

- I) V1-6 INTRO: It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to
As we enter this portion of the letter, Paul finds it necessary to continue to glory
WHY IS HE DOING THIS?
- II) False apostles had infiltrated the church and were boasting of their victories
Mercenary, Jewish pseudo-intellectuals were claiming superior ministry to Paul
They were presenting themselves as **super apostles**
- III) In order to gain a following, they used an **age-old tactic**
They were dividing the church by belittling Paul and his ministry
They were sowing discord, elevating themselves, and teaching false doctrine
- IV) Instead of rejecting their influence and teaching, they were believing them
They were not applying what Jesus had taught the church
Mt 7:15 Beware of false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravenous wolves!
- V) In another letter Paul would give orders concerning these kinds of teachers
Ro 16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, note those who **cause divisions** and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and **avoid (turn away) them.**
- VI) They were not super apostles, they were deceitful workers and agents of Satan
They were **false prophets** that Paul took pains to clearly identify
- VII) From chapter one, Paul responded to the accusations they have made
Up until this chapter we have looked at 23 of their charges
- VIII) The fact is: when something is repeated often enough, **it becomes** truth to some
It is a form of propaganda and today is called the **illusion of truth effect**
DEFINITION
- IX) The **Illusion of Truth Effect** is the tendency to believe **false information** to be correct after **repeated exposure**. Researchers established that people could already know the correct answer at the start of the study but could be persuaded to believe otherwise **through the repetition of a lie**
- X) The **false teachers** knew that repeating various charges would undermine Paul
This is because when the lie is repeated it, **for some**, becomes fact
Some of the Corinthians have been influenced by the lies told about him

- I) Paul now, in defense of the gospel and his ministry, **responds strongly**
AS WE'VE SEEN
- II) He began establishing his credentials by **rehearsing his pedigree** (11:22)
He then went on to share of his various **trials** and **sufferings** (11:23-33)
- III) **At this point**, he needs to go deeper into his ministry to re-establish his credibility
He speaks of something that he had been silent about for over 14 years
- IV) He has shared about physical trials and sacrifices
He now speaks of spiritual experiences that he has had in the Lord
He shares concerning visions and revelations he has received
BEGIN
- V) V1 It is doubtless **not profitable** for me to boast I will come to visions and
He had just written that if he were to boast, it would be in **his infirmities** (11:30)
- VI) He now begins to speak of spiritual experiences, **and their cost**
- VII) There are many people who long for deep, spiritual experiences
We need to keep in mind that spiritual experiences often come **at a price**
- VIII) V1 It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast
Because his adversaries have undermined his character, he now must respond
He hesitates to do so because it looks like he is boasting of his experiences
- IX) He doesn't want to seem to make excuses in response to his enemies' charges
He also shouldn't have to be defending himself! They should be doing this!
- X) He has already addressed his reluctance and the reason why he was sharing this
2 Co 11:12 But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may **cut off the**
opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be **regarded just as we** are in the
things of which **they** boast.
2 Co 11:18 Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, **I also will boast**
- XI) His opponents are presenting themselves as spiritual giants
They are being regarded as super apostles, equating themselves with him
- XII) He has already spoken of his trials and difficulties he has experienced

I) His troubles and trials have been used to deepen his knowledge of God
They have caused him to rely more on Jesus and less on his own talents
Ps 119:71 It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees

II) He now shares concerning visions and revelations from the Lord
What are visions? They are visual in nature, revealing God's will and purpose
The word **vision** is used around 17 times in the NT

EXAMPLES

III) Mt 17:1-9 **Peter, James, and John** saw Jesus' transfiguration and the appearance of Moses and Elijah

Ac 7:55 **Stephen** had a vision of God's throne and Jesus standing at His right hand

Ac 10 Peter had a vision of a sheet filled with unclean animals and then went to the home of a gentile, Cornelius, to preach and baptize him and his household

PAUL HAD SEVERAL

IV) When Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, Paul became blind
Paul asked Jesus what He would have him to do
Jesus told him to go to the city and he would be told what to do

V) The Lord then said to a man named Ananias to go and pray for Saul
At first Ananias hesitated but Jesus told him to go: Saul would be waiting
Ac 9:12: (Paul) has **seen in a vision** a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

LATER IN HIS MINISTRY

VI) Paul received a vision when seeking direction for where he was to preach next
Ac 16:9 **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.

VII) In Corinth, Paul was concerned because of the great opposition
Ac 18:9-10 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: Do not be afraid; keep on speaking do not be silent. I am with you and no one is going to attack and harm you because I have many people in this city

REVELATIONS

VIII) He spoke of **revelations**, which are **the unveiling** of the purposes of God to him
Gal. 1:11-12 I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it **by revelation** from Jesus Christ.

HE NOW GIVES TESTIMONY

- I) V2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago--whether in the body I do not
Why did he say ***I know a man in Christ***, instead of identifying himself?
He did this to keep from vaunting himself, and chose to speak in the third person
OBVIOUSLY
- II) Paul is speaking concerning himself, and not some other unidentified man
HOW DO WE KNOW THIS
- III) There are various reasons, but especially one
V7 Paul received a thorn in the flesh because of it
- IV) V2-3 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago whether in the body I do not
For over 14 years, Paul had not spoken of this experience to anyone
- V) Paul can't say if it was his body and soul, or only his soul temporarily
This was something that he was not completely sure about
It is an experience that he cannot fully comprehend or put into words
- VI) V4 how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words which it is
Caught up: Seized violently; raptured; he was suddenly taken to Paradise
- VII) In V2 He says he was caught up to the ***third heaven***
In V4, he says he was caught up into ***Paradise***
These are not two separate places, but refer to the same place
DEVELOP
- VIII) In the Bible, the word Heaven is used in three basic ways
First: The earth's atmosphere, also called the sky
Gen 1:8 God called the firmament ***Heaven***
- IX) **Second**: Interstellar, or planetary space: the starry heavens
Ps 33:6 By the word of the Lord were the heavens made their starry host by the
breath of his mouth
- X) **Third**: God's throne room, beyond His creation; transcendent
Ps 123:1 I lift up my eyes to you, to you whose throne ***is in heaven***.
- XI) **Paradise** Is a synonym for heaven, and is used three times in the NT (here)
Lu 23:43 Jesus promised the repentant thief a place ***in paradise***

- I) Rev 2:7 He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the churches; To him who overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the **paradise** of God.
- II) V4 He was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words which is not He knew where he was but what he heard and saw was illegal for him to speak of Human words were inadequate: The revelation **was for him**, to strengthen him
- III) V5 Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast except in my infirmities This is insightful as he remembers such thrilling revelations in earlier years These were things that he recognized as amazing **EVEN SO**
- IV) 14 years had passed, and Paul had experienced great afflictions since then There is a distinction he is drawing between his early experiences and recent
- V) In his early days of his walk, there was an abundance of spiritual revelations These were **mountain top experiences** that gave him joy and depth God's marvels were opened to him, and he came to truly know God
- VI) In his later days, there have been sorrows and pains almost unspeakable Labors, stripes, beatings, stoning, dangers, fatigue, hunger, thirst and betrayals
- VII) Instead of boasting of my experiences, I would rather speak of my weaknesses These are the things that have worked to deepen my love for Jesus Phil 3:10-11 I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the **fellowship of His sufferings**, being conformed to Him in His death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead
- VIII) These things had increased his desire to be faithful in his service to Jesus
- IX) His weaknesses are being pointed out by the false teachers **to undermine him** He does not see these as negatives, but as the road to a deeper love for Jesus
- X) They gave him a greater understanding of grace, and God's provisions He had already made it clear that **all glory** should go to the Lord
- XI) V5 To boast in his infirmities served to magnify God's power at work in him

- I) V6 For though I might desire to boast I will not be a fool
These things that he had experienced prompted a desire to boast
These false teachers were unable to claim such incredible experiences
HIS POINT
- II) Only experiences that show his need for Jesus' strength are worthy of boasting in
- III) V6 But I forbear lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or
I want you to value me based on my work among you not unusual spiritual visions
- IV) It is in our nature to desire signs and stories that are amazing
Paul rejected the temptation to build a following based on fantastic experiences
- V) This is something every minister should be concerned about: giving glory to God
- VI) We can yield to the temptation to present ourselves as extremely important
We can forget Who is doing the work and begin to draw attention to ourselves
ILLUSTRATION
- VII) Our flesh desires attention, and we can use spiritual things to gain attention
Like the young man on the high dive, calling to the gym teacher to watch him
- VIII) We can begin drawing people to have a cheering section to encourage us in it
This is always destructive
- IX) **We need to remember** that we are only the vessels God has chosen to use
Jn 3:27 John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.
2 Co 3:5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but **our sufficiency is from God**
2 Co 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God **and not of us.**
Phil 2:13 for **it is God who works in you** both to will and to do for His good pleasure.
- X) V7 Lest **I should be exalted** above measure by the abundance of the revelations
Because of such amazing spiritual experiences, he could have become proud
- XI) V7 A thorn in the flesh **was given me** a messenger of Satan to buffet me lest I be

- I) Thorn: Skolops: A sharp, pointed tent stake, driven into my body, piercing me
These were used to **torture by impaling** and could be used for crucifying
- II) The word could be used to speak of an acute form of suffering **excruciating pain**
God **allowed this attack** on him with the purpose of keeping him humble
The painful attack he was enduring kept him dependent on the Lord
WHAT WAS THIS THORN IN THE FLESH?
- III) The thorn is not identified but it would seem that the Corinthians knew what it was
There have been various suggestions over time
FIRST
- IV) Some believe it possible that the thorn **was illnesses** Paul was struck with
He may have been infected with **malarial fever** while on a missionary journey
This would incapacitate him, **sending him into delirium**, and tremors
Headaches accompanying this have been described as red-hot bar in forehead
- V) Some suggest that he had **diseased eyes**
This may have been referred to in his letter to the Galatians
Gal 4:13 You know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel to you at the first.
V15b I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, **you would have plucked out your own eyes**, and have given them to me
SECOND
- VI) Some contend that he is speaking of an actual demonic attack
This thorn is referred to as a messenger (aggelos) of Satan
Messenger: Used 188 times in the NT, 180 of those times referring to an angel
- VII) It is possible this thorn in the flesh was **a demonic attack** on the Apostle Paul
THIRD
- VIII) It may have been **a person** who was relentlessly attacking Paul
Aggelos is also used to identify a pastor
- IX) This might have been the demonically inspired opposition leader in Corinth
He would have been used to undermine the gospel and tear up the church
- X) Paul recognized this as demonic: it was extremely painful to this great man
NOTICE
- XI) It was **given by God** but was identified as a messenger of Satan

- I) God can give permission to the evil one to come against a believer
He allowed this to happen to His servant Job to accomplish His purposes
- II) He also allowed this with the Apostle Peter
- III) When Jesus celebrated Passover, He said that one of His men would betray Him
This caused His men to question which one of them could do such a thing
- IV) Peter believed he would not only stay faithful, but also even die for Him
This prompted Jesus to respond
Lu 22:31-32 The Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, **Satan has asked for you**, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.”
SATAN HAS ASKED FOR YOU
- V) Satan is not free to attack us whenever he desires, nor can he use all of his power
He can only tempt when **given permission**, being restricted by God
NOTICE
- VI) This gives us insight into how traumatic testing can be
Wheat is sifted through violent action which separates the wheat from the chaff
The chaff stays in the sieve, but the wheat falls to the ground
- VII) The purifying of our faith can shake us to our core
It can be severe, and extremely difficult to endure but produces refined faith
Is 48:10 Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you **in the furnace of affliction**
- VIII) Jesus said Peter, I have prayed for you and you will not be completely lost
This will work out for you to become a source of encouragement to others
Your failure will produce empathy, understanding, humility, and compassion
- IX) After Peter endured the **sifting**, he was humbled, and his faith was refined
God allowed the sifting to produce the desired result in Peter: **humility**
- X) V7 this messenger of Satan **buffeted** (violently mistreat; strike) Paul
WHY WAS THIS ALLOWED?
- XI) V7 lest he should be exalted above measure by the abundance of revelations
His abundance of experiences and revelations could have fostered pride

- I) The simple fact is even the most mature believers are not out of **danger of pride**
Great accomplishments can foster **a great desire** to boast
Paul had made it clear: I will boast, but **only in my weaknesses!** (V5)
- II) The false teachers were boasting of things they had, **in the flesh**, accomplished
The things that Paul had accomplished **were not** of his own abilities or skills
They were works that were produced by the Lord
- III) Paul had many victories, converts, miracles, revelations and visions
The thorn in his flesh kept him **totally dependent** on the Lord
- IV) V8 I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me
This reminds us of how Jesus prayed three times in the Garden
- V) In the end, Jesus finally said Nevertheless, not My will but Your will be done
Paul received the same answer: no
- VI) He did not combat this in his own strength, but called upon God for deliverance
God did not answer him according to his request, but used it for his good
His thorn wasn't removed, but instead he was given the strength to endure
- VII) V9-10 And He said to me My grace is sufficient for you for My strength is made
My grace is sufficient: you don't go through these difficulties **without My help**
Is 43:2 When you go through deep waters, **I will be with you**. When you go
through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of
oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.
- VIII) God used it to produce purity and humble dependence on Him through it
The result: I have matured in my walk with the Lord
- IX) V10 I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions
Paul's weakness caused God to receive all the more glory
- X) Rather than glorying in his accomplishments, he gloried in what God could do
Phil. 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.