

"TO THE CHURCH OF GOD WHICH IS AT CORINTH"

PAUL'S LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH



2 CORINTHIANS 12

THE SETTING

Paul continues to address the insinuations of his opponents that he is not a true apostle and not reliable preacher of the Gospel (due to the fact that he didn't require compliance to the Law of Moses). Already Paul has defended himself against their accusations that since he took no support from his preaching that his teaching was also worthless. He has asserted that he is in no way inferior to even the most imminent apostles (probably referring to Peter and John). He has assured them that as bold as he is in his letters, he will be when he visits them in person. He points out to them that they have been looking at things as they are outwardly and not evaluating either his opponents or himself correctly. Similarly, he has also pointed out that he, not they, were the first preachers of the Gospel to them. He also pointed to his superior knowledge of Scripture. And most recently in chapter 10, he pointed to his labors and suffering in the Gospel. But his "boasting" (for the sake of spiritual credentials) is not done yet.

¹ Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. ² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven. ³ And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—⁴ was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak. ⁵ On behalf of such a man I will boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses. ⁶ For if I do wish to boast I will not be foolish, for I

PAUL'S GREAT VISION

- Paul recognized that there was nothing really to be _____ by boasting, but that he had a lot to _____, if he didn't.
- Your thoughts — What do think would cause Paul to now want to talk about his visions and revelations?
- Why is Paul speaking of himself in the third person ("I know a man in Christ") as having this following revelation?
 - If Paul wrote this letter about AD 55, and the vision happened _____ years previously, when did this vision occur?
 - Most scholars believe Paul was converted about AD _____, so was this the vision that converted Paul originally?
 - What does Paul mean by "whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know"?
 - What could this tell us about visions and revelations?
- What is the third heaven?
 - What is Paradise?
 - What are "inexpressible words"?
- Other places in which the prophet was not permitted to reveal certain things...Revelation 10:4, Daniel 8:26, Daniel 12:4,9

will be speaking the truth; but I refrain from this, so that no one will credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me.

⁷ 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!

⁸ Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.

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. 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.

¹¹ I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to

- But Paul’s ironic boast is really about his _____. (v. 5)
- Why didn’t Paul just stick with boasting about his vision?

THORN IN THE FLESH

- What was the “price” of the great revelations given to Paul?
 - What is a “thorn in the flesh”?
 - Who was it from?
 - Why did God allow this?
 - Does God allow this among His people today sometimes?
- Did Paul appear to understand the point of the “thorn in the flesh” at first?
 - How many times did he pray that it might be removed?
 - Does this tell us anything about our own “no” answers to our prayers?
- What does “My grace is sufficient for you” mean?
 - What does “power is perfected in weakness” mean?
 - What should it teach us?
- What did this enlightenment do for Paul?
 - Why?
 - What does this point of view teach us about our own weaknesses, lack of resources, shortcomings, and frailties?
 - What can God do with all these negatives?

NO INFERIORITY

- What is the implication of “I should have been commended by you”? What had the Corinthians done when Paul’s reputation was being torn down?

the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody. ¹² The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles. ¹³ For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!

¹⁴ Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. ¹⁵ I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? ¹⁶ But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself; nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit. ¹⁷ Certainly I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I? ¹⁸ I urged Titus to go, and I sent the brother with him. Titus did not take any advantage of you, did he? Did we

- Who might the most eminent apostles be?
- What might some of the signs of a true apostle be?
 - Passing on miraculous gifts
 - Raising the dead
- What does he mean “by all perseverance”?
- In view of the context (vs. 11) what is implied about how the Corinthians had treated Paul, when he says, “in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches”?

DO YOU REALLY THINK I AM CONNING YOU?

- What burden is Paul talking about in vs. 14?
 - What was Paul’s primary concern?
 - What does this teach modern preachers or elders today?
 - Paul saw himself as their spiritual _____
- What does it mean to “be expended” in vs. 15?
- Why would Paul ironically call himself a crafty fellow, taking them in by deceit?
 - Perhaps the background to vs. 16b, 17 is that Paul’s opponents had accused him of being a _____ in Paul refused to accept _____ assistance, so that he could make more _____ on this later _____ for the poor.
 - Paul is not _____ Titus or the other brother, but _____ that neither of them took _____ of anyone.

not conduct ourselves in the same spirit and walk in the same steps?

- What does it mean that Titus, the other brother, and Paul conducted themselves in the same spirit and walked in the same steps?

¹⁹ All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved. ²⁰ For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; ²¹ I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.

FOR EDIFICATION NOT DEFENSE OF HIMSELF

- What does Paul mean that this whole defense was for their edification not his personal defense?
 - What was Paul's fear?
 - What could happen, if people didn't repent?
 - strife (what is this?)
 - jealousy (what is this?)
 - angry tempers (what is this?)
 - disputes (what is this?)
 - slanders (what is this?)
 - gossip (what is this?)
 - arrogance (what is this?)
 - disturbances (what is this?)
- What did some of the Corinthians need to repent of?