

Why do we rage against our trials? Why do we struggle so against our infirmities, our restraints?

THE THORN

Arise, O Lord, do not let man prevail;
Let the nations be judged before You.
Put them in fear, O Lord;
Let the nations know that they are
but men. Selah.

Psalms 9:19-20

“We should otherwise think ourselves gods. We are so inclined to sin that we need strong restraints, and so swelled with a natural pride against God, that we need thorns in the flesh to let out the corrupt matter. The constant hanging the rod over us makes us lick the dust, and acknowledge ourselves to be altogether at the Lord’s mercy. Though God hath pardoned us, he will make us wear the halter about our necks to humble us.”

Stephen Charnock

Man, self-centered and narcissistic by birth, perceives the thorns of life from only one perspective, one direction: he sees only their inward thrust. They inflict discomfort, disruption of goals, frustration, agonizing pain. The thorn punctures the outer defenses and it hurts, and he rebels against the utter unfairness and inconvenience of its assault.

Such a response betrays our family line. The people of Israel were fed up with the quality of their water, with their monotonous diet, and they grumbled and whined like spoiled brats at Moses until the Lord was fit to be tied and ready to destroy them all.

But long before that Adam and Eve, dwelling in a paradise, as much as shook their fists at God out of pique because they weren’t satisfied with their living conditions. He had given them everything, save the fruit from one tree. For the sake of that forbidden fruit, they struck back. They said, *We don’t like the way You’ve organized this paradise.*

Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.

2 Corinthians 12:7-8

The modern believer, dwelling in the paradise of grace in Christ, feels the occasional sting of a thorn, and rebels against the injustice and pain. Like the apostle Paul he cries, O God, can’t you do something about this painful thorn sticking in my side? And the Lord gives His answer:

And He has said to me, “My grace

is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.”

2 Corinthians 12:9a

Our compassionate, disciplining Lord has an opposite perspective on the thorn. Instead of seeing it as something piercing in, He sees it as something releasing out. With His thorns He punctures our pride, our self-sufficiency. With His thorns He keeps in check our bent toward sinning. With His thorns He teaches us reliance on Him, rather than on ourselves.

Over time even believers become bloated by their own self-sufficiency. They become filled with the hot, noxious bile of arrogant pride; their repeated winking at sin causes them to become inflated with the bilious gas of self-righteousness.

So the Lord applies some therapeutic discipline to relieve our pent-up rebellion. And it hurts, indeed it hurts. It is meant to. The fleshly part of us wants to complain, to strike back, to refuse the treatment. But our spirit in communion with His grabs hold of the pain and uses it for our good. After all, what have we to complain about?

Why should any living mortal, or any man, Offer complaint in view of his sins? Let us examine and probe our ways, And let us return to the Lord.

Lamentations 3:39-40

Once surrendered, once contrite, the Lord may remove the thorn. But, knowing us better than we know ourselves, He may also leave it in. We may just need that constant, nagging reminder of our need for Him, our need to submit, our need to replace our failing strength with His grace.

