



The Inscrutable Question: Paul's Entreaties Denied by the Lord: Suffering Must Be Met with Delegated Power and Resident Doctrine, 2 Cor 12:9-10

2 Corinthians 12:9 - And the Lord said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

The weakness experienced by Paul was suffering for blessing. The power is the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, the power of the Word of God, and the power of plan of God for the believer. Once understood, Paul oriented and adjusted:

2 Corinthians 12:10 - Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

The weakness is the suffering for blessing through which Paul has learned to become content. His focus is on accelerating his spiritual advance rather than being distracted by the problem.

He then mentions four areas of testing that serve as warm-ups for the next stage of spiritual growth. These are expressed by four plural nouns:

ὕβρις, *hubris* - "slanders." This correlates with *people testing* in Stage 2. The noun originally meant "an act which invades the sphere of another to his hurt" (*TDNT*: 8:295)

ἀνάγκη, *anankē* - "pressures" It has to do with stress that is imposed externally or internally. Here it refers to the internal stress of *thought testing*.

διωγμός, *diōgmos* - "persecutions" This is *system testing* that takes the form of religious testing, such as Judaism, Gnosticism, Pantheism, et al.

στενοχωρία, *stenochōria* - "stresses"

This last word refers to *disaster testing* and is often expressed during time of national discipline. Some concepts about this application can be discerned from the analysis given by:

Kittel, Gerhard and Gerhard Friedrich (eds.). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol. 7. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 605:

στενοχωρία. Relates to external events which overtake men. Denotes a life under external pressure or psychologically in inner depression. What smites the sinner is the inner and outer tribulation which robs him of peace. According to Rom. 8:35 Christians in their following of the Lord are by no means exempt from earthly afflictions. They have to bear in full measure what the saints of the Old Testament had to bear again and again. But affliction and distress, and whoever is behind them, cannot separate believers from the God whom they follow and thereby bring about their dereliction.

The Hebrew equivalent of **στενοχωρία** gives us much the same definition and application:

Harris, R. Laird (ed.). *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Vol. 2. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 779:



צרה, *tsa-RAH*. Indicates intense inner turmoil. It describes the anguish of a people besieged by an enemy. It is comparable to the pain of a woman bearing her first child. The land of a people that reject the Lord's word is described as full of distress, darkness, and the gloom of anguish (Isa. 8:22; cf. 30:6). Into such darkness Yahweh will bring the light of his salvation (Isa. 9:1-2).