

2 CORINTHIANS 12 | *Power in Weakness*

Power Made Perfect in Weakness

1 I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord [Jesus]. 2 I know a man in Messiah who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. 3 And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— 4 and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. 5 On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses— 6 though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me. 7 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass (κολαφίζω, pres.)¹ me, to keep me from becoming conceited. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord [Jesus] about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me,

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Messiah may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Messiah, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak (ἀσθενέω),² then I am strong (δυνατός).

The Signs of a True Apostle

11 I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles (τῶν ὑπερλίαν³ ἀποστόλων), even though I am nothing (οὐδείς). 12 The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs, wonders, and mighty works.⁴ 13 For in what were you less favoured than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong!

Spent for Your Souls

14 Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. 15 I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls (ψυχή). If I love (ἀγαπάω) you more, am I to be loved less? 16 But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by deceit. 17 Did I take advantage of you

¹ “[T]o cause physical impairment, torment, fig. extension of 1, of painful attacks of an illness, described as a physical beating by a messenger of Satan” (BDAG, 555).

² “God’s will for our lives is found in our limitations.”

³ “[E]xceedingly, beyond measure, as adj. οἱ ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι the super-apostles” (BDAG, 1033).

⁴ The signs of a true apostles are signs, wonders, and mighty works.

through any of those whom I sent to you? 18 I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?

Paul's Fear

19 Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Messiah, and all for your edification (οικοδομή),⁵ beloved. 20 For I fear (φοβέω) that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarrelling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. 21 I fear (φοβέω) that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not changed their mindset (μετανοέω)⁶ about the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.

Overview

Lessons for Life

- 1. Visions and revelations of Jesus in heaven are possible (though rare)(vv. 1-4).**
 - a. We get no indication Paul was seeking such an experience. It was God who initiated it.
 - b. Paul had at least six other visions and revelations from God (cf. Ga 2:2; Ac 9:3-19 = 22:6-10 = 26:12-18; 11:25-26; 16:9-10; 18:9-10; 22:17-21).
- 2. The third heaven is where God dwells (v. 2).**
 - a. Most probably, the first heaven is the earth's atmosphere, and the second heaven is outer space, the domain of angels. The third heaven is likely outside the space-time-matter universe. Thus, Paul doesn't know if he was in the body or out of the body.
 - b. "How ridiculous it was for the cosmonauts in the Russian sputnik to say they didn't see God when they went to the moon. They didn't go far enough, friend."⁷
- 3. We are not to boast except of our weaknesses (vv. 5-6).**
 - a. When we tell others about our spiritual experiences, God is to get the attention and not ourselves.
 - b. We are to boast gladly of our weaknesses so that Jesus' power may rest on us (v. 9).
 - c. There is not place for arrogance in ministry.⁸
- 4. To keep us from becoming conceited, we may be given a thorn in the flesh (v. 7).**

⁵ "[P]rocess of building, building, construction...fig., of spiritual strengthening...*edifying, edification, building up*" (BDAG, 696).

⁶ "[C]hange one's mind...*feel remorse, repent, be converted* (in a variety of relationships and in connection w. varied responsibilities, moral, political, social or religious)" (BDAG, 640).

⁷ McGee, 5:141.

⁸ Barnett, 567.

- a. Thorns in the flesh come in many shapes and sizes.
- 5. We may sometimes pray directly to Jesus (v. 8).**
- a. Normally, we are to pray to God the Father in Jesus' name.
 - b. **Ac 1:24** 24 And they prayed and said, You, Lord [Jesus], who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen....
 - c. **Ac 7:59** 59 And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.
- 6. Jesus' power is made perfect in our weakness (v. 9).**
- a. Jesus' grace is sufficient for us (v. 9).
 - b. We are to be content with weaknesses, insult, hardships, persecutions, and calamities, because when we are weak, then we are strong (v. 10).
 - c. The greater the degree we sense our weakness, the more we will be ready to experience God's power (Eph 3:16; Php 4:13).⁹
 - d. "Human weakness provides the opportunity for divine power."¹⁰
 - e. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity."¹¹
- 7. We are to seek people, not people's money and possessions (v. 14).**
- a. We are obligated to save up for our children (v. 14).
 - b. We are gladly to spend and be spent for the souls of others (v. 15).
 - c. Like a candle, we are to be consumed to give light to others.
- 8. We are to speak in Jesus in the sight of God for the edification of others (v. 19).**
- a. οἰκοδομή: "process of building, building, construction...fig., of spiritual strengthening...*edifying, edification, building up*" (BDAG, 696).
- 9. There is to be no quarrelling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, or disorder among us (v. 20).**
- 10. We are to change our mindset about any impurity, sexuality immorality, and sensuality we have practiced.**
- a. μετανοέω: "*change one's mind...feel remorse, repent, be converted* (in a variety of relationships and in connection w. varied responsibilities, moral, political, social or religious" (BDAG, 640).
 - b. We are to agree with God about the sinfulness of our sin and change course away from it.

⁹ Constable, 169.

¹⁰ Hughes, 453.

¹¹ Barclay, 290.