

# 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians Chapters 12-13

Charles Dailey © 2023 NLT CPS  
Updated 8/30/2023 Printed 11/20/2023

## Introduction:

The casual reader of Scripture must always be alert to the context of what they are reading, but nowhere is context more important than 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians. Without extensive context, Paul can be made to say things that he does not intend to communicate. His use of irony and sarcasm can make real problems for those who want to quote one verse to prove a point.

## PAUL'S VISIONS AND REVELATIONS ALSO SUPPORT HIS APOSTLESHIP

**2 Corinthians 12:(1) This boasting will do no good, but I must go on. I will reluctantly tell about visions and revelations from the Lord.**

- While Paul is **boasting**, he will tell of **visions** and **revelations** including being in the very presence of **the Lord**.

**(2) I was caught up to the third heaven fourteen years ago. Whether I was in my body or out of my body, I don't know - - only God knows.**

- The *first* **heaven** refers to our earthly atmosphere as in Genesis:

**"From the dew of heaven and the richness of the earth, may God always give you abundant harvests of grain and bountiful new wine." Genesis 27:28**

**Heaven** here speaks of the *atmosphere of our earth*.

- The Hebrew language used **heaven** in two other ways:

**The heavens will be black above them; the stars will give no light. The sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will provide no light.** Isaiah 13:10

**Heavens** here describes what we might label as the visible universe. This is the second **heaven**.

- **The third heaven** points to the dwelling place of God.

**The LORD looks down from heaven and sees the whole human race. (14) From His throne He observes all who live on the earth.** Psalms 33:13-14

**(3) Yes, only God knows whether I was in my body or outside my body. But I do know (4) that I was caught up to paradise and heard things so astounding that they cannot be expressed in words, things no human is allowed to tell.**

- Paul was somewhere but he didn't know if he was in his earthly **body** or not. He named his location as **paradise** and the vocabulary was either beyond his understanding or he was not allowed to repeat what he was hearing. (How does *this* experience compare with his critics?)

**(5) That experience is worth boasting about, but I'm not going to do it. I will boast only about my weaknesses.**

- Paul's critics **boasted** about their *greatness*, but Paul is **boasting** about his *weaknesses*. They are quite different.

**(6) If I wanted to boast, I would be no fool in doing so, because I would be telling the truth. But I won't do it, because I don't want anyone to give me credit beyond**

**what they can see in my life or hear in my message, (7) even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God.**

- When Paul **boasted**, he would be **telling the truth**. He had **wonderful** things that he could boast about, but he didn't want to be evaluated by the words of his **boasting**. He wanted to be evaluated by his actions.

## **PAUL RECEIVED WONDERFUL REVELATIONS FROM GOD, BUT THEY WERE BALANCED WITH TORMENTS**

**(7b) So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud.**

- Paul can **boast** and still be **truthful**, but he wants his critics to see for themselves by looking at his **life** rather than hearing his claims.

**(8) Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away.**

- His torment was repeated **three times**. Paul was a prime servant in spreading the message of the risen Jesus, but he didn't receive any special rewards for it. But God did respond as we see next.

**(9) Each time He said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.**

- Paul learns that God's **grace** will enable him to survive. God looks best when He works with **weak** people. Many views have been offered as to what Paul's reoccurring weakness was. Some have suggested an eyesight problem as implied in Galatians 4:15. Others have suggested that he had malaria that flared up at times. Whatever it was, it

repeated itself and it distressed Paul who asked for it to be removed.

- Throughout the pages of the Scriptures, God has worked with people who were in a weak position.
  - **Joseph** was a *prisoner* of his brothers, but with God's intervention, he became a ruler in Egypt and set up his family with wealth and security.
  - God chose *baby Moses* to be trained in the finest leadership schools in the world and then empowered him to lead Israel out of Egypt's bondage to the freedom of the wilderness.
  - **Peter** was a *fisherman* with some leadership ability. Jesus turned him into the lead man of the Twelve and gave him the Holy Spirit.

**(10) That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

- Because God uses *our weaknesses* to display *His strength*, Paul took **pleasure** in his **weaknesses**. They were much less of a burden to him

## **PAUL'S SIGNS SUPPORT HIS APOSTLESHIP**

**(11) You have made me act like a fool -- boasting like this. You ought to be writing commendations for me, for I am not at all inferior to these "super apostles," even though I am nothing at all.**

- Instead of Paul **acting like a fool** and **boasting**, the Corinthian church should have been **writing commendations** for him because he was not **inferior** to those who claimed to be **"super apostles."**

**(12) When I was with you, I certainly gave you proof that I am an apostle. For I patiently did many signs and wonders and miracles among you.**

- Paul's numerous **signs, wonders and miracles** that he had performed among them were visible evidence that he was an **apostle**. He hadn't failed to produce incontrovertable proof of his authority.

**(13) The only thing I failed to do, which I do in the other churches, was to become a financial burden to you. Please forgive me for this wrong!**

- The only way he had treated them differently than other **churches** was by not becoming a **financial burden** to them. Then sarcastically he asks **forgiveness for this wrong**.

## **PAUL'S PENDING VISIT TO CORINTH**

**(14) Now I am coming to you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you. I don't want what you have -- I want you. After all, children don't provide for their parents. Rather, parents provide for their children.**

- Controversy surrounds the meaning of the **third time**. Some commentators believe that Paul intended to make **three** trips, but didn't get it done. We reject this view because Paul goes on to discuss the three **trips** in more detail as in 13:1-2.
- **David Guzik** believes that **trip one** was when he established the church and **trip two** was a "brief, painful visit in between the writing of 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians."
- Paul again makes reference to rejecting their pay as in verse 13. He was putting money *into them* and not taking

money *out*. He was like a **parent** to them and was **providing** for them as a **parent** would for the **children**.

**(15) I will gladly spend myself and all I have for you, even though it seems that the more I love you, the less you love me.**

- Paul's generosity and **love** toward the Corinth Church was not being rewarded with **love** from them, but it seemed that more charges were being directed toward Paul and his motives.

**(16) Some of you admit I was not a burden to you. But others still think I was sneaky and took advantage of you by trickery.**

- The complaint was that he was sending in his helpers and they were collecting money and passing it to Paul.

**(17) But how? Did any of the men I sent to you take advantage of you? (18) When I urged Titus to visit you and sent our other brother with him, did Titus take advantage of you? No! For we have the same spirit and walk in each other's steps, doing things the same way.**

- **Titus** and another **brother** came to visit but they didn't take any financial advantage of the Corinthian Church either. Those men who went to help thought just like Paul did.

**(19) Perhaps you think we're saying these things just to defend ourselves. No, we tell you this as Christ's servants, and with God as our witness. Everything we do, dear friends, is to strengthen you.**

- Paul is not **defending** himself and his co-workers. They are all **Christ's servants** and **God** is looking at what we do. Everything we do **is to strengthen you**.

**(20) For I am afraid that when I come I won't like what I find, and you won't like my response. I am afraid that I will find quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorderly behavior.**

- Paul's **fear** is that when he arrives among them he will have to take an authoritative role and get the sin cleaned up. This list of social sins had developed or continued under the leadership of the "super apostles."

**(21) Yes, I am afraid that when I come again, God will humble me in your presence. And I will be grieved because many of you have not given up your old sins. You have not repented of your impurity, sexual immorality, and eagerness for lustful pleasure.**

- Paul restates his **fears** stated in verse 20. He has been telling other churches what a good church they were, but God might humble Paul and he would have to face the reality that they had not stayed with their original commitments to leave **sin** behind.

**(13:1) This is the third time I am coming to visit you (and as the Scriptures say, "The facts of every case must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses").**

- This will be Paul's **third** appearance among the Corinthians and that is a reminder of an old Biblical truth:

**"You must not convict anyone of a crime on the testimony of only one witness. The facts of the case must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."** Deuteronomy 19:15

So Paul is counting his **three** trips separated by several years as making him a **witness three** separate times.

## PAUL'S APOSTLESHIP WAS SUPPORTED BY THE CORINTHIANS THEMSELVES

**(2) I have already warned those who had been sinning when I was there on my second visit. Now I again warn them and all others, just as I did before, that next time I will not spare them.**

- On his **second** quick trip, Paul had warned that he would use his authority as an apostle of Christ to get the **sin** settled in the Corinthian church. On the third trip he will have time to address the evident social sins of verse 21.

**(3) I will give you all the proof you want that Christ speaks through me. Christ is not weak when He deals with you; He is powerful among you.**

- The sinning component of the church won't repent easily. They will challenge Paul's authority and he will prove that **Christ** speaks through him. Paul will demonstrate that **Christ is not weak**, but **powerful**.

**(4) Although He was crucified in weakness, He now lives by the power of God. We, too, are weak, just as Christ was, but when we deal with you we will be alive with Him and will have God's power.**

- In the Garden, Jesus had asked His closest friends for companionship in prayer, but sleep was a greater priority for them. Luke 22:46. Then the Father sent an angel to strengthen Him in His **weak** moment.

**Then an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened Him.** Luke 22:43

- Later we read of His **power**:



**Now Christ has gone to heaven. He is seated in the place of honor next to God, and all the angels and authorities and powers accept His authority.**

1 Peter 3:22

- Paul identifies with **Christ's weakness** because he, to, is human, but he will deal with the Corinthian Church in the **power** of **Christ**.

**(5) Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves. Surely you know that Jesus Christ is among you; if not, you have failed the test of genuine faith. (6) As you test yourselves, I hope you will recognize that we have not failed the test of apostolic authority.**

- Paul next urges the church to do a self-examination of their **faith**. While they **test** themselves they should note that he has **not failed the test** of being an **apostle** and that he has **authority**.

## **PAUL DESIRED TO DO GOOD FOR THE CORINTHIANS**

**(7) We pray to God that you will not do what is wrong by refusing our correction. I hope we won't need to demonstrate our authority when we arrive. Do the right thing before we come -- even if that makes it look like we have failed to demonstrate our authority. (8) For we cannot oppose the truth, but must always stand for the truth.**

- Paul **prayed** that the Corinthian church would **correct** their course on their own. But **truth** was going to reign supreme.

**(9) We are glad to seem weak if it helps show that you are actually strong. We pray that you will become mature. (10)**

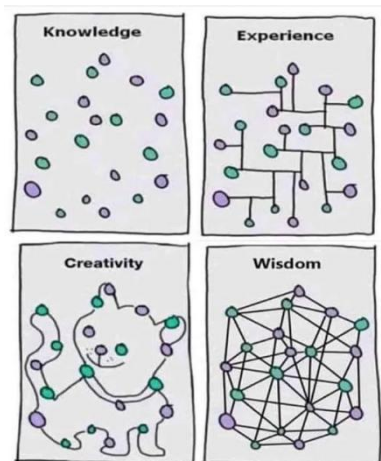
I am writing this to you before I come, hoping that I won't need to deal severely with you when I do come. For I want to use the authority the Lord has given me to strengthen you, not to tear you down.

- Asking the Corinthians to correct their own problems can really show their **strength**. That way he can use his **authority** to **strengthen** them and not do any **tearing down**.

## PAUL'S GRACIOUS FAREWELL

(11) Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.

- It is implied that the church had a regular meeting. Even though the church had serious shortcomings, they met. By meeting they could express **joy**, **grow** and **encourage each other**. They could learn to **live in harmony** and peace. It is clear from 2 Corinthians 12:20 that **joy** was missing from their group.
- For Christian growth to happen, we need to be present in the assembly so we can gain knowledge by hearing or seeing.
- Church is not something believers go to, but family we belong to.



**(12) Greet each other with Christian love. (13) All of God's people here send you their greetings.**

- Some translations use wording like **“Greet one another with a holy kiss.”** Paul was not suggesting they begin a practice of greeting entirely foreign to their culture. **David Guzik** aptly says: “Our cultural equivalent is a handshake and a warm greeting.” This raises the question if some in the Corinthian church might not have been speaking to others.

**(14) May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.**

- Paul concludes with a great truth of Christianity: there is a Trinity. As in other places in Scripture, he speaks of:
  1. The **grace** of the **Lord Jesus Christ**. Jesus came to earth and put up with rejection by His nation Israel. They thought they were worshiping God, but rejected Him in the process.
  2. The **love of God**. **Love** is at the core of the Father's Being. All of His other characteristics are anchored in His **love** for others.
  3. The **fellowship of the Spirit** because every believer has the **Spirit** in his life to strengthen and guide us. Acts 2:38. While Jesus, because of His humanity, was limited to being in one place at a time, the Spirit can have **fellowship** with every believer everywhere.

