

Obfuscation is the stock-in-trade of the false prophet. (To obfuscate is to confuse or bewilder, to make a matter hard to understand.) This the false prophet accomplishes by refusing to renounce the hidden things of dishonesty, by walking in craftiness, and by handling the word of God deceitfully. **2 Cor. 4:2.** False prophets also in every instance have perverted the words of the living God, of the Lord of hosts our God; the seriousness of which is reflected in the size and nature of the Lord's punishment therefore; to wit:

“Therefore, behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you, and the city that I gave you and your fathers, and cast you out of my presence; And I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten.”
(Jer. 23:39,40)

False prophets moreover corrupt the word of God, and are utterly insincere in all their handling of the weighty matters of faith, even in the very presence and sight of God. **2 Cor. 2:17.** ***“And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.”*** **1 Cor. 2:1-5.** Whatever may be said in ridicule, often in a mocking and scoffing manner, about the foolishness of simple preaching; – in the opinion of God Almighty, preaching is the most powerful weapon in God's armory of holy faith; to wit:

“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” **(1 Cor. 1:21)**

There once was a chief judge of the Kansas Supreme Court – named Al Schroeder. He did us much evil. He now has the unenviable task of explaining to the Great God Almighty why he persecuted the Lord's loved ones. When he retired from the bench his black-robed brethren gave him an encomium to honor him for his years of service to the State, blah, blah, blah. In his reply, Schroeder said he thought about becoming a preacher rather than a lawyer and a judge – as he started out in life. But then he decided against becoming a preacher because, he said, preachers can't do anything but talk. He wanted a job with some teeth in it. He wanted a job where you could be tough, knock somebody's head off. Also, preachers often don't make much money, and usually don't have much prestige. When ole Schroeder died, they hid him, just so we could not picket his funeral and warn the living. Listen, Beloved.

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” **(1 Cor. 1:18-20)**

Paul was no Fancy Dan preacher – No grinning Joel Osteen – or, Bob Schuller – each with teams of make-up artists – getting these TV Super Stars ready for, It's Show Time! Prosperity Gospel, indeed! How unlike Paul and the other apostles. Gill: ***“‘And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling,’*** *Meaning either the weakness of his bodily presence, the contemptibleness of his voice, and the mean figure that he made as a preacher among them, both with respect to the matter and manner of his ministry in the eyes of many; or his lowly and humble deportment among them, Not exerting the power and authority Christ had given him as an apostle; but choosing rather to work with his own hands, as he did at Corinth, to minister to his own necessities, and those of others; or the many persecutions that he endured there for the sake of preaching a crucified Christ; and which he sometimes called infirmities,* **2 Cor. 12:9,10;**” to wit:

“For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong.”
(2 Cor. 12:8-10)

Beloved, this powerful language – and the remarkable context of it – is especially applicable to us and our experience at this hour in this place. Paul recites a glorious, heavenly experience which God had given him in Paradise or the Third Heaven – followed by an abundance of special revelations of divine truths; to wit:

“It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell; God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell; God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory; yet of myself will I not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth; but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me. AND LEST I SHOULD BE EXALTED ABOVE MEASURE THROUGH THE ABUNDANCE OF THE REVELATIONS, THERE WAS GIVEN TO ME A THORN OF THE FLESH, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, LEST I SHOULD BE EXALTED ABOVE MEASURE.”
(2 Cor. 12:1-7)

(A modest digression for the comfort of the living saints – God’s living Elect – gathering together as Westboro Baptist Church, in Topeka, Kansas, the United States of America, on Planet Earth. To this little group God has vouchsafe an *“abundance of the revelations.”* Look about you. Who else loves the cause of God and truth in the earth today? Who else on Earth today can be said to function as the robust defenders in these last days of the faith once and for all times delivered to the saints? Beloved, these glorious revelations are nothing less than the mysteries of God, and we are the fiduciaries; to wit: *“Let a man account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards [i.e., fiduciaries] of the MYSTERIES OF GOD. Moreover it is required in stewards [i.e., fiduciaries], that a man be found faithful.”* 1 Cor. 4:1,2.)

Does it not also apply to us, the warning that lest we be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations which God has given us? We must walk humbly lest we displease our Father, who has declared, *“An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin.”* Prov. 21:4. Now let us return to our text; to wit:

“AND LEST I SHOULD BE EXALTED ABOVE MEASURE THROUGH THE ABUNDANCE OF THE REVELATIONS, THERE WAS GIVEN TO ME A THORN IN THE FLESH, THE MESSENGER OF SATAN TO BUFFET ME, LEST I SHOULD BE EXALTED ABOVE MEASURE.” (2 Cor. 12:7)

Who or what is Paul’s thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan? Many have been the thoughts and conjectures of mankind – some saying one thing, others saying other things – but all the expositors agree that the thorn in the flesh refers to the same thing as the messenger of Satan; that is, the thorn in the flesh is one and the same as the messenger of Satan – the former being a figurative expression; the latter being literal, and explanatory of the former. Some think that corporeal afflictions are meant here, which may be compared to thorns; to wit:

“Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths.” (Hos. 2:6)

Which are not joyous, but are grievous to the flesh, and come not by chance, but by divine appointment; and are designed and made use of to hide pride from men; and sometimes, by divine permission, Satan has a hand in inflicting them, as in the case of righteous Job. It is difficult to think of the holy apostle Paul as being dangerously near destruction due to one unmanageable sin or other in his life; but such seems to have been the case. Indeed, Paul’s own words are these:

“And lest I should be exalted above measure, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me.” (2 Cor. 12:7)

Gill: “Over-much elated in his mind, and swelled with a vain conceit of himself, through the abundance of the revelations; for he had not only one or two, or a few, but an abundance of them; and which everything does but grace, tended to lift up his mind, to stir up the pride of his heart, and to entertain too high and exalted thoughts of himself. (Was pride the debilitating sin of the Apostle?) Pride is naturally in every man’s heart; born-again persons are not without it; knowledge, gifts, and revelations are apt to puff up with SPIRITUAL (!) PRIDE unless counter-balanced and overpoised by the grace of God. THIS GREAT APOSTLE WAS NOT OUT OF DANGER BY THEM, for he was not already perfect; wherefore to prevent an excess of pride and vanity in him on account of them, he says, ***‘there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me.’*** ...Some say the thorn in the flesh was the cholic, some the gout, others a pain in the ear, and others a persistent headache; which latter it is said he was much troubled with. Others think that the corruptions of nature are intended, which in regenerate persons are left, as the Canaanites were in the land, to be thorns in the eyes and sides of the Israelites; to wit: ***‘Know for a certainty that the Lord your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you.’*** Josh. 23:13. ***‘Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.’*** Judg. 2:3. These ‘thorns,’ to be sure, were felt by the Apostle, and were very grievous and humbling to him, and were no doubt sometimes stirred up by Satan, which made him complain bitterly, and groan earnestly; and it may be observed, to strengthen this sense of the passage, that it was usual with the Jews to call concupiscence, or the vitiosity of nature, Satan; for so they often say, Satan, he is the evil imagination, or corruption of nature; and particularly they call the lust of uncleanness by this name; and it is said of a young man of Israel, being tempted by a young woman of Midian, through the counsel of Balaam, that SATAN BURNED IN HIM, and he turned aside after her; and that the evil imagination is the old serpent; yea, they call this THE MESSENGER OF HELL, a phrase very much like what is here used.” We are all familiar with the Bible account of this incident; to wit:

“And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab...And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand; and he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through her belly. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel. And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand.” (Num. 25:1-9)

“Then stood up Phinehas, and executed judgment; and so the plague was stayed. And that was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore.” (Psa. 106:30,31)

Gill: “*Rabbi Hona, as he was preaching to the children of men to take warning, said unto them, Children, beware of the messenger of Hell; But who is this? the evil imagination, or concupiscence, is that which is THE MESSENGER OF HELL.*” (CONCUPISCENCE. A longing after that which is forbidden; “*the lust of the flesh.*” 1 Jn. 2:16).

Indeed, the great apostle seems to have had mighty struggles against sins of the flesh; to wit:

“What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law; for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of CONCUPISCENCE. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death...O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:7-10,24)

“Mortify (i.e., make to die) therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, EVIL CONCUPISCENCE, and covetousness, which is idolatry. For which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.” (Col. 3:5,6)

“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification; that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor; NOT IN THE LUST OF CONCUPISCENCE, even as the Gentiles which know not God.” (1 Thes. 4:3-5)

Gill: “*But, after all, I see not but that THE DEVIL HIMSELF MAY BE MEANT; for the phrase – a thorn in the flesh – is metaphorical, and the phrase – a messenger of Satan – is literal, and explains the other; and the whole may be read thus, THERE WAS GIVEN TO ME A THORN IN THE FLESH, NAMELY, THE ANGEL SATAN TO BUFFET ME; so that Satan, who was once an angel of light, now of darkness, IS the thorn in the flesh; and might be suffered to appear visibly to Paul from time to time, in a very terrible manner, and which was very grievous to be borne; he might by permission have great power over his (Paul’s) body, as he had over Job’s, to use it ill, to beat and buffet it; for this also may be taken literally; and he (Satan) might likewise in other ways greatly distress him (Paul) by stirring up the corruptions of his heart; by following him with his satanic injections, suggestions, and temptations; by raising violent persecutions, and instigating many of his emissaries against him; the Jews sometimes make mention of the angel or messenger of Satan mocking at the righteous, and buffeting them. This sore exercise befell the Apostle for his good, to keep down the pride of his nature; lest, says he twice in one verse, LEST I SHOULD BE EXALTED ABOVE MEASURE. For such ends and purposes does the Lord, in His infinite wisdom, deal with His people continually.”*

Beloved, the Jews have a notion that this was one reason for God’s trying Abraham with the sacrifice of his son Isaac, to depress that pride that was likely to arise in him because of his greatness.

And did not God teach us many things during our trials?

I love you.

Amen.