spiritual power of his

message rather than because of some "super" demonstration of apostolic authority.

He will "boast" on "behalf" of the "man" (Paul) who must demonstrate a "super" credential for his apostleship. He has to — because it is the truth. He really was in Paradise. If he tells them this truth about the "apostle" Paul, it will not be foolish. He could "boast" about the excursion in Paradise for hours upon end if he wished. He could make all kinds of comparisons between his singular, supernatural trip out of this world into the next, and those "other" teachers in Corinth who were bragging about their background. And it would all be true because he, alone, could lay claims to such an exalted honor. But he will *only* mention that the event happened. He will not go on and on "boasting" or "comparing."

What he *will* do is tell these brethren about the ordinary, everyday, servant of God, Paul, who lives depending upon the grace of God because of his "thorn in the flesh." On his own behalf he will "glory" in his weakness. He started out "preaching" (I Cor. 1:26-31) to the Corinthian brethren that God's power found its energizing in things which were weak. Now he will show that he "practices what he preaches." He is "content" with weakness because that is where the power is! Human weakness, admitted and accepted, makes available an instrument through which divine power may flow. Human weakness, admitted and accepted, turns to the "source" (I Cor. 1:30) of absolute power. Paul wished not to be judged by what he could tell about "super-duper experiences" but by what they have seen in his ordinary, workaday life as a servant of Christ and a preacher of the gospel.

Paul's refusal to "boast" and "testify" about his great "mountaintop" experience in Paradise should be a good guideline for the multitude of religious "stars" circulating Christendom today testifying of their "great spiritual experiences" or "visions" or "revelations." People are not converted to Christ by human "experiences," no matter how extraordinary. It is the *gospel* which is the power of God unto salvation and that is found exclusively in the scriptural record. No human "experience" atoned for sin; no human "experience" can absolutely verify the justifying grace of God; no human "experience" can impute Christ's righteousness to sinful man; no human "experience" can give birth to the Spirit of God in man's

nature. Salvation for the human race was earned by the perfect life of Jesus Christ accomplished by the historical, vicarious death of Jesus Christ, and sealed (or validated) by the historical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Any existential experience any human being has of salvation or sanctification *follows and is totally dependent upon* his knowledge of, belief in, and obedience to the Person, Jesus Christ, as documented in the facts stated above (the gospel). When christians speak, let them speak the facts of the gospel and keep their "experiences" to themselves! People are converted and edified by the word of God — not by our "experiences." In fact, "experiences" are most often misleading. They give people the impression that Christianity is nothing more than "religion" which has its source in human imaginations or feelings or "experiences."

Paul did not boast about being caught into Paradise because he did not get there on his own power. He did not assault the gates of heaven and fight his way in; he did not climb a "bean-stalk" and find the goose with the golden eggs; he did not earn a trip there by being "a good little boy." He was an invited, transported, guest. He was "caught to third heaven" (Gr. *harpagenta heos tritou ouranou*). *Harpagenta* means, "to snatch or catch away" (see Acts 8:39; I Thess. 4:17; Rev. 12:5) and has the idea of force suddenly exercised. He would not "boast" because he probably saw the same thing going on there that John saw in his "vision" — great potentates casting down their crowns in deep humility before the throne of Christ and falling down on their faces before the throne (see Rev. 4:1-11; 5:1-14; 7:1-17; 20:11-15, etc.). It was a "trip" for Paul that made *all* boasting utterly foolish, absolutely disgusting, repugnant, stupid, blasphemous! Not even an apostle who miraculously spoke in foreign languages, healed terminally ill, raised people from the dead, was commissioned to write the living and abiding word of God, and was transported to Paradise would boast! *How dare we boast of anything!* (Rom. 3:27-28; I Cor. 1:26-31; Eph. 2:9).

**12:7-10 Exasperating Extremity:** Paul was given an "excess" (Gr. *hyperbole*, "cast over, or beyond") of revelations. He had more than any one in Corinth might claim, perhaps more than any other true apostle might claim! Wherefore, "lest" (Gr. *hina me huperairomai*, subjunctive mood, present tense) he be continually "exalted" or "raised up" there was given him a "thorn in the flesh." The Greek

word *skolopsi* is translated "thorn" but is often used to denote "a sharp, pointed stake or stick" as well as a "thorn." What Paul was "given" hurt him like a wooden stake being driven into his flesh. It was *te sarki*, "in the flesh" and not psychological. The "stake" continually *harassed* him (Gr. *kolaphize*, present tense verb, "to buffet, to strike with clenched fists over and over," see Matt. 26:67; Mark 14:65; I Cor. 4:11; I Pet. 2:20). Paul lived with this pounding, beating "stake" being driven into his flesh day after day. It is doubtful that Paul was using the words in a figurative sense so we must assume it was some form of physical handicap which was painful or some disease. We do not know precisely what it was. Some say it was some sort of ocular (eye) disease because of his need to "write with large letters" (Acts 9:1; Gal. 4:15; 6:11). Others think it may have been malaria "which haunted the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean." Still others think it was some debilitating, impairing, painful disfigurement (a withered limb or crippling arthritis) which made him ugly and hindered his work (see II Cor. 2:10). It definitely was "in" the flesh and not simply the opposition he suffered or some fleshly temptation he endured. William Barclay cites the view that it might have been *epilepsy* since in the ancient world when people saw an epileptic they spat to ward off the "evil demon" they suspected possessed him. In Galatians 4:14 Paul says that when the Galatians saw his infirmity they did not *reject* him and the Greek word literally means *you did not spit at me*.

What the "stake" was is irrelevant to us. Paul is not the only person in the Bible, or in history, who has had a "stake in the flesh." People have them, are born with them, endure them every day. The fact that God permitted *Satan* to deliver it is the problem! It is the every recurring theological or philosophical problem of reconciling the Biblical claim of the existence of a God of absolute power and righteousness, with the opposite claim that there is a supernatural (not absolute) being who exists with powers of evil and hurtfulness and is *allowed* to exercise those wicked powers contiguous to the all-powerful and all-good God. Satan was *permitted* to harass Job (see Job, chapters 1 and 2). He was *permitted* to tempt the perfect man, Jesus. Whatever he does, he does only by the *permission of God*. Evil is never out of control of an Absolutely Good God. That is what the scriptures teach and that we believe, whether it appears to be so to the



finite experiences and thinking of man or not! God has given sufficient evidence of his infinite and absolute power, and sufficient evidence that his propositional revelation (the Bible) is absolutely trustworthy. We may therefore believe his declarations of Satan's limited powers. God's revelation to Paul concerning the purpose of his "stake in the flesh" will go a long way in satisfying the christian's mind about the presence of evil and suffering in this world. Please see Special Studies on *The Problem of Evil*, *Questions About Whether the Devil Can Actually Perform Supernatural Deeds or Not*, and, *Is There Demon Possession Today As There Was During the Time of Christ's Incarnate Ministry?* at the end of this chapter. If the problem of pain and evil is a real threat to your christian stability, we suggest you make a thorough study of the Bible books of *Job* and *Psalms*, and, in addition, read *The Problem of Pain*, by C.S. Lewis, and, *What the Bible Says About Self-Esteem*, by Bruce Parmenter, pub. by College Press.

Paul's "stake" in the flesh was to keep him from elevating himself and losing the grace of God, to make him a vessel of God's power in the world. It was a continual reminder to him that he was not sufficient of himself. He absolutely needed God's grace! Without it he would be nothing! Without it he would be eternally lost. Whatever it took to keep in the grace of God he cherished, "boasted about" and was "well pleased" with.

C.S. Lewis writes, in, *The Problem of Pain*:

When Christianity says that God loves man, it really means that God *loves* man: not that he has some 'disinterested,' really indifferent, concern for our welfare, but that, in awful and surprising truth, we are the objects of his love. You asked for a loving God: you have one. The great Spirit you so lightly invoked, the 'Lord of terrible aspect,' is present: not a senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happy in your own way, not the cold philanthropy of a conscientious magistrate, nor the care of a host who feels responsible for the comfort of his guests, *but the consuming* fire himself, the love that made the worlds, persistent as the artist's love for his work and despotic as a man's love for a dog, provident and venerable as a father's love for a child, jealous, inexorable, exacting as love between the sexes. . . .

The problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of God who loves, is only insoluble so long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word "love," and look on things as if man were the center of them. Man is not the center. God does not exist for the sake of man.

## SECOND CORINTHIANS

Man does not exist for his own sake. "Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." We were made not primarily that we may love God (though we were made for that too), but that God may love us, that we may become objects in which the divine love may rest "well pleased." To ask that God's love should be content with us as we are is to ask that God should cease to be God. . . .

What we would here and now call our 'happiness' is not the end God chiefly has in view: but when we are such as he can love without impediment, we shall in fact be happy.

We have quoted all that to help you appreciate that God's grace — even though it may include a "stake in the flesh" is sufficient to make us into a person God can *really* take pleasure in — a person humble, dependent on him, firm in conviction that he is our goodness, grateful, and able to serve others. The goodness and holiness of Jesus worked through people while he was here on earth by the power of persuasion. While here he worked on that which was matter and physical by sheer force — by miracles. But his *spiritual* power he worked only through those who allowed themselves to come under the persuasive, *disciplining power of his grace*. Grace (or, love) is the most *persuasive* power there is. If grace cannot mold a person into someone God can enjoy and use, nothing else can. Grace is *all* sufficient! Paul needed *nothing* else!

For God to say to an apostle, "My grace is sufficient for you" is to say everything there is to be said. It is the ultimate statement from God! It eliminates a long, long list of things man, in his finitude, thinks is necessary for sufficiency. The world believes itself to be insufficient if it has no money, fame, influence, comfort, political freedom, peer-esteem, happiness, independence and self-esteem (pride). All these things are unnecessary for a man's sufficiency in the judgment of God! God's grace is sufficient because the power of God is made *perfect* in weakness!

The Greek word *teleitai* (present tense verb) is translated "perfect." It means "to bring something to its fulfillment, its goal, its purpose, its aim." Paul is saying that continuing "stakes in the flesh" are God's *instruments* to continually bring the grace-gift of his power to its purpose in the believer's life. And what is the end God seeks by giving us his power? *It is to conform us to the image of his dear Son* (Rom. 8:29) — to make us into a Jesus-person.

Three times Paul prayed (Gr. *parekalesa*, "called upon, besought") the Lord that his "stake in the flesh" should *depart* (Gr. *aposte*, "fall away" we get the English word "apostasy" from it) from him. Three times, the answer from God came back, "No! — My grace is sufficient for you." God hears and answers all prayers made to him. According to his own infinite wisdom and love he answers either, "Yes" or "No." Let us be thankful that he often answers, to our eternal benefit, "No." Even an apostle found himself praying to his own spiritual and eternal detriment! The Greek word *arkei* is translated, "sufficient" and literally means, "sovereign, rule, enthroned" (see our comments on II Cor. 9:8). In other words God's answer to Paul's call that his stake in the flesh" be taken away was, "My *grace* must *rule* and be enthroned as sovereign in your life and this stake is necessary for that." Sinful, rebellious man will not allow God's grace to rule him without some "stake" continually thrust into his flesh! Yes, the goal God has for all your physical weaknesses and mine is to give us something in which we may "boast" and to make us *content* with his everlasting grace.

These next statements from Paul are almost incredible! It is never easy to endure physical weakness. But Paul says (12:9b-10) that he is "glad" and "content" with his "sharp stake in the flesh." The Greek word *hedista* is translated "more gladly" and is an adverb in the superlative degree literally meaning, "most sweetly" (see also II Cor. 11:19). The Greek word *eudoko* is translated "content" and means literally, "well-pleased." Paul was not "bitter" about his weaknesses — he was "sweet." He was not merely resigned to them, he was "well-pleased."

He gloried ("boasted"), and was pleased to do so, with *insults* (Gr. *hubresin*, English, *hubris*, meaning arrogances, haughtinesses, insolences toward him), with *hardships* (Gr. *anagkais*, being needy, hard-up, destitute), with *persecutions* (Gr. *digomois*, being pursued, chased, hounded), with *calamities* (Gr. *stenochoriais*, literally, "narrowness of place," or "between a rock and a hard-place," means, anguish and distress).

Question! Are you "well-pleased" when you are insulted, destitute, hounded, and between a rock and a hard-place? Are you "sweet" and "well-pleased" with your physical weaknesses and sharp, stabbing "stakes in the flesh"? We are not talking here about

stoic resignation — but about being pleased, *well-pleased*. Are these “weaknesses” with the divine assurance of infinite grace all you need? Can you get by on just that? Lord, deliver us from our *usual* reaction to weaknesses — shame, complaint, resentment, excusing failures, and self-indulgence for compensation. It is the way of the world to glorify human strength, beauty, fame, power, wealth and independence, or to indulge the flesh as a compensation for weaknesses and sufferings. But the way of God is diametrically opposite. The way of God is to be “sweet,” “well-pleased” and gratefully accepting the sovereign rule of God’s grace as the compensation for weaknesses and sufferings. The world cannot “sing that song” — the world does not know that song, it is the song sung in heaven (see Rev. 15:2-4; 19:1-10; 4:1-11; 5:9-14; 7:13-17).

The creature presumptuously assumes his Creator admires human power. The Creator declares he admires human weakness which depends on the Creator’s grace. No room for merit there. No room for demanding there. No room for bragging there (except in God’s grace). The history book of God’s dealing with mankind (the Bible) shows that God’s power *rested* (Gr. *episkenose*, “overshadowed”) upon people the world would call “weak.”

How Paul could carry on a world-wide ministry, day in and day out, suffering the beatings, shipwrecks, dangers and hardships (II Cor. 11:21-29) he enumerates is beyond comprehension. Add to those overpowering obstacles his “sharp stake in the flesh” and his accomplishments for Christ are nearly *incredible*! It is a wonder that he could get out of bed each morning and put one foot in front of the other. When he was “weak,” he was “strong” because he was ruled every day by the sovereign grace of God. Grace, “amazing grace” energized him, drove him, empowered him. He was *immersed* in the wonderful grace of Jesus. His faith in that grace provided the energy and motivation. God’s providential sustenance each day provided the necessary physical strength to fulfill his mission. What Paul wanted to do sometimes conflicted with what the Lord wanted him to do (see Acts 16:6-10), so the Lord had to redirect his plans. Perhaps the Lord did his hindering of Paul through this “sharp stake in the flesh.” But whatever Christ had for Paul to do, Christ supplied the physical necessities to accomplish it. What Paul had to supply was *faith*. Faith with God’s grace produces divine power and victory in what the world

calls weakness and defeat. With this powerful victory Paul is "well-pleased"!

## SECTION 2

### **Weakness in Bearing (12:11-18)**

11 I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these superlative apostles, even though I am nothing. <sup>12</sup>The signs of a true apostle were performed among you in all patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. <sup>13</sup>For in what were you less favored than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!

14 Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you; for children ought not to lay up for their parents, but parents for their children. <sup>15</sup>I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls, If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less? <sup>16</sup>But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by guile. <sup>17</sup>Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? <sup>18</sup>I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?

**12:11-13 Spiritual Signs:** Paul's opponents (the Judaizers) had tried to convince the Corinthian Christians that Paul did not have the "bearing" of a "true apostle." His "appearance," his "attitude" was not commensurate with the popular idea of how a "true" apostle would display himself.

Paul's answer: "My opponent's idea of a 'true' apostle is foolishness!" They think only in terms of worldly "signs" and worldly "attitudes." They think a 'true' apostle would go about "boasting" of his miraculous powers and showing them off at every opportunity.

Everything Paul had "gloried in" was true! But the "foolishness"

of having to glory in things which were his only by the grace of God bothered him. So he says, "I have been a fool!" They had "forced" (Gr. *enagkasate*, "compelled," "constrained" see Matt. 14:22; Lk. 14:23; Gal. 2:3, 14) him into the "foolish" game of comparing and glorying. They should have "commended" (Gr. *sunistasthai*, literally, "stood beside him") him. They should have defended his apostleship and his personal integrity. Even if his "bearing" made him to appear to be "nothing" (Gr. *ouden*, unsophisticated, unschooled, and unpleasant to look at, he was in no way "inferior" (Gr. *husteresa*, behind, destitute, English prefix "hyster-" comes from this word and means, "loss of") to "these" pseudo-apostles who think they are "super-duper" (note his sarcasm). "Bearing" or "appearance" is outward and may be faked. The Pharisees were very religious in their "bearing" but it was all hypocritical. Modern "image-makers" have produced a number of men in the "religious market" who have the "bearing" of "minister of God." But what message do they preach? How does their personal life measure with the Bible? The Corinthians, of all people, should have defended Paul.

First, the "signs" (Gr. *semeia*, that which points to, signals, evidences) of a "true" (Gr. *men*, "indeed, actual, truly") apostle were "performed" (Gr. *kateirgasthe*, "worked") among these Corinthian Christians. Paul endured (Gr. *hupomone*, "remained under," "was patient") much immaturity and stubbornness by the Corinthians in order to win them to Christ and build them up in the faith. He confirmed the gospel message with "signs and wonders and mighty works" (Gr. *semeiois te kai terasin kai dunamesin*) to bring them to faith. And then he imparted to them wonderful miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (see I Cor. chapters 12-14) to build them up in their faith and to preserve the true apostolic gospel since there were probably no inspired documents containing the gospel readily available to the churches at that point in time. They "came behind no church" in possessing miraculous gifts by which to be edified. They "came behind no church" in receiving the services of a "true" apostle. Paul wrote them three or four letters and visited them at least three times. He sent his most prized co-laborers (Timothy, Apollos, Titus) often to work with the Corinthians (see Acts 18:1, 5; I Cor. 4:17; 16:10; Rom. 16:21; I Cor. 3:5; 4:6; 16:12; II Cor. 2:13; 7:5-16; 8:16-24; 12:18). They should have "commended" him. Instead, they defamed him, and were about

to repudiate his ministry among them.

Even though he had imparted to them miraculous powers no one but a true apostle could give, they were ready to reject his spiritual leadership. Their rationalization for rejecting him may be found in their attitude toward the spiritual gifts (see I Cor. chapters 12-14). While Paul directed them to desire the gift of *prophecy* (inspired teaching) which would edify everyone, they were so spiritually immature they clamored for the "showy" gift of speaking in a foreign language ("tongues") which edified no one but the person speaking. Paul showed the Corinthians "signs," but he emphasized the spiritual, the practical, the teaching signs. They wanted the spectacular, the worldly, the ostentatious. Paul's opponents, the pseudo-apostles, were probably telling the congregation that a "true" apostle would "bear" himself more spectacularly than a mere "teacher." They probably challenged Paul's claim that he was able to "speak in tongues more than you all" (I Cor. 14:18) and mocked his preference to "speak five words with the mind, in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue" (I Cor. 14:19).

Paul had given the Corinthians all the spiritual advantage he could. The only "favor" he had not done for them was "burden" them. He means he had not taken financial support from them (see comments II Cor. 11:7-15). Does Paul mean to ask their forgiveness for an *actual* wrong (12:13)? Had he really "wronged" them (Gr. *adikian*, an injustice)? While it is altogether possible that a congregation may be "wronged" or even do itself an "injustice" by not having the opportunity to financially support the preaching of the gospel, we think Paul is using sarcasm here. Paul clearly believed he was benefiting the Corinthian church by taking no financial remuneration from them although he took it from others (Phil. 4:15-18). But someone had convinced the Corinthians that the "bearing" of a "true" apostle would require being a financial "burden" on the congregation. This issue must have been very significant for Paul to keep mentioning it!

**12:14-18 Sacrificial Service:** The signs of a true apostle are (1) having seen the risen Lord Jesus; (2) performance of miracles; (3) preaching a gospel of grace. But what Paul is dealing with here, in context, is another important *sign* of a true apostle — "sacrificial service." Humility, dependence on God's grace, working to edify chris-

tians and congregations — these are what a true apostle does. How much edifying had the pseudo-apostles done? None! They were tearing apart. What had the pseudo-apostles “given” to the Corinthians? Nothing! They were taking.

J.B. Phillips translates 12:14-15: “Now I am all ready to visit you for the third time, and I am still not going to be a burden to you. It is you I want — not your money. Children don’t have to put by their savings for their parents; parents do that for their children. Consequently, I will most gladly spend and be spent for your good, even though it means that the more I love you, the less you love me.” Paul is not contradicting the rest of the Bible saying that children have no responsibility to “honor” (support financially) their aged parents who may need it. Paul is the one who told children that supporting (“honoring”) their parents was “the first commandment with a promise” (Eph. 6:2). Paul is referring here to *young* children at home who are not mature enough to work and support their parents. Paul is not going to ask the Corinthian church (his “baby”) to support him. They still need to be matured, built up, strengthened. He will support them! Like a father, his heart’s desire is to give of himself so that his children may grow into adulthood.

Whatever it takes to accomplish that Paul is *glad* (Gr. *hedista*, “sweetly”) to give. His children are “sweet” to him. He loves them with all his being. He will “sweetly” *spend* (Gr. *dapaneso*, expend, consume, squander, see Luke 15:14) and *be spent* (Gr. *ekdapanethesomai*; first person, singular, future, indicative passive, “allow myself to be consumed, exhausted”) *for your souls* (Gr. *huper ton psuchon*, on behalf of your souls). He is willing to be completely used up, depleted of energy, strength and worldly possessions for their spiritual good (souls). A man who would be willing to be “anathema” from Christ for the sake of his Jewish brethren (Rom. 9:1-2) would be sincere in this promise as uncommon as it may be even among christians.

If Paul had shown more love for the Corinthians than he had for other churches, this would not be strange. Love must necessarily be more often shown to “problem” children than to others. This does not mean he loved the Corinthians more. He is trying to cajole them or chide them and call them back to their devotion to him. Abundant love to the “problem” child is often repaid by rebuff and rejection



(see the prophet Hosea).

“They” (opponents and the few Corinthians they had seduced) were saying Paul was being “crafty” by not taking financial support from the congregation. “They” were probably accusing Paul of some ulterior scheme, some nefarious plan to really defraud the congregation, “setting them up” by faking humility and sacrificial service. “They” were saying that if he had been a “true” apostle he would have taken their money and bossed them around and made a spectacular show of his miraculous powers. The Greek phrase *alla huparchon panourgos dolo humas elabon* is a participial phrase, and, literally translated is, “But being cunning with guile, you I took” and means, “being thoroughly unscrupulous.” “They” accused Paul of “snaring, trapping or baiting” the Corinthians like one who hunts animals.

His answer is four straightforward, rhetorical questions: (1) “Did I take advantage (Gr. *epleonektesa*, defraud, lead astray) of you through any of those whom I sent to you?” (2) “Did Titus take advantage of you?” (3) “Did we not act in the same spirit?” (4) “Did we not take the same steps?” Evidently “they” were saying Paul had taken no support from the Corinthians, but that the “offering” he took for Judea was going to go into his pocket. They knew Titus had not taken advantage of them. They knew Titus had not acted dishonestly. Timothy and Titus and Apollos had ministered among them for many months. They were Paul’s “children in the faith.” They had not defrauded the Corinthians. Now, Paul asks, “Was my behavior among you any different than theirs?” How can they believe a man who could produce such exemplary christian servants as these would be dishonest with them? How the great heart of this selfless servant of Christ must have ached! What stress it must have caused, what sadness, what temptation he must have had to “quit the ministry” to leave the Corinthians to their fate! But he didn’t. He exhausted himself for them.

### SECTION 3

#### **Weakness in Behavior (12:19-21)**

19 Have you been thinking all along that we have been de-

fending ourselves before you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved. <sup>20</sup>For I fear that perhaps I may come and find you not what I wish, and that you may find me not what you wish; that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. <sup>21</sup>I fear that when I come to mourn over many of those who sinned before and have not repented of the impurity, immorality, and licentiousness which they have practiced.

**12:19 Presumptuousness:** All through this epistle Paul has been dealing with the presumptuousness of his opponents at Corinth who thought he was writing to defend himself. That presumes, of course, Paul was in the wrong. His opponents were convinced all their allegations against him were true. The Greek text in verse 19 is emphatic: *Palai dokeite hoti humin apologoumetha . . .* literally, "Already you judge that to you we are making a defense. . . ." The Greek word *apologoumetha* is the same word Peter uses (I Pet. 3:15) to urge all christians to be ready always to make a defense of the gospel — it is the word from which we get the English word, *apologetics*, a defense based on evidence and reasoning.

Paul puts it this way: "Are you thinking all this time that I have been trying to justify myself in your eyes? I have said and written everything to you as a man totally responsible to God and as one serving Christ." Paul has said nothing to the Corinthians that God and Christ would not have said. In fact, what the apostle said is what the divine Godhead has given (revealed to) him to say. Paul's message was inspired and inerrant. It was not some defense of his own egotism, it was from Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They assumed all along he was a weakling. He did not "come on" like they thought an "authority" would. So, whenever Paul spoke sharply or threatened corrective measures, his opposition assumed he was defending himself.

His exhortations, rebukes, warnings and severe words were actually the words of Christ for their "upbuilding" (Gr. *oikodomes*, edification, construction, upbuilding). The Judaizers were in Corinth (and perhaps other opponents of the gospel of grace) tearing down the faith of the christians, taking away their liberty in Christ, destroying their hope of the resurrection, and enticing them back into their licentious

Gentile ways. They were headed for spiritual ruin. All they had gained in Christ was about to be plundered. It called for severe, extreme, uncommon action. This humble apostle was even willing to make a "fool" of himself and engage in a game of "comparisons" ("boastings"). They assumed he was bent on defending his own bruised ego. Actually, he was very nearly compromising his own conscience (in the matter of "boasting") in order to rescue the Corinthians from the "messengers of Satan." All of his "boasting" about what he had suffered, what his Jewish heritage was, what he had accomplished was not to build up his reputation so he could "take advantage" of them financially or religiously. It was to mature them in their spiritual union with Christ. It was to help them benefit from and enjoy their spiritual heritage as christians. He would sacrifice his own conscience about "boasting" to keep them giving their attention and loyalty to God's word and keep them from being seduced by the pseudo-apostles. He did not want to constantly recite his credentials and proofs of his apostleship. But false teachers are so cunning, so deceitful. They do not have the constraints of truth and love that bind christians. They are at liberty to say anything, do anything, pretend anything. That makes it necessary for christian messengers to have to continually "prove" the authority of their message. This problem continues to this day. People still think christians are egotists when they repeatedly stand up for and defend the word of God. Many think christians are "pig-headed," loud-mouthed, bigots when all they are trying to do is keep the world from being seduced by Satan's messengers — pseudo-apostles.

**12:20-21 Perversity:** It is almost if some of the Corinthians were daring Paul to make some demonstration of "authority" or "power" by reverting to their former heathen ways. As an apostle, "an authority in the church" he has really *done* nothing about the sinfulness going on in the Corinthian church. He has *said* a lot — told *them* a number of things to do, but he has exercised no supernatural powers as he did with Elymas (Acts 13) or others. They think he is "weak."

Paul's fear about his forth-coming "third" visit to Corinth starts with his fear of what he may find when he gets there (v. 20). They may not be what he wishes when he gets there — and if that is so, he may not be what they wish he would be. He is going to exercise some chastening power, if they do not correct the sin themselves.

He fears (from reports he gets) that he may find them still “quarreling” (Gr. *eris*, “strife,” in their Pantheon the Greeks even had a “goddess of discord” named *Eris*). He also expected to find them “jealous” (Gr. *zelos*, zeal in the worst sense, envious), “angry” (Gr. *thumoi*), “selfish” (Gr. *eritheiai*, rivalrous, competing against one another), “slandering” (Gr. *katalalia*, speaking against one another), “gossiping” (Gr. *psithurismoi*, whispering, telling tales), “conceited” (Gr. *phusioseis*, puffed up), and “discorded” (Gr. *akatastasiai*, rioting, chaotic, separating). To this list he adds in verse 21, “impurity” (Gr. *akatharsia*, uncleanness, moral or spiritual dirtiness), “immorality” (Gr. *porneia*, fornication, porno-) and “licentiousness” (Gr. *aselgeia*, lewdness, perversity, wickedness). Most of these have to do with sexual sins and perversions so *common* in Corinth. It would be difficult to compare modern wickedness with that 2000 years ago, but hardly any perverseness today could be worse than that of Corinth in the first century.

Now what Paul feared was that he would find them continuing in such gross wickedness and that would be proof that his work among them had, after all, been in vain. That would be humbling to Paul. Not that Paul was afraid of humility. That was the essence of his character now as a christian. But Paul is using the word “humble” in the sense of being brought to “mourn” or brought to grief. He would be devastated, should he find them acting wickedly, like a father who had “spent” himself to lay up a magnificent heritage for his child only to have the child disregard and despise both the heritage and the father.

Paul is closing his letter to Corinth — his last one — and he wants them to know he has tried to be like the “father” in parable of the “Prodigal.” That is what “ministry” is all about. He is not “weak” — but merciful like a father. But if it is necessary to “restore” them to the grace of God, his “weakness” will be exchanged for the chastening “authority” and “power” of a “father” in the faith.

## APPREHENSIONS:

1. Why was Paul so adamantly opposed to “boasting” (comparing ministries)?

## THE PROBLEM OF WEAKNESSES

2. How many visions and revelations did Paul have?
3. Why does he speak of himself in the third person ("I know a man")?
4. What is the "third heaven"? What is the first heaven and the second heaven?
5. Just what does the Bible say about "Paradise"?
6. Why is Paul unable to speak about his trip to "Paradise"?
7. What is the meaning of the Greek word *skolopsi* translated, "thorn"?
8. Was Paul's "thorn in the flesh" really some physical problem? How do you know?
9. What is the theological problem about Paul's "thorn in the flesh"?
10. What does Paul say was the purpose of his "thorn in the flesh"?
11. How is God's power brought to its goal or aim in human weakness?
12. How did God answer Paul's prayer for the "thorn" to be taken away?
13. What did God teach Paul about the proper attitude toward "weaknesses"?
14. Why did those opposing Paul accuse him of being "weak"? What did they see in him which they considered weakness?
15. How did Paul refute their accusations of "weakness"?

### APPLICATIONS:

1. Is it wrong for preachers to "glorify" God for what they have sacrificed in the cause of Christ? Always wrong? Sometimes right? When? Why?
2. Do you know religious leaders today who boast about the "revelations" and "visions" they have had? What does Paul's reluctance to do so say about their eagerness to do so?
3. If you had been caught up to Paradise and had seen it, could you keep from telling about it even if God told you to keep silent?
4. What do you know about Paradise? What does it do for your spiritual life? Are you anxious to go there?
5. Do you have a "thorn in the flesh"? Have you ever had one? Do

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- you expect to have one?
6. What have your "weaknesses" taught you?
  7. Is God's grace sufficient for you? If that was all you had in this world, right now, would you be "well-pleased"? Why?
  8. Do you find yourself having your spiritual powers increased when your physical powers are decreased? Which do you prefer?
  9. What does it take to make you "content"?
  10. Would you consider yourself "wronged" if you could not contribute financial support to the work of the gospel? Deeply wrong?
  11. Are you willing to "spend" and "be spent" (exhausted in resources and strength) for the church (christians)? Is it necessary? What would happen if you did?
  12. Can "speaking" build up the church? Speaking as Paul spoke?
  13. Is such speaking being done? If not, why not?
  14. Do you mourn over people's spiritual weaknesses as much as you mourn their physical weaknesses? Should you?
  15. Is there impurity, immorality and licentiousness in the modern church of Christ? What should be done about it? How do we bring that about?

# Special Study

## THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Condensed from *Introduction to Philosophy — A Christian Perspective*, by Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, pub. by Baker book House.

Three basic ways of relating God and evil.

- A. One may affirm the reality of evil and deny God (atheism)
- B. One may affirm God and deny the reality of evil (pantheism)
- C. One may attempt to show the compatibility of God and evil

Atheism: Denying the reality of God

If God exists, He is not essentially good.

1. Either (A) morality is right because God willed it or else (B) he willed it because it is right.
2. But if (A), then God is arbitrary about what is right, and He is not essentially good.
3. And if (B), then God is not ultimate, since He is subject to some standard beyond Himself.
4. But in either case — if God is not essentially good or not ultimate — God is not what theists claim Him to be
5. Therefore, no theistic God exists.

Answers:

1. Good is based on God's will but God is sovereign and not arbitrary.
2. God's nature is the ultimate norm in accordance with which His will cooperates. God wills what is essentially good without there being some ultimate standard beyond Himself. The ultimate norm for all good flows from the will of God but only in accordance with the nature of God. God is neither arbitrary nor less than ultimate.

Atheism: God should destroy all evil.

1. If God is all-good, He will destroy evil.
2. If God is all-powerful, He can destroy evil.
3. But evil is not destroyed.
4. Therefore, there is no all-good, all-powerful God.

Answers:

1. Premise No. 3 implies a time limit on God. God may *yet* destroy evil.

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2. It is possible that there is no way to destroy evil without also destroying the good of permitting free creatures.
3. The syllogism may be turned around thus:
  - A. If God is all-good, He will one day defeat evil.
  - B. If God is all-powerful, He can one day defeat evil.
  - C. Evil is not *yet* defeated.
  - D. Therefore evil *will one day* be defeated.

Atheism: God and evil are logically incompatible.

1. God and evil are opposites.
2. Opposites cannot exist simultaneously.
3. But evil exists.
4. Hence, God cannot exist.

Answers:

1. The atheist fails to prove that God and evil are actually contradictory. They may be only contrary and not contradictory.
2. Let us restate the atheistic argument here:
  - A. God exists. (1)
  - B. Evil exists. (2)
  - C. (3) there is no good purpose for evil.
  - D. Therefore, both (1) and (2) cannot be true.
  - E. But we know (2) is true.
  - F. Therefore, God cannot exist. (1)

The difficulty with this atheistic argument is in proving premise (3) to be true. The only way one can be sure God could not possibly have any good purpose for evil is (1) either to already know God is not all good, which begs the question, or (2) to know the mind of God, which is presumptuous for any finite being.

If there is an all-good God, it follows automatically that He does have some good purpose for allowing evil, even if no human being knows what that good purpose is.

An important point for the theist to remember . . . since the point disputed here is logical or conceptual, all the theist needs to do is show some *possible* explanation for evil to defeat the non-theist's claim. Theists are not obligated to show *in fact* that this is the case.

## THEISM'S ANSWER TO EVIL

God permits evil in order to produce a greater good.



## THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

1. God freely created the world, not because He had to, but because He wanted to do so.
2. God created creatures like Himself who could freely love Him. But such creatures could also hate Him.
3. God desires all men to love Him, but will not force any against their will to love Him. Forced love is not love. It is rape.
4. God will persuade as many to love Him as He can (II Pet. 3:9). God will grant those who will not love Him their free choice — forever (hell).
5. God's love is magnified when we return His love (since He first loved us) as well as when we do not. It shows how great He is that He will love even those who hate Him.

Thus, in the end the greatest good will be achieved in several ways:

1. God will have shared His love with all men.
2. God will have saved as many as He could without violating their free choice (I Tim. 2:1; II Pet. 3:9). Those not saved will be given their own freely-chosen destiny; thus the good of their freedom will be respected.
3. Throughout all God will be glorified in that (a) His sovereign will has prevailed: (b) His love is magnified whether it is accepted or rejected (c) He has defeated evil by forgiving sin (through the cross) and by separating good from evil forever (through the final judgment). And (3) He has produced the best world achievable (where the most men possible are saved and secured from evil forever).

There are two very important aspects of this theodicy that should be stressed:

1. It is a "best-way" (versus a "best-world") theodicy. That is, this present evil world is not the best world possible, but it is the best way to achieve the best world. Permitting evil is a precondition of producing the best world (Rom. 5:20; Gen. 50:20).
2. This solution is not a soul-making but a soul-deciding theodicy. God is not conceived as a cosmic behavioral manipulator who is programming people into heaven against their will. God operates with men only with their "informed consent." God never goes beyond freedom and dignity to save men at any cost — not at the cost of their freedom or dignity. Whosoever will may come, but whoever won't will not be forced

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to come. In a truly free world, God cannot make souls act against their will. He can only lovingly persuade them and then respect their decision — whatever it may be.

## Special Study

### IS THERE DEMON POSSESSION TODAY AS THERE WAS DURING THE TIME OF CHRIST'S INCARNATE MINISTRY?

It is my opinion that there is no demon possession of human beings today in the precise manner such as manifested in the phenomenal way it was during Christ's incarnate ministry (and perhaps as it was during the remainder of the ascendancy of the Roman empire).

It is my opinion that the "binding of Satan" in Rev. 20:1-6 was initiated and resulted from the redemptive work of Christ in His Incarnation. It was completed when the "beast" of the 4th universal empire (as Daniel predicted), Rome, fell. At that time, it is my opinion, demon possession, as manifested in the Gospels and Acts apparently was to cease. All binding of Satan is relative. He has always been "bound" to some degree or other due to the fact that God is Almighty. God is the only being who is Almighty. It is my opinion a part of Satan's binding has to do with the restriction imposed by God so that Satan's demons are no longer able to "possess" human bodies as they were during the time of Christ's incarnation.

1. To have this opinion does not mean I deny the power of Satan to deceive the minds of people today who deliberately choose to believe falsehood perpetrated by "lying signs and wonders." If the definition of demon possession means simply that Satan has captured the minds of men by unbelief, I would agree.

"Satan entered into Judas . . ." (Luke 22:3 and John 13:27) but he was not what other scriptures describe as "demon possessed."

2. Do the alleged demons possessing people today ever enter into animals? (See Matt. 8:28-34; Luke 8:26-36; Mark 5:1-16.)
3. Do the alleged demons possessing people today ever testify to the identity and deity of Christ or the messengers of Christ and what their work is? (See Acts 16:17; 19:15; Matt. 8:29; Mark 1:24 and above references.)
4. Do the alleged demons possessing people today ever speak out as recognizable separate individuals — definitively separate from the human whose body they possess?
5. How many demons (alleged) today be exorcised? Is the exorcism always miraculous and always instantaneous? If not, is it simply a matter of conversion by the power of the gospel regenerating the

- mind through preaching and teaching? When there is an unsuccessful exorcism, or casting out, are those possessed by alleged demons doomed to suffer such possession until they die?
6. Only Jesus could give power to exorcise demons. That was a direct gift and a supernatural power. It apparently did not require being a "born again" believer to receive this power — Judas apparently was given this power — he was one of the twelve (cf. Matt. 10:1,8).
  7. On the other hand, many pseudo-faith-healers today, and "ministers" from all differing theological and doctrinal positions, claim they have cast out or exorcised demons. Whom are we to believe? Who has that power today among all who claim it? What are we to conclude from their claims? Who is to decide which are "real" demons and "real" exorcists? By what criteria?
  8. Demons in the scripture were not "ecto-plasm" — they were (and still are, in the abyss) real persons!
  9. The psychic powers of the human mind over matter have been well documented. What some think is demon possession could very well be such psycho-somatic phenomena. Voodooism may be classified under this heading.
  10. The most destructive power of the devil is not possession of a human body but a mind or soul (cf. Matt. 10:28). It appears that while demons possessed bodies of some humans during Christ's incarnation — the mind or soul of that person was not possessed. Demons merely "troubled" humans (Luke 6:18); they "drove" people to do, physically, what they did (Luke 8:29).
  11. Of all the miraculous gifts the Corinthian Christians were given, exorcism of the demon-possessed was not among them (I Cor. ch. 12-14).
  12. How do we know when someone is demon possessed? What is the criteria by which distinction is made between demon possession and epilepsy, mental illness, perverted maliciousness and crazed murderousness (e.g. Hitler, de Sade, etc.)?
  13. Is it not possible that all the mania for the occult and the practice of it is being used by the devil to get people to think he has powers which he does not really have (Rev. 13:13-15)?
  14. If demon possession could only come to those who were willing — was the "little daughter" of the Syro-Phoenician woman a "will-

## IS THERE DEMON POSSESSION TODAY?

ing" victim? In other words, demon possession had nothing to do with the willingness of the possessed. Therefore, exorcism was not done by "conversion" but by the exercise of divine authority in a miraculous way.

15. It seems apparent that only Jesus and the apostles, or specially endowed disciples (Luke 10) could exorcise demons. This they did, not by "conversion" but by miracle. There is no evidence from the scriptures that this miraculous power could be given by any other than Christ Himself and that while He was in His incarnate ministry.
16. If miracles of healing, speaking in foreign languages, prophecy, including "discernment of spirits" (I Cor. 12:10), etc., ceased with the end of the New Testament era and the death of the apostles (or the ones to whom the apostles imparted these gifts), so that we can only be certain of the documented miracles of Scripture, then the same principle ought to be applied, for the same reason, to demon possession and exorcism. Otherwise, we are in a quandry to decide about modern claims of demon possession and exorcism among religious groups from one end of the doctrinal spectrum to the other. There are also pagan exorcists making claims.
17. There really is not any documentation of demon possession in the Old Testament such as occurred during the Incarnation (with an exception or two, e.g. King Saul).
18. It appears, then, that demon possession in the precise manner in which it occurred during Christ's incarnate ministry was uniquely for the purpose of affording historical evidence that Christ (and His apostles) possessed the Sovereign Spirit of God — that their message was one of victory and power over Satan and all of hell.
19. A recent case in point, excerpts from article in Joplin, Mo., *Globe*, 3-8-81:  
Catholic priests were "attempting" to rid an 11 year old boy in Brookfield, Conn. of "demons." (The boy's name is unknown.)  
A 19 year old friend was watching these sessions, challenged the demons "to take me on. Control me. Leave this boy alone," acc. to tape recordings of the sessions. (Arne Johnson) was the friend.

Johnson allegedly stabbed to death a co-worker (Alan Bono)

## SECOND CORINTHIANS

after Bono had quarrelled at Bono's apartment.

Johnson is now pleading that "he is not responsible for his acts" because of "demonic possession."

Ed and Lorraine Warren, who worked on the Amityville Horror case were asked to help the boy who "appeared to be possessed" (the 11 year old boy). Warrens said they found "movement of objects and frightening manifestations" in the house. The Warrens said "the boy was indeed possessed," and he seemed to be possessed "off and on, 24 hours a day," said one family member. Tape recordings the Warrens made of some of the sessions have the boy making guttural and hissing sounds, cursing his mother, and threatening to stab and kill those present in the room.

Photographs of the sessions show family members attempting to restrain the boy, who the Warrens said seemed to have superhuman strength.

A priest named Virgulak was called to investigate the case; he has made several reports to the bishop of the diocese, but no public reports. He has "declined to discuss the reports but said no formal exorcism has ever been requested or performed on the boy."

There were "prayer sessions" called "a deliverance" which is supposed to be "a lesser form of exorcism that does not require approval of the bishop."

The Warrens say Johnson's attempts to help the boy were amateurish because "the only way to order demons out of a person is by using the name of Jesus Christ."

Mrs. Warren said, ". . . (Johnson) he challenged what was within the child to take him on — and none of us ever do that, not even priests."

Problems with this account:

- a. Based on a number of "begging the question" statements such as, "appeared to be . . .," "seemed to be . . .," "seemed to have . . .," "no public reports . . .," "supposed to be . . .," "approval of the bishop. . ."
- b. "In the name of Jesus" means in the Bible, "by the authority of Jesus." Does Roman Catholicism have the "authority of Jesus" to exorcise? The "name of Jesus" is to be used in ex-

orcism by only those authorized to use it (cf. Acts 19:13-16). Whom are we to believe now has that authorization? What credentials do they present for it? Do such exorcists agree doctrinally with the Word of the Holy Spirit in the Bible? If not, are we to believe they have the power of the Spirit?

20. There are two Old Testament prophecies, clearly Messianic, which predict the cessation of "sorceries and soothsayers" (Micah 5:12-13), and "unclean spirits" or demon-possession (Zech. 13:2). Homer Hailey, in his book, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets*, pub. Baker, sums up Zechariah 13:1-6 in these words, "A fountain for sin and uncleanness will be opened for all the people. At that time the falsehood of idols will cease, prophesying will be discontinued, and the unclean spirits will pass out of the land." Mr. Hailey contends that Zechariah 13:1-9 is entirely Messianic and says, "Once the foundation was laid and the new revelation was complete, the need for prophets would cease. Daniel indicates the same in a strong Messianic prophecy, when he said of the anointed one, the prince, that He would bring in everlasting righteousness, and seal up vision and prophecy. Likewise, unclean spirits, the antithesis of the prophets, would cease. In the conquest of Christ over Satan and his forces, unclean spirits have ceased to control men as they did in the time of the ministry of Christ and the apostles."

Of course, these prophecies from Micah and Zechariah do not preclude the *attempts* of human beings and Satan to try to *deceive* the world that demon possession and sorceries are still supernaturally viable. We believe the Bible clearly indicates what is alleged today to be supernatural demon possession is no longer a possibility. *Lying* wonders and *deceiving* signs remain very much a possibility so long as men and women refuse to believe and love the truth and prefer to believe what is false (see II Thess. 2:10-12; II Tim. 4:3-4, etc.).

21. The crucial and ultimate question about modern (alleged) demon possession is: *Whose testimony is reliable?* Whose testimony is inerrantly, infallibly reliable besides the testimony of the Scriptures? None! Any man today, without the inerrancy and infallibility of the Holy Spirit to verify his experience and accredit his testimony may be either deceived or a deceiver.

## Special Study

### QUESTIONS ABOUT WHETHER THE DEVIL CAN ACTUALLY PERFORM SUPERNATURAL DEEDS OR NOT

1. There is only one Creator. No one else ever creates anything.

God is said to have given the devil permission to take away Job's property. Job said, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away." The devil did not have that power of his own. He probably tried to get Job to think he did, but Job was not persuaded. Is Job right or wrong? Did God take away, or did the devil?

Can Satan give an order that "fire should come down out of heaven" or make an image breathe (Rev. 13:11-17). Who is in charge of ordering things in heaven (or on earth)? Satan or God? While men were convinced the "beast" was invincible (Rev. 13:18), God revealed through John that the beast was human (Rev. 13:18), not supernatural, not divine, not to be worshiped!

2. Only God is Almighty. How does one distinguish what or who is almighty from that which is not?

If the distinguishing criteria of almightiness appears in two persons or realms, can both be almighty? If only one can be real, what is the other? — partly real?

It is a law or logic that two contradictory propositions cannot both be true!

3. If one says we distinguish what we are to believe as actual or real by whether the attending message or doctrine is true and good or not, how does one substantiate which message is good? If we say the message of God does not lie, how do we determine it does not lie? If the devil has supernatural power how are we to determine that his message is not substantiated as "good" and those who claim to speak for the Lord as "bad"?

The ethical value of what God says is good cannot be substantiated on the basis of pragmatism (it works) because that makes every person able to say what works for you doesn't work for me. The *absolute* ethical value of God's statement of "good" depends on authority. Authority depends on demonstration of faithfulness and sovereignty in the absolute degree. How could that allow for *real* supernaturalism to be arrogated to someone else?

4. Did the devil have the real power to produce what he promised in the Garden of Eden? II Cor. 11:3 says he deceived Eve by his cunning.



ning to lead her thoughts astray.

II Thess. 2:9-12 says the devil, through the "lawless one," is to do *pretended* (Gr. *pseudo, false, fake*) signs and wonders, with all wicked deception (Gr. *apate, cheating, beguiling, false impressions, unscrupulous*) for those who refuse to love the truth. God will send to them a *working* (Gr. *energeian*) of error (Gr. *planes, astray, wandering, planet*) to believe the *lie* (Gr. *pseudei*) for those having not believed the truth, but are having pleasure in unrighteousness.

Does that sound like actual miracles are going to be given to lead people astray?

5. The supernatural things done by God (and his representatives) are said to be moral *facts* in themselves which in turn delineate in man's experience the existence and nature of God (cf. Rom. 1:18ff; Acts 14:15-18; Acts 17:22-31, et al). If there are other supernatural facts being done which are capable of competing on the same level, in the realm of the factual, what do they delineate — that there are two Gods? If these two supernatural facts are both facts, how are we to decide to which one we surrender? The one who seems to have the most workable doctrine?
6. Is Satan's power to deceive in the reality of a supernatural event actually done or is it in the interpretation he wishes us to make of the event which *appears* to be a supernatural event? If it really is a supernatural event accomplished by the devil (or a human being today), what interpretation are we to make?
7. Paul writes that we should not let the devil *defraud* us (Gr. *pleonektethomen*) by being agnostic about his *devices* (Gr. *noemata, mentatlity* — not miracles) II Cor. 2:11.

The mind is powerful, Ideas and thoughts have tremendous capabilities. Mental, psychological trauma has caused amazing effects over personalities and even over physical functions.

8. Jesus stated that it was a logical impossibility that Satan would cast out demons for Satan would be defeating himself. Therefore, when demons are really, actually cast out, only the Lord could be doing it. If alleged modern exorcisms are actual, then Jesus is working through Catholicism, through witch-doctors, etc. The Jews of Jesus time did not really cast out demons or they would have had the evidence to really accuse Jesus of blasphemy.

9. Two passages in Deuteronomy appear to conflict. Deut. 13:1-5; 18:20-22.

Perhaps Deut. 13:1-5 means, If what a prophet gives as a sign or wonder *appears* to come to pass, and if he says, Let us go after other gods . . . do not follow him . . . his signs are really false.

One should not go after other gods because one knows what has appeared to come to pass, and if he says, Let us go after other gods . . . do not follow him . . . his signs are really false.

One should not go after other gods because one knows what has appeared to come to pass has only appeared to do so. Only true prophet's signs and predictions factually come to pass.

10. Those who did not repent of their sorceries, Rev. 9:21, repented not of *pharmakeion* — the Greek word for "sorceries" is the word from which we get English, pharmacy. Is it possible that the "sorcerers" worked their alleged signs and wonders by chemicals and pharmaceutical properties.

The word translated *magic* (RSV) in Acts 19:19 is Gr. *periergos* and means *curiosity, inquisitive*, or literally, "Things that are appearing to work — *superfluous*." Things not reality, but things in the realm of question or doubtful.

Elijah's challenge to the prophets of Baal is instructive. Elijah said, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And during the contest the prophets of Baal could *not* call down fire from heaven! Even though they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out of them. Here is the time for the devil to do a miracle, if he can!

11. Let us consider again the text in Job.
- a. God said to Satan, "Behold all that he has is in your power. . . ." The Hebrew word is *yadeka* from *yod*, literally, "Hand." This word is used metonymically for "power" in Deut. 32:36; II Kings 19:26; Job 5:20; Psa. 22:20; 49:15; Isa. 37:27; 47:14; Dan. 6:27; Hosea 13:14; and Micah 2:1, but never of any supernatural power.
  - b. Job's first disaster was perpetrated by the Sabeans falling upon his servants and slaying animals and servants. The devil could have put it into the minds of *men* by the vehicle of

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falsehood (communicated in language) to do this.

Job's second disaster is said specifically to be the fire of *God* falling from heaven.

Job's third disaster was the Chaldeans raiding and slaying with the sword — nothing supernatural here.

Job's fourth disaster is the death of his children *while they were drinking wine*, during a windstorm. Perhaps they were deceived by Satan into getting drunk and could have escaped the windstorm had they not been drunk. This does not necessarily have to be a supernatural, occult, windstorm which the devil worked — it could be God's windstorm.

c. Job, chapter 2:

God says to the devil, “. . . you moved *me* against him” (2:3) “to destroy him. . . .” The devil moved *God* to destroy Job!

The devil says to God, “. . . put forth thy hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face . . .” (2:5). The devil knows that only God has the supernatural power to touch Job's flesh.

In 2:7 the Hebrew text literally reads, “So went out Satan from the face of Jehovah. And *he struck Job with burning ulcers, bad, from the sole of his foot to the top of his head.*”

*Who is the antecedent of “he” — God or Satan? The nearest is God.*

d. If it is God really exercising *His* supernatural power in all this what does God give into the “hand” of Satan?

I think it is simply the permission for Satan to try to *deceive* Job (and the world) into *thinking* he (Satan) is exercising this power. Satan has permission from God to *pretend* this or these powers belong to him.

How does Satan pull off this pretense? By lying to men and letting men use all human craftiness at their disposal to make it appear what is being done is supernatural.

The devil, by lying, tempted Job (through his friends) to think what had befallen him was evil. It really was chastening. All that we think about physical discomfort or loss is that there is some supernatural evil doing evil to us. Actually it is all chastening. What is evil about it is the lie that it is not in

the sovereign control and will of God. It is the *power of fear* (of death) by which Satan enslaves men (Heb. 2:14-15). Satan has no power to supernaturally kill (or even naturally), or make alive. He has the “power” only to lie to people that he has such power.

12. Judas had power to do miracles (Matt. 10:1ff). He also allowed the devil to come into him. Who gave him power to do miracles?

Simon the Sorcerer wanted to buy Holy Spirit power to do miracles but Peter said, “You have neither part nor lot in this matter” (Acts 8:18-24).

It is possible, therefore, that those who would prophesy and exorcise demons in Matt. 7:21 did so through power given by God and then later became those “working lawlessness” (Gr. *ergazomenoi ten anomian*) (Matt. 7:23), just like Judas.

13. Or, do we propose that everything which *appears* to be miracle *is* — but that only *some* are from God and *some* are from the devil?

How do we decide which are which? Do we have to decide? We are told we should not permit ourselves to be deceived — if we do not decide which are from God, we are in danger of being deceived.

If it is to be decided on the basis of which doctrine or works are good or evil — how do we decide that? From the Bible? How do we decide the Bible is speaking the truth? And does the Bible really say the devil has authority and power to do a real miracle?

How was it decided at the very first (in the garden of Eden)? How did God expect Eve to be able to decide whether the devil could produce what he promised so she could make the decision of faith?

OR IS FAITH, A “LEAP IN THE DARK” AFTER ALL?

This is not an attempt to deny the Scriptures — it is an attempt to understand them.