

2 Corinthians, Chapter 12

For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends. - 2 Corinthians 10:18

In the preceding chapters Paul addresses those who are critical of his humble appearance (10:10) and question how the Spirit could truly be involved in such a trial-filled ministry. Paul states that he refuses to entertain them with lofty empty-rhetoric as the false teachers who taught out of greed were doing. His opponents were boasting in *their* spirituality and *their* ethnic identity. In order to convey to the Corinthians that God's strength is powerfully made visible amid human frailty, Paul writes: "*If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.*" (2 Cor.11:30) "... *for [Christ's] power is made perfect in weakness.*" (2 Cor. 12:9).

"...God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong." 1 Corinthians 1:27

- How did God ultimately display His sovereign power over the sting of death? (1 Cor. 15:56-57; Phil 2:7-8)

Read Acts Chapter 14 - Forced to leave Antioch, Paul and Barnabas went to Iconium where many Jews and Greeks became believers. They stayed for a long time despite strong opposition. When an attempt was made to stone them, they fled to Lystra and continued to preach the gospel. Jews later came from Antioch and Iconium persuading the crowds at Lystra to have Paul stoned to the extent where they thought he was dead, and they dragged him out of the city.

Chapter 12:1-6 Paul's Vision

v.1 - Paul's opponents boasted that they had received visions and had other spiritual experiences. They were pressing Paul to declare if he had the same experiences to deem his apostleship valid. Read 2 Cor. 11:30-31

v.2-3 – "**Third heaven**" - This phrase reflects a distinction between (1) the atmosphere where birds can be seen to fly, (2) the higher area where the sun, moon, and stars can be seen, and (3) the unseen realm where God dwells (Neh. 9:6). This third area is called paradise (*Gk. paradeisos*), as referring to the garden of Eden; a place of blessedness where God dwells. (Gen. 3:8; Lk. 23:43)

Chapter 12:7-10 Paul's Thorn

v.7 – Having been in paradise and a privileged hearer of things which men must not even utter, what does Paul say in regard to the affliction that has plagued him? - How has God helped you to maintain an appropriate level of humility?

v.9 – Reflect on the words: "My grace is sufficient for you." Has this truth taken root in your life? How is it manifested?

- What are some examples in the Bible of the "*weak/lesser*" being chosen over the "*strong*" to show God's power?

v.10 – Does Paul's example of the reason why he delights (*or is content ESV*) get forgotten by many Christians today?

Chapter 12:11-21 Paul's Concern for the Corinthian Church

v.13 - What did Paul do that some charged made the Corinthians inferior to other churches? (2 Cor. 11:7-9)

v.13-18 - Paul felt the Corinthians were making a worldly connection between the amount an Apostle received in compensation and the value of that Apostle. He tells them that his true value can be found in the extent of his love.

- Do you feel our current Christian culture sometimes chooses leaders based on factors other than love? Like what?

v.20-21 - What was Paul afraid might occur, and that he might find, when he got to Corinth?

v.19-21 - How does Paul show us what it means to be a spiritual leader?

Act Always in Humility - Love Both Friend and Foe - Trust God and Hope in His Promises - Pray Diligently
Meditate On His Word - Bring Other People to Glorify God - Speak the Truth in Love – Administer Discipline Lovingly