

2/24/13

**Strength From Weakness**  
**2Cor. 12:1-10**

Paul is still playing the part of a fool in boasting about himself reluctantly, lowering himself to the level of these hucksters, with sarcastic irony. 2Cor. 11:1-12:13

Paul was playing the fool in boasting to expose the false boasting of the false apostles, the Judaizers.

1. He states his goal clearly, “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. For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.” 2Cor. 11:12-13

2. He stated clearly he was playing the fool, according to the flesh, as the foolish false apostles, “I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise, at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little. What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. Seeing that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast.” 2Cor. 11:16-18

The great distinction between the boasting of the false supper apostles and Paul was two-fold.

1. The boasting of the false apostles was according to their flesh, the sinful nature of man, and not based on truth, while Paul’s boasting was to mock their carnal manner, but based on truth.

2. The boasting of the false apostles was in their accomplishments and supernatural experiences, while Paul’s was his sufferings, weaknesses through the power of Christ.

Paul has just finished giving the account of Damascus, when he escaped to save his life, as the governor under King Aretus was guarding the city with a garrison, desiring to arrest him. So Paul was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hand. 2Cor. 11:32-33

\* The focus of Paul was his suffering in weakness, as he had to act as a common criminal, as he was helped to be lowered down in a basket to save his life.

Then without hesitation Paul moves right into another of his apostolic experiences, he revealed he had gone to heaven and once again his boasting is not in the experience for his apostolic credentials, but rather on his strength through weakness by the power of Christ.

We want to examine Paul’s experience of going to heaven that was used by God to keep him humble, which is marked by three things:

- I. The privilege of having gone to heaven. vs. 1-4
- II. The perception having gone to heaven. vs. 5-6
- III. The price for experiencing heaven. vs. 7-10

**I. The privilege having gone to heaven. vs. 1-4**

- A. The apostle Paul expressed that he was reluctantly continuing to boast, playing the fool. vs. 1a
  - \* “It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast.”
  - 1. Paul affirms this fact clearly.
    - a. The word doubtless “de”, could be translated and is at times, “surely or certainly”.
    - b. The word profitable “sumphero”, means to benefit or help.
      - 1) It is a participle present active, indicating continuously.
      - 2) This ongoing boasting will not benefit them personally, but is necessary to defend his apostleship.
    - c. In other words, Paul is telling the Corinthians that what he was about to reveal to them would not benefit them spiritually.

- 1) The experience of heaven was for Paul’s own personal profit.
- 2) The hearing of his experience would not benefit them at all.
- 2. Paul had been compelled to boast in order to defend his apostleship and will charge the Corinthians for compelling him again.
  - a. “Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly--and indeed you do bear with me.” 2Cor. 11:1
  - b. “But in whatever anyone is bold--I speak foolishly--I am bold also.” 2Cor. 11:21c-d
  - c. “If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.” 2Cor. 11:30
  - d. “I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing.” 2Cor. 12:11
- B. The apostle Paul expressed that he had receive numerous visions and revelations. vs. 1b
  - \* “I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.”
  - 1. Paul identifies two different forms of divine communication.

- a. A vision “optasia” is when a person is awake, and perceives visibly an account that God is revealing, but it is not always accompanied with understanding.
  - 1) Isaiah saw a vision of the throne of God with understanding. Is. 6:1
  - 2) Daniel on the other hand received what is known as “the 70 weeks of Daniel”, for the last days and the Antichrist without understanding and would be sealed up till the time of the end. Dan. 9:24-27, 12:9
  - 3) Ezekiel had many vision as well as Zachariah, some with understanding others without.
- b. A revelation “apokalupsis”, depicts the unveiling of something, so as to see, know and understand.
  - 1) God revealed to Paul the gospel by revelation. Gal. 1:12
  - 2) God revealed the book of Revelations to John through his angel, so he could reveal it to the church.
  - 3) God revealed to Peter at Joppa through a vision to go with two men, but did not understand it at first, then God revealed the meaning in stages, as he spoke to

- the men and as he was in the house of Cornelius. Acts 10
- 2. Paul had many different visions and revelations.
  - a. At Paul’s personal conversion, on the Damascus Road. Acts 9:3
  - b. At the time when he saw the man of Macedonia, who asked him to come and help, going to Philippi. Acts 16:9
  - c. At the founding of the church at Corinth, Jesus appeared to him, telling him not to be afraid, no one would touch him for He had many people in that city. Acts 18:9
  - d. At the time when Paul was arrested in the temple and he spoke to the crowd from the stair of the Antonius Fortress, telling them he was praying in the temple and the Lord told him to flee Jerusalem, the Jew would not receive his testimony. Acts 22:17
  - e. At the time the angel appeared to Paul on the ship to Rome, revealing no one would perish and he would get to Rome. Acts 27:23
- C. Paul expressed that he was taken to heaven. vs. 2-4
  - 1. He told the Corinthians what he knew about his going to heaven. vs. 2a
    - \* “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago.”

- a. He spoke about himself in the third person, as if it were another person, yet he is the man.
  - 1) The man he knew is identified to be “in Christ”, saved, a new creature by trusting Jesus. 2Cor. 5:17  
\* The phrase “in Christ” is the key to the epistle to the Ephesians, uniting Jew and Gentile, one in Christ and is found over 30 times?
  - 2) He identified himself in verse six and seven to be this man..
    - a) “For though I might desire to boast.” vs. 6a
    - b) “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of revelations.” vs. 7a
- b. He specified the personal privilege of the experience to be fourteen years earlier.
  - 1) The apostle reveals that this experience had been kept secret for these fourteen years, until he was forced to boast.
    - a) He wrote this letter in 55-56 A. D.
    - b) The date would be 41-42 A. D. the time when Paul was in Tarsus and unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in

- Christ, only hearing that the one who persecuted believers now preached the faith. Acts 9:30, Gal. 1:22-23
- 2) Some have related the experience with Lystra when he was stoned and dragged out of the city dead, but that too late. Acts 14:19
  - 2. He told the Corinthians what he did not know about going to heaven. vs. 2b-c, 3  
\* “whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows.”
    - a. Paul was not certain if he was in his physical body “soma”, or not.
      - 1) To speculate and choose one over the other is to become a fool, thinking we know more than Paul who was there.
      - 2) To attempt to identify this experience with the modern day, so called, “out of body experience” of many, who say they died and went to heaven and then returned is sheer speculation and dangerous, for most are not believers!
    - b. Paul told the Corinthians who did know the condition of his presence in heaven, “God knows”. vs. 2d
      - 1) He told the Corinthians earlier that when a believer dies he is instantly

- present before the Lord in spirit and soul, while the physical body is put in the grave till the resurrection. 2Cor. 5:1-5
- 2) He is not contradicting himself, Paul did not die, but was taken to heaven, these are two different things.
  3. He told the Corinthians he was translated to heaven. vs. 2e
    - \* “Such a one was caught up to the third heaven.”
    - a. Paul described his experience as being caught up “Harpazo”, which means to seize, pluck, pull, taken away suddenly, violently by force.
      - 1) He will use it again in verse four.
      - 2) More than half of the thirteen times it appears in the New Testament it is a translation from one geographical location to another!
      - 3) The word is used to describe the snatching up of Philip as he baptized the Ethiopian Eunuch and was translated to Azotus. Acts 8:39-40
      - 4) The word is used for the rapture of the church. 1Thess. 4:17
      - 5) The word is used for the man child, Christ, as He is caught up to God. Rev. 12:5

- b. Paul described the location as the third heaven.
  - 1) The Bible in Genesis describes the first heaven as the open space where the birds fly.
  - 2) The Bible describes the second heaven as the stellar or outer space.
  - 3) The Bible describes the third heaven as the abode of God.
4. Paul repeats what he said in verse two, but not exactly. vs. 3
  - a. This is a summary statement to affirm the truth about what he did not know about his physical body, soul and spirit, giving emphasis to the truth of it. vs. 3
  - b. He omits three things.
    - 1) “in Christ”.
    - 2) Fourteen years ago.
    - 3) Such a one was caught up to the third heaven.
5. Paul told the Corinthians what he heard. vs. 4
  - \* “how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”
  - a. He confirmed where he heard these words, in paradise. vs. 4a
    - 1) The word paradise “paradeisos” was used among the Persians a

grand enclosure or preserve, hunting ground, park, shady and well watered, in which wild animals, were kept for the hunt; it was enclosed by walls and furnished with towers for the hunters.

- 2) The location was also a pleasure garden or park for special honored individuals, allowed to enter in and walk and talk with the king.
  - \* The LXX used it to identify the garden of Eden.
- 3) The word is found only two other times in the New Testament.
  - a) Jesus promised the thief on the cross, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise”. Lk. 23:43
  - b) John promises the overcomer to eat of the tree of life that is in the midst of paradise. Rev. 2:7
- b. He identified the third heaven to be paradise, using them synonymously, the same location, the abode of God.
  - 1) This means that the Bosom of Abraham in Hades” or “Sheol” where the beggar Lazarus went was Paradise, the place of comfort before the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the place of

torment, where the rich man went. Lk. 16

- 2) Paul and Peter tell us that Jesus led captivity captive as he went down to Hades and preached to the prisoners. Eph. 4:10, 1Pet. 3:19
  - \* The words of Jesus to the thief were, “today you will be with me in paradise”, were fulfilled.
- a. He heard inexpressible words. vs. 4a
  - 1) Paul did not see anything that we know of, he does not say so.
  - 2) The word inexpressible “errtos”, means unutterable.
  - 3) The word was used as a technical term for the Greek mystery cults. Linski
- b. He heard things which are not lawful to be uttered. vs. 4b
  - 1) God spoke to Paul these words for him and his encouragement in ministry, not for anyone else.
  - 2) They were to be kept for himself.
  - 3) He revealed his fourteen year secret while maintaining the secrecy of what he heard.

### **Illustration**

One day a young girl was examined by a physician regarding her blindness which she had experienced

since birth and was told that a simple operation could very well regain her sight.

The family was poor so the doctor volunteered his services at no charge. As the operation was finished she waited day by day to have the bandages removed. Then the day came and as the room was darkened the bandages were removed, one by one.

The young girl said nothing, the lights were turned on and still nothing, she walked to the window and looked out and as she stared she began to cry.

Her mother and the doctor feared that she could still not see, only to hear, “Mother, why did you not tell me how beautiful it was?”, in response her mother said, “I did my best”.

\* How much more heaven with these earthly minds and eyes!

### **Application**

1. Discretion is a lost virtue in today’s society but it does not come natural, it must be cultivated, each of us need to ask God for discretion as to the thing that we share with others, that they be for their benefit and not merely boasting.

a. There are some things that God allows us to experience just for the benefit of ourselves and for no other.

b. There are other things that we are able to use for His glory and benefit of others with wise discretion.

1) “To give prudence to the simple, To the young man knowledge and discretion.” \_  
Prov. 1:4

2) “Discretion will preserve you;  
Understanding will keep you.” Prov. 2:11

2. God is still speaking to us by visions, dreams and revelation for the promise of Joel refers to dreams and visions. Joel 2, Acts 2

a. But no dream, vision or revelation is equal in authority to the Scriptures.

b. Each dream, vision or revelation is subject to revealed canon of Scripture. 2Tim. 3:16-17, 2Pet. 1:20-21

c. The God we serve is not the author of confusion. 1Cor. 14:33

3. The Bible tells us that one day soon, we the church will be translated up to heaven to meet our love one in Christ. 1Thess. 4:15-17

\* There have been two men in the Old Testament who were caught up to heaven and kept there.

a. The man Enoch. Gen. 5:24

b. The man Elijah. 2Kings 2:11

\* And Elijah appeared in the Mount of Transfiguration with Moses. Matt. 17

*The privilege of Paul having gone to heaven was God’s sovereign choice!*

**II. The perception having gone to heaven. vs. 5-**

**6**

- A.** The apostle Paul would not boast of the one who went to heaven. vs. 5a  
 \* “Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast.”
1. Paul is referring to himself “of such a one”.
    - a. The one who went to heaven.
    - b. The one who heard unutterable words.
  2. Paul has boasted reluctantly, lowering himself to the level of the false apostles.
    - a. To defend his apostleship.
    - b. To expose their carnality.
    - c. To prove that he played the fool in boasting to reveal the real fools.
  3. Paul, himself would not boast, nor was he boasting as the false apostles.
    - a. To impress.
    - b. To provide credentials of apostle.
    - c. To establish authority over them.
- B.** The apostle Paul would only boast in his infirmities by depending on Christ. vs. 5b  
 \* “except in my infirmities.”
1. He revealed his despair of life and trusting not in themselves, but in “God who raises the dead”. 2Cor. 1:8-9
  2. He revealed God always led them to triumph in Christ by the preaching of the gospel, an aroma of life to some and an aroma of death to others. 2Cor. 2:14-15

3. He did not loose heart in all his sufferings trusting the Spirit to renew them from day to day and God who will raise us up. 2Cor. 4:8-18
  4. He was always trusting in Christ regarding his sufferings, boasting in his weaknesses. 2Cor. 11:23-31
  5. He was boasting in the sufficiency of Christ.
    - a. The person “in Christ”, is the one who pleases God.
    - b. The person “in Christ” is the one who has access to God.
    - c. The person “in Christ” is not seeking to boast in self or bring attention to self, as the false apostles.
- C.** The apostle Paul wanted to make sure his foolish boasting was not misunderstood. vs. 6a-c  
 \* “For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth.”
1. Paul told them that even if he did boast, he would not end up being a fool.
    - a. The words desire and boast are aorist, Paul is supposing a single instance he might want to boast. Lenski  
 \* The boasting was reluctant and by compulsion by both the Judaizers and the Corinthians. 2Cor. 10:12; 11:1; 12:11



- b. If such an occasion took place, he would not be a fool.
    - 1) The word for fool “aphron” means senseless foolishness. 2Cor. 11:16, 19, 12:6, 11
    - 2) The phrase “I will not” is in the indicative future tense.
    - 3) The fools were the false apostles.
  - 2. Paul told them the reason, he will only speak the truth.
    - a. The word for truth is “aletheia” what is true in any matter, the context is the things of God
    - b. The truth is that Paul is trustworthy in his information.
- D.** The apostle Paul did not boast in any of his spiritual accomplishments or experiences that no one have a false impression of him. vs. 6d-e
- \* “But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me *to be* or hears from me.”
- 1. Paul refrained himself from such boasting in himself, lest people would think of him above what they **saw** he was before them or less by playing the fool in boasting and think him a real fool.
    - a. The word refrain “pheidomai”. means to abstain and restrain.

- 1) Indicating that he held back from continuing lest he be responsible for giving some the wrong idea.
  - 2) That he was better than others by these visions.
- b. The word think “logizomai” is an accounting term of commerce.
    - 1) He did not want anyone to credit him with spiritual things based on these subjective visions, but rather on the object evidence of his apostleship to them.
    - 2) This is the practice of men who are not led by the Spirit of God, but of the flesh, to present themselves before man in a false manner to impress and deceive people.
- 2. Paul refrained himself from boasting in himself, lest people would think of him above what they **heard** from him or stumble them, thinking he was really bragging.
    - a. He wanted his words to be edifying and beneficial for the believer.
    - b. He disciplined his life, being Spirit bound and controlled for the good of the believer.
    - c. He knew that our speech can cause people to think that we are the one responsible for what God is doing as the Holy Spirit is meeting their needs,

- for the natural transfer is to the one who is being used by God!
- d. Four times the personal pronoun “I” is tied to four verbs.
- 1) Though he might desire to boast.
  - 2) Though he is playing the part of a fool, he would not be a fool.
  - 2) Due to the fact that he would be telling the truth.
  - 4) Therefore he exercised discipline and decided not to share any more visions or revelation.

### Illustration

Moses is a classic example of the epitome of humility as he did not even take notice that his face was shining.

### Application

1. Pride is the number one thing that God hates.
  - \* These six *things* the LORD hates, Yes, **seven** *are* an abomination to Him: A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, A false witness *who* speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren. Prov. 6:16-19
2. Pride is tempered by constantly remembering that all we have has been given to us. Rom. 12:3, 1Cor. 4:7

- a. The fear of the LORD *is* to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way And the perverse mouth I hate. Prov. 8:13
  - b. Pride *goes* before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall. Prov. 16:18
  - c. In the mouth of a fool *is* a rod of pride, But the lips of the wise will preserve them. Provs. 14:3
3. The only protection against pride is to walk in the Spirit daily.
- a. There is a warfare going on, realize it. Gal. 5:16-17
  - b. There is a constant dependence to be going on. Eph. 5:18

*The perception of Paul having gone to heaven was not arrogance, but humility!*

### III. The price for experiencing heaven. vs. 7-10

- A. Paul the apostle knew that God had counter-balance the elated experience of heaven with the fist from hell. vs. 7
1. He acknowledged his potential for spiritual pride. vs. 7a-b
    - \* “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me.”

- a. The tendencies of our sinful flesh regarding pride is destructive enough, but spiritual pride is much worst and dangerous than carnal pride.
- 1) Exalted beyond measure  
“hpuerairomai”, means to be lifted or raised up over something.
  - 2) The reason was for the numerous revelations “apokalupsis” given to him, which is in the plural, confirmed by the abundance “huperbole”, to throw beyond or excessive, in the subjective present passive.
  - 3) The word appears three times in the New Testament, two in this verse and the last for the Anti-christ.  
2Thess. 2:4
- b. The thorn is not identified. vs. 7b
- 1) The word thorn “skolops”, means a sharp stake or splinter, found only this time in the New Testament.
  - 2) The context without doubt is a tent stake familiar to Paul occupation of being a tent-maker.
  - 3) To counter-balance his sinful nature, literally says, “for the flesh” “sarx”.
  - 4) What it was we don’t know, much speculation has been made, such as headaches, eye disease, physical

- endurance, epilepsy, malaria, sorrow for Israel
- 5) Paul reveals how the Galatians would have plucked out their eyes for him. Gal. 4:15
  - 6) Paul mentions how he wrote in large Letters? Gal. 6:11
  - 7) Paul failed to recognize the high priest. Acts 23:5
- c. The thorn was a gift from God.
- 1) The word given “didomi”, means simply to give something to someone.
  - 2) The tense again is the indicative aorist passive, when he went to heaven.
3. He understood the thorn to be a gift from God to keep him abased, rather than puffed up. vs. 7c-d
- \* “a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.”
- a. The agent was Satan’s messenger “angelos” or angel. vs. 7c
- 1) The word is used for false apostles, as messenger or angel of Satan. 2Cor. 11:13-15
  - 2) The word is used for the seven churches of Revelation.
  - 3) We know that Satan is a tool of God at times and Job is a classic example. Job 1-2

- b. An instrument to afflict him was for his good, to keep him humble and dependent on God. vs. 7d
    - 1) The word buffet “kolaphizo”, means to fistcuff, to strike with the fist.
    - 2) The word is used as they beat Jesus in the face. Matt. 26:67
    - 3) Above measure “huperairomai”, to by supper exalted in self conceit.
- B.** The apostle Paul was no fool, but a wise man commending himself and resting in the wisdom of God. vs. 8-9c
- 1. Paul petitioned the Lord to remove it,
    - \* “Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.”
    - a. The number three is found often regarding prayer, Daniel prayed three times, our Lord also asked the Father three times to remove the cup from Him, yet he said, “not my will be done but yours be done”.
    - b. Paul knew about being persistent in prayer to seek out relief from the Lord, but was answered by Jesus.
      - \* Pleased “parakaleo” indicative aorist active, it was settled, never petitioned again.

- 2. Paul was answered but not according to his will, but according to God’s will. vs. 9a-c
    - \* “And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”
    - a. God’s grace was sufficient “arkeo”, unailing for Paul, present active!
    - b. God’s strength “dunamis” is made perfect in weakness “astheneia”.
      - 1) The word perfect “teleioo”, means to being to completion by the power of God which is ever perfect in it’s sufficiency. 2Cor. 1:8-11, 3:4-6
      - 2) The meaning in our text is that the power comes to perfection or sufficiency only in the midst of weakness.
      - 3) His grace is sufficient. 1Cor. 10:13
- C.** The apostle Paul gives his concluding wisdom. vs. 9d-10
- 1. Paul would only boast in the power of Christ, this was his goal. vs. 9d-e
    - \* “Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”
    - a. He came to a settled conclusion, he would willingly and joyfully to a greater degree glory in his infirmities,

- plural, than his visions and revelations given to him.
- b. The purpose is given, that the power of Christ may rest upon him.
    - 1) The word rest “episkenoō”, means to take possession of him for protection and enablement, coming upon him. 2Cor. 4:7
    - 2) Just as the presence and power of God on the prophets of old.
2. The pleasure of Paul was to be empowered by Christ. 2Cor. 4:8-15, 11:22-28
- \* “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”
- a. He concluded again to delight in his dependency on Jesus to enable him for all his difficulties.
    - 1) Infirmities “astheneia”, weaknesses on any level.
    - 2) Reproaches “hubris”, insults.
    - 3) Needs “anagke”, things imposed by circumstances or otherwise.
    - 4) Persecutions “diogmos”, sufferings for his faith.
    - 5) Distresses “stenochoria”, dire calamities.

- 6) All for Christ sake’s not his own fault!
- b. He understood, both in mind and life experience when he was weak then he was strong!
  - \* “If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.” 2Cor. 11:30

### Illustration

Gideon and his three-hundred is a classic example of God’s power.

### Application

1. For everything that can exalt us, God will counter-balance with abasement, in Paul's case a thorn or state. Jn. 15:5
2. There are times when God's answer will be negatively no, to bring about positive results in my life. Phil. 4:13
  - a. Moses was told not to enter the Land.
  - b. Elijah was told no when he asked to be killed
  - c. David was told no when it came to building the temple.
3. For God to avail us of all things would be to cripple us and cause us to take for granted our relationship and dependency. 2Pet. 1:3-4
  - \* Through our divine nature and promises to escape the corruption of the world.

4. It is interesting that you can be too strong to be used of God while **never** too weak! Phil. 4:9  
\* “The things which you **learned** and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.”

The price for experiencing heaven was abasement through grace!

### **Conclusion**

Paul’s experience of going to heaven was used by God to keep him humble:

- I. The privilege of Paul having gone to heaven was God’s sovereign choice!
- II. The perception of Paul having gone to heaven was not arrogance, but humility!
- III. The price for experiencing heaven was abasement through grace!