

2 Corinthians 12,13

Day 1

Paul's Vision. Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

1. What did Paul conclude about boasting to the Corinthians? 12:1 (Cf. 11:12; 12:11)

2. What happened to “*a man in Christ*”? 12:2 When did this occur?

- How well could Paul relate what he saw? 12:3,4

FYI: “When you read the Old Testament prophets and Revelation, you see that people who had a vision of heaven could not adequately express in words what they saw...Ezekiel saw wheels within wheels and creatures with four faces. Daniel’s descriptions and John’s in Revelation are similarly symbolic. These visions suggest that when we are with the Lord...we will know secrets that cannot be put into language.” - Ray Stedman (393)

“The record of the Acts makes it clear that Paul received a number of visions of the risen Lord...commencing with the dramatic confrontation on the road to Damascus. Acts 18:9 records one at Corinth, another at Jerusalem during his last visit there (Acts 23:11), another on the voyage to Rome (27:23). See also Acts 9:12 and 16:9 and the promise of the Lord to him in Acts 26:16.”
- Stuart Allen (246)

3. While admitting there was honor involved in receiving such a vision (5a), what was the only thing Paul would talk about? 12:5

- Although what he said was true, why did he refrain from boasting? 12:6

FYI: “Imagine. Paul had actually been in the presence of the Lord, but for fourteen years he kept it to himself. Even at this writing he is reluctant to let people know about it...Instead of exploiting his experience, he kept it under wraps, waiting till the right time to mention it, when it might persuade some of his followers against slipping away from the truth...Paul wants to make sure no one gives him credit for the glory he experienced.”
- Charles Swindoll (ME 65)

“Paul will not **be a fool**, so he will not boast in this vision. At the same time, we almost sense that it was important for Paul to communicate to the Corinthian Christians that *he really did have such experiences*. Paul never did boast as the [false] apostles did, but he certainly had profound experiences with God. The proof of those profound experiences was found in his transformed life and powerful, truthful ministry.” - David Guzik

4. Although the scriptures give few detailed descriptions of resurrection life and heaven, what does Paul’s vision indicate to you?

- How do you think having this vision at the beginning may have helped Paul throughout his ministry?

Paul's "Thorn in the Flesh"

5. Because of this revelation, what temptation arose? 12:7 (*Since Paul transitions into writing in the first person point of view at this point, who was the "man" (vs. 3)?*)

FYI: "Paul, in describing this remarkable spiritual experience, is describing just the kind of thing that the 'super apostles' among the Corinthian Christians would glory in. When he described his humble experiences in 2 Corinthians 11:23-30, he did not hesitate to write in the first person... But here, he walks more carefully. Paul does everything he can to relate this experience without bringing glory to himself." - David Guzik

6. Who did Paul blame for the "thorn in the flesh"? 12:7b

Thorn Strong's NT:4647 *skolops*, withered at the front, i.e. a point or prickle (a bodily annoyance or disability)

"**Messenger** is the same word as 'angel.' Satan, being a created being, is not omnipresent, but he has a multitude of fallen angels, or evil spirits... In Job's case (Job 2:4-6) and here in Paul's case, God allowed these creatures to vent their hatred against God's people in inflicting them with physical afflictions, hoping thereby to cause them to rebel against God or to destroy their testimony in some way. It would be unwise, of course, to blame all pain and sickness on Satan, except in the general sense that he introduced sin and its consequences into God's perfect creation." - Henry Morris

7. Suggestions have abounded about this being a physical or spiritual ailment. Why do you think that Paul didn't identify it?

8. How did Paul respond to this affliction? 12:8

FYI: "Some say it is unspiritual and evidence of little faith to pray for something more than once. That would be surprising to Paul, who **pleaded with the Lord three times**, and to Jesus, who prayed with *the same words* three times in His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:39-41)." - David Guzik

9. What does each phrase in 12:9a in God's response express to you?

- *My grace*
- *is sufficient*
- *for you*
- *My power is perfected in weakness*

FYI: "Let us not make the mistake of keeping **grace** to the gospel of salvation. Grace, as well as saving, strengthens, guides, and enables us to become 'more than conquerors through Him Who loves us' (Rom 8:37). In fact grace follows us all through our earthly pilgrimage and lives, and will be with us till the day of glory dawns, and there is not a moment we can dispense with it." - Stuart Allen (249)

"Since grace is given freely to us in Jesus, it can't be taken away later because we stumble or fall... **Grace** could meet Paul's need because it was the very strength of God." - David Guzik

10. List Paul's reaction to God's answer.

- 12:9b
- 12:10a (See Acts 5:41,42)
- 12:10b

FYI: Rest on/dwell in episkenoō Strong's NT:1981, "to spread a tabernacle over" (epi, "upon," skene, "a tent"), "cover," "spread a tabernacle over." - Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words

"This is the paradox of spiritual warfare. When is the devil being defeated? Not when we feel confident. Not when all is well. Not when we feel strong and victorious. The devil is being defeated when we feel weak and helpless, oppressed and attacked. The devil is being defeated when we go to the Lord, pleading for the strength to fight for one more day."
- Ray Stedman (395)

"Many think that real Christian maturity is when we come to a place where we are somewhat 'independent' of God. The idea is that we have our act so together that we don't need to rely on God so much day to day, moment to moment. This isn't Christian maturity at all. God deliberately engineered debilitating circumstances into Paul's life so he would be in constant, total dependence on God's grace and God's strength...Yet, we should never think that in our lives, the mere presence of a thorn means the glory and strength of Jesus would shine in us and through us. You can resist God's grace and refuse to set your mind on Jesus, and then find your thorn cursing you instead of blessing you."
- David Guzik

11. If God hadn't allowed the thorn in the flesh, how might Paul's ministry have suffered? If God hadn't strengthened him, what might Paul have done, even early on in his ministry? (Compare what David wrote: Psalm 27:13)

Applying the Word: What is meaningful or helpful to you from Paul's example for dealing with any "thorns" in your life?

Day 2

Paul's Generosity and Love. Read 2 Corinthians 12:11-15

12. What should the Corinthians have been doing for Paul? 12:11b Why?

FYI: You drove me to it. "It was not really the foolish boasting of his opponents that had driven him to boast but the folly of the Corinthians in heeding it and their failure to rally to his defense. If any Christian community was qualified to write Paul's testimonial, it was the Corinthian church. They had remained silent, forcing Paul to speak up..."
- The Expositor's Bible Commentary

"Paul...would rather write about Jesus, but the worldly thinking that made the Corinthian Christians think little of Paul also made them think little of Jesus, even if they couldn't perceive it."
- David Guzik

13. What had the Corinthians witnessed through Paul? 12:12
(See Romans 15:18-19)

- What kind of “perseverance” (vs. 12) had Paul displayed while in Corinth? Acts 18:6-12,18

Digging Deeper

What requirement was there for being an apostle? Acts 1:22

How did Paul qualify?
1 Cor. 15:8 (See Acts 26:12-18)

FYI: Apostle Strong's NT:652 *apostolos*; a delegate; specially, an ambassador of the Gospel; officially a commissioner of Christ (with miraculous powers)

Perseverance/patience *hupomone* Strong's NT:5281, lit., "an abiding under" (hupo, "under," meno, "to abide"), is almost invariably rendered "patience."
- Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words

14. What did Jesus demonstrate? Acts 2:22 (e.g. Matthew 8:16,17)

- What was given to the apostles as confirmation? Acts 2:43; 14:3 (Also Hebrews 2:3-4)

15. How spectacular were these miracles?

- Acts 5:12,15,16
- Acts 9:37-40
- Acts 19:11-12

True apostles had been chosen directly as such by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, had performed true miracles (II Corinthians 12:12), and had seen personally the resurrected Christ (see on I Corinthians 9:1) ... the apostolic era ended with the death of John."
- Henry Morris

16. Underline how Paul credited God for his work.

- 1 Corinthians 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. NAS
- 2 Corinthians 3:5 Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. NIV
- Galatians 2:8 For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. NIV
- Ephesians 3:7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. NIV
- Colossians 1:29 To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. NIV]

17. What accusation had the Corinthians made against Paul? 12:13

- What does Paul's tongue-in-cheek apology (*considering the signs, wonders and miracles that they had seen - 12:12*) indicate about the legitimacy of their complaint?

FYI: Ray Stedman speculates: "The false teachers who had infiltrated the Corinthian church were telling the people that Paul had insulted the Corinthians by refusing their support. 'He let the Macedonians support him while he was in Corinth.' They said, 'and he even supported himself as a tentmaker. But he wouldn't let you support him! Why? Because he thinks that you Corinthians are inferior to the believers in other churches!'"
- Ray Stedman (402)

18. List the reasons Paul gave for not asking for their support:

- 12:14a *"I will not be a burden to you"*
- 12:14b
- 12:14c
- 12:15a

FYI: **"For I do not seek yours, but you:** This is the testimony of every godly minister. They do not serve for what they can get *from* God's people but for what they can give *to* God's people. They are shepherds, not hirelings. This is the heart of Jesus towards us. We often think that what God really wants is what we *have*, but He really wants *us*."
- David Guzik

19. How had the Corinthians responded? 12:15b (Cf. 6:12,13) What tone do you read in Paul's words?

FYI: "Paul had lavished love on the Corinthians, but they were not responding with love. Instead, they had turned away from Paul and given their love to these false teachers. They had believed lies that the false teachers told about Paul. How did Paul respond? Not with anger, but with the wounded love of a father responding to a wayward child."
- Ray Stedman (403)

Applying the Word: *What do you think are some of the most common reasons for why someone might respond negatively to love or generosity? What do you learn from Paul about overcoming those barriers?*

Day 3

Paul's Intentions and Concerns. Read 2 Corinthians 12:16 - 3:4

20. What other accusation had been connected with Paul's not taking money for his own use? 12:16 How do you think that could be construed to be trickery/deceit?

crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit/trickery: "These words are not spoken by the apostle in his own person of himself, but in the person of his adversaries... they insinuated to the Corinthians...that though he did not receive anything from them with his own hands, yet he craftily and cunningly made use of others to drain their purses."
- Gills Exposition of the Entire Bible: <https://biblehub.com>

"The alternative (interpretation) would be to regard [this] as the psychological pressure to which Paul allegedly subjected the Corinthians by refusing to exercise his personal right to [payment] and yet requesting generous contributions to the collection he was organizing."
- The Expositor's Bible Commentary

21. How did Paul challenge their thinking? 12:17,18

- What was the answer to Paul's questions? How do you think the Corinthians were (hopefully) feeling at this point?

22. Instead of making a defense to the Corinthians, to whom was Paul accountable?
12:19a (See 1 Cor. 2:15)

- List the three phrases that describe his motivation for ministry? 12:19b (Cf. 1:23; 11:10,31)
"before God"

23. What fears did Paul express about visiting them again? 12:20a

- What does the list of behaviors Paul gave in 20:20b say about the problems and atmosphere this church struggled with? How might this help explain their vulnerability to false teachers?

24. What other fear did Paul express? 12:21a (Why would Paul be humbled? See 2 Corinthians 8:24)

- What other types of behavior was Paul concerned he might encounter in the church? 12:21b (See his warnings in 1 Cor. 5:9-11.)

25. If there were problems, what legal formality would be observed in dealing with them at his next visit? 13:1 (See Deuteronomy 19:15) What would this avoid?

26. What warning did Paul give? 13:2 What does the need to write this say about the apparent situation at Corinth?

FYI: "Those who sinned earlier' are the immoral persons of 12:21b who did not repent during Paul's 'painful visit' and were evidently still indulging in their sexual sins. 'All the rest' (3:2 'any of the others' NIV) are probably those Corinthians who had been adversely influenced by the false apostles and were arrogantly fomenting unrest within the church (12:20b)."
- The Expositor's Bible Commentary

27. What would this discipline show? 13:3

- Although Jesus submitted to the cross, what did they need to also consider? 13:4a
- By application, what did they need to realize about Paul? 13:4b

Digging Deeper
For more about
God's discipline, see
Hebrews 12:5-11

FYI: "It would seem that in their immaturity the Corinthians were unimpressed by Christ-like gentleness and meekness (10:1) but were overawed by arbitrary displays of power (11:20)... The Corinthians had in effect challenged Christ (cf. 1:1), who would not disappoint them as he exhibited his resurrection power through his apostle."
- The Expositor's Bible Commentary

"Some had evidently said that [Paul's] reluctance to use his apostolic powers in judgment meant that in reality he was no apostle...To all such he asserts that the power of Christ would be a reality amongst them and he would be a vehicle of that power."
- Ray Stedman (254)

Applying the Word: *How willing are you to stay involved with people even when things are difficult or you don't like how people are responding? What helps you to keep loving and witnessing to others even when you don't feel like it?*

Day 4

Paul's Final Appeal. Read 2 Corinthians 13:5-14

28. How did Paul challenge the Corinthians? 13:5a (How can we test ourselves? 1 John 4:15)

- What did he want them to remember? 13:5b (*What focus would this give them? What convictions about themselves?*)

29. What did they need to recognize about Paul and his fellow workers? 13:6 (See 2:17)

FYI: "As v. 6 implies, the Corinthians' belief in the genuineness of their faith carried with it the proof of the genuineness of Paul's apostleship and gospel, for he had become their father in Christ Jesus through the gospel (1Cor 4:15). They themselves as men and women in Christ formed the verification of his credentials (cf. 3:2, 3). Only if they doubted their own salvation should they doubt Paul's claim to be a true 'apostle of Christ Jesus' (1:1). If they did not fail the test, neither did he (v. 6)." - The Expositor's Bible Commentary

30. What did Paul desire for them even if he appeared weak? 13:7 (What would you say about Paul's focus and heart.)

For your perfecting/made complete *katartisis* Strong's NT:2676, "to make fully ready, put in order" - The Complete Word Study Dictionary (843)

31. Compare Paul's declaration in 13:8 to 4:2. What do you think he is saying about himself personally?

- What might he be saying in general about the nature of truth? (See Gamaliel's speech in Acts 5:38.39)

32. Underline what the following say about God's way and truth.

- Job 42:2 "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. NIV
- Ecclesiastes 3:14 I know that whatever God does, It shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, And nothing taken from it... NKJV
- John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life NAS
- John 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. NIV
- Ephesians 4:21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus NKJV

33. Although Paul was willing use authority to correct them (13:2), what was his hope? 13:10

34. What were Paul's goals for the Corinthians? Note what follows "*for your...*" in many of these verses).

- 1:6
- 1:24
- 4:15
- 12:15
- 12:19
- 13:9 (NAS "*that you may be*"...)
- 13:10b (cf. 12:19b)

35. How would the attitudes and behaviors Paul encourage them to have in 13:11 impact the problems of this church? (Compare Romans 12:15-18)

36. List the three blessings Paul wished for them at the end. 13:14

FYI: "This is the only place in the New Testament where the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are mentioned together in this kind of blessing. Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to be completely blessed by everything God is."
- David Guzik

Memory Verse:

2 Cor. 12:9 And He has 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, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. NAS

*Finally, brethren, rejoice,
be made complete,
be comforted,
be like-minded,
live in peace;
and the God of love and
peace will be with you.*

2 Corinthians 13:11 NAS