

How Would You Prove You Are A Christian?

2 Corinthians 12

How would you prove you are a Christian?

Would you say that it is because you believe in God?

Would you say because you are a good person?

Would you give them the date of when you decided to follow Christ?

Would you say it is because you are part of a Christian community?

Paul is proving that he is an apostle.

Why is this important for Paul to prove to them?

Because in his first letter he said that he was worth imitating.

11:1 And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1 NLT)

What Does The Bible Say?

This boasting will do no good, but I must go on. I will reluctantly tell about visions and revelations from 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. 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. (2 Corinthians 12:1–4 NLT)

God had personally taught the apostle Paul.

5 That experience is worth boasting about, but I'm not going to do it. I will boast only about my weaknesses. 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. 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. (2 Corinthians 12:5–7 NLT)

God has a way of keeping us humble.

8 Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. 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. 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. (2 Corinthians 12:8–10 NLT)

We don’t like discomfort, but we cherish the strength we receive through Christ.

11 You have made me act like a fool. 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. 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. (2 Corinthians 12:11–12 NLT)

Our actions should speak louder than our words.

How Can You Obey?

How would you prove you are a Christian?

Would you say that it is because you believe in God?

Would you say because you are a good person?

Would you give them the date of when you decided to follow Christ?

Would you say it is because you are part of a Christian community?

Here is how you know that you are a Christian:

8 If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. 9 But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.

(1 John 1:8–10 NLT)

You feel bad when you sin and you go to God with your guilt.

11:1 And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1 NLT)

Is your life so devoted to Christ that you are worth imitating?

Additional Notes:

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at www.crosswaveschurch.com/host. Cross Waves has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

Additional Notes:

This week's Tough Questions is from Walter C. Kaiser Jr. et al., *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 76–78.

Verses used in Tough Questions:

1 The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need. (Psalm 23:1 NLT)

1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. (Psalm 23:1 ESV)

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. (Psalm 23:1 NIV)

8 That is why the Scriptures say, “When he ascended to the heights, he led a crowd of captives and gave gifts to his people.”
(Ephesians 4:8 NIV)

18 When you ascended to the heights, you led a crowd of captives. You received gifts from the people, even from those who rebelled against you. Now the Lord God will live among us there. (Psalm 68:18 NIV)

9 That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.” (1 Corinthians 2:8–9 NLT)

4 For since the world began, no ear has heard and no eye has seen a God like you, who works for those who wait for him!
(Isaiah 64:4 NLT)

17 “Look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth, and no one will even think about the old ones anymore. (Isaiah 65:17 NLT)

Explore:

In chapter 11, Paul again defended his authority as an apostle. He did this in response to the false teachers and Judaizers (legalists who taught that following the Law of Moses was necessary for salvation) that were attacking his ministry. He felt forced to “boast,” or make known his qualifications and calling as a servant of Christ. He continued this defense in chapter 12, ultimately exalting the Lord, rather than himself.

Explore:

Believers Exalt God Rather Than Themselves (2 Corinthians 12:1-6)

Paul had many reasons to boast about his life and ministry experiences. No other apostle had been called to follow Christ through such extraordinary circumstances. He had certainly received extraordinary visions. We know of no one else who

had the privilege of getting a glimpse of Heaven, as Paul recalled in this passage, except for John in the book of Revelation. While most would have used the sensational experiences to elevate their position or even exaggerate their calling, Paul was very careful not to use these experiences to brag about himself. Rather, he was intentional in turning the focus toward Christ. He had been forced to defend his ministry as an apostle but still kept the attention on Christ.

In verse 1, Paul expressed the fact that even though he could continue to speak of his credentials and experiences, there was really nothing to be gained from doing so. He would continue to do so, however, in an attempt to silence his critics.

Apparently, the critics and false teachers had criticized his claim to be an apostle and had questioned his experiences.

Paul's reluctance in sharing these details highlighted the differences between him and the Judaizers. While they were anxious to receive accolades and honors, Paul sought honor only from God.

In verse 2, the apostle spoke in third person by asserting he knew about a man who was given a glimpse of Heaven.

Commentators feel this may have been Paul's way of avoiding the temptation to boast of his experiences. The event described here occurred fourteen years prior to the writing of 2 Corinthians, even before Paul embarked on his missionary journeys. Little is known about this period in the life of Paul, and the account described here is not recorded for us anywhere else in the Scriptures. The "third heaven" referred to the place where God and the angels dwell.

Twice in this passage (verses 2 and 3), Paul expressed uncertainty of whether he was in the body or apart from the body during the experience. In other words, he could have actually been taken into Heaven and then returned to earth, or the experience may have strictly been a spiritual one. What was certain was the fact that the experiences Paul had were not intended to be shared with others (verse 4).

In verse 5, Paul asserted that if there were to be any boasting, he wished it to be in regard to his weaknesses. What mattered

to Paul at this point was the work God was doing in him and not the achievements of the past. If he had chosen to boast, however, it would have been the truth (verse 6). His desire was that no one place him in a position he did not deserve, simply because of his experiences. The only possible reason for boasting on Paul's part, and ours, is the sufficiency of Christ, and not an experience or ability.

Explore:

What was the thorn in the flesh and why was Paul so vague in this verse? There are numerous suggestions regarding the "thorn" that Paul was speaking of. Although numerous options could be considered, there is no basis for anyone being dogmatic about a particular view.

- Some see the "thorn" as being spiritual in nature, namely demonic opposition. This particular view finds its basis in passages such as 1 Thessalonians 2:18.

Some see Paul's "thorn" as being emotion- al or mental in nature. Numerous issues could fall under this category,

including sensual desires, doubts, temptations to despair, or even mental weariness.

- It is possible that the “thorn” for Paul was physical in nature, including, but not limited to, severe headaches, epilepsy, malaria, or eye problems, possibly blindness.
- The “thorn” that Paul struggled with could have even been personal in nature. There is no doubting the immense opposition that he faced in his ministry. That being said, it is possible that one or more individuals played the role of antagonist and continually persecuted Paul verbally or physically.

In the end, we cannot be certain about what Paul was alluding to when he penned these words. So why would the apostle be so vague? It is possible that under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul would not share any specifics so as not to leave out or ostracize those with a different “thorn” than he had. What we can say with certainty is that whatever the “thorn”

was — whether physical, spiritual, personal, or otherwise — God’s grace and strength were sufficient for them all.

Explore:

God May Use Difficulty to Keep Us Humble and Dependent on Him (2 Corinthians 12:7)

Paul’s vision of Heaven was great, but if not rightly kept in perspective, it could have ruined his earthly ministry. Because God knows our nature and inclination toward pride, He often allows great burdens and great blessings to be mixed in the kettle of our lives. In Paul’s case, there was the experience of

numerous revelations, most of which the reader is never told about. This alone could have provided the apostle enough reason to become prideful. In fact, what person, acting in the flesh, would not be prone to boast of such experiences?

God allowed what Paul called a thorn in his flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him and keep him humble and reliant upon God. In the original Greek, the word translated as thorn had the idea of something sharp that would cause acute pain. While we don't know exactly what this thorn in the flesh involved, many scholars believe it was some sort of physical ailment. The word buffet literally means to "beat with the fist." Paul did not have the time or energy to focus on areas to be proud about because he was too focused on relying on God to help him with the struggles and battles he faced daily. The term for messenger as used here was based on a Greek word that could be translated as angel or could be translated as a messenger. This thorn was like a messenger sent by Satan to periodically harass Paul.

Interestingly, Paul mentioned twice in this single verse that this "thorn" was given to him to keep him from becoming conceited

or exalted in his own mind. This alone teaches many truths. For instance, believers are not immune to the temptation to be prideful. Nor are they immune to the challenges and struggles that come with being human. It also shows the reader that it can be a good thing for an individual to acknowledge his personal struggles in the faith. Many reading Paul's words, even now, can identify with the temptations and challenges he spoke of.

Further, while God may not cause bad things to happen, He does permit them and when He does, they can, and will, accomplish good for the believer. (See Genesis 50:20 and Romans 8:28 for more insight on how God can use difficulty for good in our lives.) As with Paul, whatever thorns in the flesh we may

experience, God's grace is sufficient to see us through them.

Explore:

God's ability to work all things out for our good and His glory illustrates that he is the Sovereign Lord of all. Encourage parents and grandparents to teach this foundational truth to their children and grandchildren.

Explore:

God Provides Us Grace and Strength for Whatever We Face (2 Corinthians 12:8-10)

These experiences for Paul were certainly heartrending and painful. They were so troublesome that he pleaded with the Lord three times that this difficulty would be taken away from him (verse 8). The term for pleading meant to implore or to cry out earnestly. Again, he did this, not just once, but three times.

Interestingly, Jesus asked the Father more than once to keep Him from having to suffer on the cross in Mark 14:32-42. In spite of

Paul's pleading with God, and doing so three times, the Lord chose to permit this messenger to continue.

Although God did not answer Paul's prayer for the removal of this struggle he was facing, He did provide something better—His grace and strength (verse 9). The tense of this verb is significant in the original language as it could literally read, "He has once-for-all said to me..." In other words, the message he received from Heaven was words he could carry with him throughout life, regardless of the challenges he would face. Instead of removing the "thorn," God gave grace—unmerited kindness and favor that would be sufficient, a term that carried the notion of contentment. Further, through Paul's weaknesses in the experiences, God's power would shine through. This power, and not his own, provided Paul the opportunity to boast in his weaknesses. Paul had come to realize that the struggle had prompted him to rely more fully on God and that God gave him the grace he needed to endure the trial. The irony was, instead of

boasting about his own accomplishments and strengths, he found a way to be thankful for his weakness because that was where God became most evident.

From verse 10, it is evident that God had changed Paul's perspective regarding the difficulties of life. The experiences that would naturally make a person, even an apostle, cringe and break beneath the pressure, were now welcomed because of the strength of God that could be manifested in and through them. In fact, those experiences provided joy for Paul, knowing that all these things were for Christ's sake and that He could manifest His strength and power through them.

Explore:

Some scholars see a greater purpose than encouraging the reader

in Paul's sharing these experiences. The opponents of the apostle and his ministry had been very critical of his claims to be an apostle, partly because of his weaknesses. See 2 Corinthians 10:10 and 11:21. Some of them were believed to have even used the many persecutions and challenges experienced by Paul as an argument against his apostleship. In this passage, as he laid out the principle of Christ's strength in my weakness, he could encourage the reader, defend his claim to apostleship (again), and even silence the criticisms of his antagonists.

Explore:

Christianity is about more than going to church and living a good moral life. Being a Christian is about having a vibrant personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Every Sunday School teacher or Bible study leader should want to see each of his or her learners enter into this relationship—their eternal destiny depends on it. As you work toward this goal, keep the following in mind:

Following Christ is about more than a mere decision; it is about a lifelong relationship. Jesus called us to make disciples, not mere decision-makers. Aim for long-term faith, not momentary emotion.

Salvation is a matter of grace, not works. Our works do not save us (Ephesians 2:8-9), nor do they keep us (Galatians 3:2-6).

Good works are a product of salvation, not a prerequisite to it.

Don't confuse sanctification with salvation. Holiness follows salvation; it doesn't precede it. Don't try to impose "Christian" expectations on men and women who don't know Christ.

- Keep it simple. Being born again is not complicated. Here's a simple way to explain it:

- Acknowledge your sinfulness and your need for a Savior (Romans 3:10, 23).

- Trust in Christ's sacrifice for your sins and in His resurrection (Romans 10:9-10).

Surrender your life to God's transforming power (Romans 12:1-2).

Most of all, remember that your job is to tell the truth in a way

others can understand, answer their questions, and give them an opportunity to respond. If you do that faithfully, some will respond and join the band of Christ- followers. When they do, Heaven will rejoice!

Question 1 of 5

What are some reasons why the New Testament Always Quote the Old Testament Accurately?

Question 2 of 5

Why is boasting always inappropriate for believers? How can we shift the spotlight onto God when people are giving us praise?

Question 3 of 5

What are some “thorns” that God might allow believers to suffer for His purposes?

Question 4 of 5

How well do you tend to handle difficult times? How do you respond?

Question 5 of 5

How would you prove to someone that you are a Christian?