

2 Corinthians Chapter 12

2 Corinthians 12:1 "It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord."

"Expedient" probably means profitable in the verse above.

"Revelations", in the verse above, means disclosure. Paul now proceeds to tell them of the revelations of God to him. Jesus revealed himself to Paul on the road to Damascus. Paul is apologizing for boasting, saying it is really of no use.

Though it was "not expedient," since it could tempt his own flesh to be proud, the Corinthians' fascination with the alleged visions and revelations of the false apostles left him little choice.

Six of Paul's visions are recorded in Acts, and his letters speak of revelations he had received.

Acts 9:12 "And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting [his] hand on him, that he might receive his sight."

Acts 16:9-10 "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us." "And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them."

Acts 18:9 "Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:"

Acts 22:17-18 "And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance;" "And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me."

Acts 27:23-24 "For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve," "Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee."

"Visions" means presentation while neither sleeping or awake. You might be awake, but not aware of other things around you. The Lord revealed Himself to Paul in this manner.

2 Corinthians 12:2 "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 a one caught up to the third heaven."

Of course, Paul is speaking of himself. Paul was truly "in Christ" as most Christians can only dream of.

This had taken place 14 years before the writing of 2 Corinthians so the specific vision Paul relates cannot be identified with any incident recorded in Acts. Probably took place between his return to Tarsus from Jerusalem and the start of his missionary journeys.

Verse 4 shows this “third heaven” and Paradise is the same place. The first heaven is the earth’s atmosphere; the second is interplanetary and interstellar space; and the third is the abode of God.

Whether Paul had a vision, or was carried away into heaven to the presence of God, really does not matter. What does matter is that Paul had a close encounter with God. There are very few instances like this in the Bible.

2 Corinthians 12:3 "And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)"

Paul is saying, that he could have left his body and gone to heaven in his spirit. He is not sure whether his spirit body went to heaven, or whether his physical body went to heaven as he was so overwhelmed by the vision.

Paul is not trying to speculate. He says God alone knows.

2 Corinthians 12:4 "How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter."

We mentioned in a previous lesson, that Paradise is where the Tree of Life is.

Revelation 2:7 "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

If the words are unlawful for man to utter, there would be no way we could know what they were. More than likely these words were for Paul alone and he was forbidden to repeat them.

2 Corinthians 12:5 "Of such a one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities."

There would be no way to prove to anyone on the earth that this had happened to you, so there is no way to glory in this. Also, Paul had nothing to do with this, God took Paul on this journey. The glory then, must lie in his infirmities.

Though Paul’s reluctance to boast caused him to refer to himself in the third person as (in verse 2), the context there makes it obvious that he was speaking about himself as relating the experience of another man would hardly have enhanced Paul’s apostolic credentials. Also, Paul’s thorn in the flesh afflicted him not someone else.

2 Corinthians 12:6 "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."

Paul says, there is no need to think of him highly for this happening. Paul again, turns their attention to the truth of the gospel he has brought to them.

If he had wished to boast about himself about this unique experience he would not be a fool because it happened. But he refrained because he wanted the Corinthians to judge him based on their observations of his ministry, not on his visions.

2 Corinthians 12:7 "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."

If you were to look up the meaning of this messenger of Satan, you would find that it means an angel of Satan. This is just more evidence to me that the "demons", devil spirits working for Satan are the fallen angels. We can see in this that God does not always heal. Sometimes the impairment we have is for our own good.

Many have speculated on the thorn in Paul's flesh. Suggested views are

- (1) Temptations from the Devil;
- (2) Paul's opposition from his adversaries;
- (3) Some intense bodily pain;
- (4) a recurring physical affliction such as eye trouble; or
- (5) Some form of mental or psychological distress.

Whatever the case, it was a tool of Satan. Whatever it was, it was sent to him by God to keep him humble. As with Job, Satan was the immediate cause, but God was the ultimate cause.

John MacArthur has an interesting take on this as he states that Paul's use of the word "messenger" (Greek: angelos, or angel), from Satan suggests the "thorn in the flesh" was a demonized person, not a physical illness. Of the 175 uses of the Greek word, angelos in the New Testament, most are in reference to angels.

This angel was from Satan, a demon afflicting Paul. Possibly, the best explanation for this demon was that he was indwelling the ring leader of the Corinthian conspiracy, the leader of the false apostles. Through them he was tearing up Paul's beloved church and thus driving a painful stake through Paul.

Further support for this view comes from the context of (chapters 10-13), which is one of fighting adversaries (the false prophets). The word "buffet" always refers to ill treatment from other people. And finally, the Old Testament describes Israel's personal opponent as thorns.

2 Corinthians 12:8 "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me."

We see in this, that Paul earnestly prayed 3 times to be healed, and God said no. We must carefully examine the guilt trip some ministers put on people who do not get healed. Sometimes it is not the will of God to heal you. It is God's business who he heals. We must not stop praying, but it is not our business whether they are healed or not, it is God's business.

The 3-fold repetition of Paul's request parallels that of Jesus in Gethsemane. Both Paul and Jesus had had their requests denied, but were granted grace to endure their ordeals.

2 Corinthians 12:9 "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."

We must not question this answer from God. For some reason, Paul could minister better with the infirmity, than he could without it. Since Paul had this weakness, he was very aware that his strength was in Christ. It would be perfectly obvious to everyone Paul ministered to, that Paul's power was in God. God ministered through Paul.

The present tense of the verb translated "is sufficient" reveals the constant availability of divine grace. God would not remove the thorn, as Paul had requested, but would continually supply him with grace to endure it.

"My strength is made perfect in weakness" shows that the weaker the human instrument, the more clearly God's grace shines forth.

2 Corinthians 12:10 "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."

Paul's weakness in his flesh just allowed the spirit to work in him more fully. Paul knows that there will be no mistaking where his strength comes from.

2 Timothy 2:12 "If we suffer, we shall also reign with [him]: if we deny [him], he also will deny us:"

Paul, knowing this, was happy to suffer for Christ's sake.

Paul took no pleasure in the pain itself, but rejoiced in the power of Christ that it revealed through him.

2 Corinthians 12:11 "I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing."

Paul is not happy that he had to boast but states the Corinthians had compelled him as they should not have believed the false apostles. He then goes on to point out that in nothing is he behind in the preaching of the 12 apostles, though he considers himself nothing. Here is how Peter and John were seen by the high priest, elders and scribes.

Acts 4:13 "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

Even though Paul had this weakness in the flesh, he still used all of his time to further the kingdom of God. He, even more than the other apostles, fulfilled the great commission.

Mark 16:15 "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

Paul went to many countries and carried the gospel message. He also did it the way Jesus had commanded.

Matthew 10:8 " Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give." All of these signs of ministry followed Paul.

2 Corinthians 12:12 "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds."

The purpose of miraculous signs was to authenticate the apostles as God's messengers. The miracle of the Corinthians' salvation was also a mark of Paul's apostleship.

Paul did heal the sick and cast out devils. In all of the ministry the Lord Jesus brought, the most important thing was to preach the gospel. On the trip to Rome, when Paul was shipwrecked, the people thought Paul to be a god, when he threw the poison serpent off, after it bit Paul. Paul had to tell the people not to worship him.

2 Corinthians 12:13 "For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except [it be] that I myself was not burdensome to you? forgive me this wrong."

Paul is telling them, here, that the only mistake he made was in not teaching them to take care of the needs of their minister. Paul had given them the salvation message and the message about the Holy Spirit. He really had no apologies to make.

How ironic that he begged their forgiveness for that wrong.

2 Corinthians 12:14 "Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children."

On his upcoming visit, Paul wished to continue his practice of refusing to accept support from the Corinthians. Paul sought the Corinthians, not their money. To reinforce his point, Paul cited the axiomatic truth that parents are financially responsible for their children, not children (when they are young), for their parents.

Paul was like a spiritual father to this church, and speaks here of himself as their parent. He is saying that he wants to give to them instead of them giving to him. I do not believe he is speaking of material things however. He was to bless them in their spirit. They need more teaching, and that is what Paul intends to do. He would like for them to be more rooted in the Word of God.

2 Corinthians 12:15 "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved."

Paul has great love for them. He is just as sure that they do not love him in return. Nothing, within his power to give them, will be withheld.

The verb translated “spend” refers to spending money, and probably describes Paul’s willingness to work to support himself while in Corinth. “Be spent” describes Paul’s willingness to give of himself, even to the point of sacrificing his life.

2 Corinthians 12:16 "But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile."

We find that, even though Paul had completely explained that he personally had never taken money from them, they still felt that he was trying to get money from them for himself, when he asked for an offering for the poor in Jerusalem.

2 Corinthians 12:17 "Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you?"

The answer of course, is no. Paul deliberately did not handle any of the offerings, so they could not accuse him of this.

2 Corinthians 12:18 "I desired Titus, and with [him] I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? [walked we] not in the same steps?"

This charge was more painful to Paul because it impugned the character of his friends. Outraged that the Corinthians could believe such ridiculous lies, Paul pointed out that his associates did not take advantage of the Corinthians during their earlier visits regarding the collection.

Paul not only defends himself here, but Titus as well. Neither Paul, nor Titus, had taken any of their offering. The offering had gone to the poor. Paul says, was it not just like me being with you, when Titus was there?

2 Corinthians 12:19 "Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but [we do] all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying."

Paul says that he does not have to answer to them, but to Christ. Paul's teaching them to give to those in need was to build them up, not to tear them down. If their giving was with such regret, I doubt it would do them any good. Giving should be done with a free heart.

Lest the Corinthians view themselves as judges before whom Paul was on trial, the apostle quickly set them straight: only God was his judge. Paul sought to edify the Corinthians, not exonerate himself.

2 Corinthians 12:20 "For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and [that] I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest [there be] debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:"

Paul does not want to come to strife and fussing. He wants to make sure they want him to come. They should settle all the questions they have, and then invite him to come. He does not want to debate with them. His reason for coming is to bring them to a fuller knowledge of God, not to debate things that do not matter. He loves them too much to come, and have so much trouble with them that it would break all ties.

2 Corinthians 12:21 "[And] lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and [that] I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed."

Parents are grieved greatly, when their children sin and do not repent. Paul feels that he is their spiritual father, and he wants them to repent of their sins, and turn from their wicked ways. When he visited them, Paul did not want to find them in the same sorry spiritual condition as on his last visit which was called "the painful visit".

To come and find the Corinthians still living in unrepentant sin which he lists here, would both humiliate and sadden Paul. This warning and the one in verse 2 in chapter 13 was designed to prevent that from happening.

"Uncleanness", in the verse above, means impurity. "Fornication", has to do with spiritual and physical adultery. It includes incest, homosexuality, and lesbianism. "Lasciviousness", means filthy or wantonness.

The problem is that some were still in an unrepentant state for these sins.

2 Corinthians Chapter 12 Questions

1. In verse 1 Paul says, he will speak of what 2 things?
2. What does "expedient" mean?
3. What does "revelations" in verse 1 mean?

4. "Visions" means what?
5. How many years before this writing did this occur?
6. Who was this man?
7. Where was he carried?
8. Was he in his body, when he went to heaven?
9. Who knows whether Paul went to heaven in body or in spirit?
10. What was the name of the place he was carried up to?
11. Describe the words Paul heard.
12. Where is the Tree of Life?
13. What was the only thing Paul would glory in?
14. To keep Paul from glorying of these revelations, what was given him?
15. Messenger of Satan in verse 7, is actually who?
16. Who does the author believe the fallen angels to be?
17. How many times did Paul pray for the thorn to be removed?
18. What answer did he get from God?
19. Paul's strength was made perfect in _____.
20. In verse 10, what things did Paul take pleasure in?
21. What is the great commission?
22. Did Paul fulfill the commission?
23. What were some of the signs of an apostle?
24. What was the only mistake Paul made with these Corinthians?
25. The children ought not to lay up for the _____.
26. What apostle had Paul sent in his stead?
27. Who does Paul have to answer to?
28. What were some of the sins they had not repented of?