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2 Corinthians 12
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By Dan Maines

2 Corinthians 12

2 Corinthians 12:1

Boasting is necessary, though it is not beneficial, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.

† Paul continues reluctantly with boasting, shifting to visions and revelations.

† He shows that spiritual experiences belong to God, not human pride.

2 Corinthians 12:2-4

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago, whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows, such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man, whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows, was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.

† Paul speaks of himself in the third person to avoid exalting himself.

† The "third heaven" and "Paradise" describe God's dwelling.

† Jewish apocalyptic writings (like 1 Enoch 14.8-25) also describe heavenly visions, but Paul stresses humility in such experiences.

2 Corinthians 12:5-6

On behalf of such a man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except regarding my weaknesses. For if I do wish to boast I will not be foolish, for I will be speaking the truth, but I refrain from this, so that no one will credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me.

† Paul refuses to boast in visions but only in weaknesses.

† He avoids glory from hidden experiences, pointing instead to his life and teaching.

2 Corinthians 12:7

Because of the extraordinary greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from exalting myself!

† Paul's thorn kept him humble.

† Its nature is debated, but it was a real, painful affliction.

† Tertullian (On the Flesh of Christ 5) understood this as

showing Paul's humanity and dependence on grace.

2 Corinthians 12:8-9

Concerning this I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

† God denied Paul's request but gave something greater: grace.

† Weakness is the stage where Christ's power is revealed.

† This verse defines Christian strength as dependence on Christ.

2 Corinthians 12:10

Therefore I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in distresses, in persecutions, in difficulties, in behalf of Christ, for when I am weak, then I am strong.

† True strength is found in Christ, not in human power.

† Paul embraces weakness because it magnifies God's strength.

2 Corinthians 12:11-12

I have become foolish, you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, since in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody. The distinguishing marks of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs, wonders, and miracles.

† Paul reminds them that his apostleship was proven by signs and perseverance.

† He calls himself "a nobody," pointing all glory to God.

2 Corinthians 12:13-15

For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong! Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you, for I do not seek what is yours, but you, for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?

† Paul's sarcasm highlights his refusal to burden them financially.

† His love is parental, spending himself for their souls.

2 Corinthians 12:16-18

But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself, nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit. Certainly I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I? I urged Titus to go, and I sent the brother with him. Titus did not take any advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit and walk in the same steps?

† Paul defends his integrity and Titus's, proving no one exploited them.

† His ministry was marked by honesty and transparency.

2 Corinthians 12:19-21

All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved. For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish, and may be found by you to be not what you wish, that perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, selfishness, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances, I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in

the past and not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and indecent behavior which they have practiced.

† Paul's ultimate goal is their edification, not his defense.

† He fears finding sin and division when he returns.

† His heart mourns for unrepentant believers, showing his deep pastoral care.

How it applies to us today

† 2 Corinthians 12 teaches that God's grace is sufficient and His power is revealed in weakness.

† Visions and experiences are secondary to faith, humility, and endurance.

† The church must value integrity, sacrificial love, and repentance over appearance and pride.

† True strength is not in self, but in Christ alone.

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

Source Index

† 1 Enoch 14.8-25 - apocalyptic vision of heaven

† Tertullian, On the Flesh of Christ 5 - Paul's weakness proving his humanity

† Chrysostom, Homilies on 2 Corinthians 26 - grace in weakness

† Jeremiah 9:24 - boasting only in the Lord

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