
2 CORINTHIANS VERSE-BY-VERSE | DR. RANDY WHITE

SESSION 23 | 2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-13

2 CORINTHIANS 11:1-12:13 | PAUL'S BOAST OF APOSTOLIC CREDENTIALS

- Verses 11:1-3 on session 20
- Verse 11:4-16 on session 21
- Verses 11:17-33 on session 22
- Verse 12:1 -
 - Paul has been boasting (feeling foolish about it the entire time) since 2 Cor. 11:1. Now he feels the pressure of this "foolishness" and states that it is **not expedient...to glory** (boast), because the boasting would lead to **visions and revelations of the Lord** which are not something to "brag about." Because of this, beginning in verse two he switches to the third person rather than talking directly about himself.
 - Why do we believe this is about Paul?
 - Because of the introductory "apology."
 - Because Paul did not know whether the experience took place physically (v. 2).
 - Because Paul knows the things which cannot be known (v. 4).
 - Because Paul is conflicted about making boast of this incident (vv. 5-6).
 - Because Paul reverts to the first person in verse 7.
- Verses 12:2-3 -
 - Paul **knew a man** - the verb is in the perfect tense, thus he *knew* him and *knows* him still.
 - The man (not the knowledge) was **in Christ**.
 - The incident was real but possibly not **in the body** (just as John's experience of the Revelation, see Rev. 1:10, or Ezekiel's experience in Ezekiel 8:3).
 - The experience was one of being **caught up to the third heaven**. Paul uses the Greek ἀρπάζω [harpazo], the same word used of his description of the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:17.
 - The **third heaven** is a phrase only used here, and is defined in verse 4. The first heaven is the sky, the second is "outer space," and the third is the current domain of God.
 - The revelation happened **above fourteen years ago**. Here is a simple chronology of Paul's early ministry:
 - Year 1 - Paul's salvation and receiving the revelation - approx 34 AD
 - Year 3 - Paul goes to Jerusalem and stayed with Peter 15 days (Gal. 1:18) - approx 37 AD
 - Year 14 - after an intervening 14 years - Paul goes to Jerusalem for the Jerusalem Council (Gal. 2:1) - approx 48AD
 - Year 14+ - Paul writes Second Corinthians, referring to his vision, which took place **above fourteen years ago** (2 Cor. 12:1) - approx 60 AD.
 - Assuming this is the vision in which Paul received the *mystery*, then the mystery came within the first year or so of his salvation.
- Verse 12:4 -
 - This event took place after the ascension, and Paul was **caught up** (*harpazo*, as in verse 2) **into paradise**.
 - Note that Paul equates **the third heaven** as **paradise**, and Jesus also spoke of paradise to the thief on the cross (Lk. 23:43). There is nothing to indicate that these are different places.
 - Revelation 2:7 speaks of paradise also, but in reference to the New Heaven.
 - The English word *paradise* is one of the few English words based on a Hebrew word, פֶּרְדֵּיס [pardes], translated as orchard(s) or forest in the Hebrew Scriptures. Compare Song of Solomon 4:13 which describes the *Beulah Land*.
 - While in paradise Paul **heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter**. Since we do not know what these words are, it would be fruitless to speculate.
- Verse 12:5 -

- Paul has been talking about **such an one** (v. 2) and **such a man** (v. 3) and now again **such an one** (v. 5), yet all along is speaking of himself, we believe. Now Paul steps back from the third person to the first person and begins to speak of **myself**.
- Almost doubtlessly, the enemies of Paul values (and vaunted) mystical experiences. Paul, in humility, will defend himself but will not arrogantly use his experiences for his own credit. This is sadly unlike many "ministers" today, who gladly advertise their so-called heavenly visions, trips to heaven, etc.
- Coming away from the "folly" of the overall discussion, he says **I will not glory, but in mine infirmities**.
- Verse 12:6 -
 - Paul (like all of us) **would desire to glory** (in his spiritual experiences), and *if* Paul did that, he would **not be a fool** in what he said because he would **say the truth**.
 - However, he would rather **forebear** in order that people would not exalt him beyond that which is really is.
- Verse 12:7 -
 - Paul speaks of his infamous **thorn in the flesh**.
 - This thorn was given to Paul for the sake of humility and was somehow demonic in nature (if we take **messenger of Satan** literally). The Greek is ἄγγελος Σατᾶν [angelos Satan]. We get "angel" from *angelos*.
 - However, it could not have been *given by* Satan, for Satan would not desire that Paul would not be **exalted above measure**. So, God gave the **thorn** using Satan as His instrument.
- Verse 12:8 -
 - Sometimes in prayer it is best to stop praying when we have an answer. Paul did not feel the need for the "importunity" that is often taught in prayer (usually based on Luke 18:1-8).
- Verse 12:9 -
 - To live a life in God's sufficient grace rather than our own strength is the greatest of blessings.
 - In God's grace, we do not have to prove ourselves, develop our own worth, live the endless burden of people pleasing, fret over our inadequacies, and so much more!
 - Our song should be, "I am weak, but Thou art strong."
- Verse 12:10 -
 - The verb **take pleasure** is not a self-loathing masochistic gratification from pain, but a translation of the word εὐδοκέω [eudokeo], based on *eu* (good) and *dokeo* (to think). It is another way of saying, **whatsoever things are true...honest...pure...lovely...of good report...think on these things** (Phil. 4:8).
 - The things that are mentioned in this verse are "dangers of missionary activity" and are thus **for Christ's sake**, not just general **infirmities**, etc. One should not take pleasure in general **infirmities** nor **reproaches** nor **necessities**, etc., for these are signs of the curse not of spiritual service, except when they arise from spiritual service (as did Paul's).
- Verse 12:11 - Paul began his "foolish boasting" by saying he was **not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles** (see 11:5), and here he concludes saying the same.
- Verses 12:11-13 - In the end, Paul will let **the signs of an apostle** stand on their own merit. In receiving these signs the Corinthian church was not **inferior to other churches** at all, and the only **wrong** that Paul had done is to let the Corinthian church receive his leadership at the financial expense of others. When he says **forgive me this wrong** he is likely continuing in the sarcastic tone he has had since the beginning of the section in chapter 11, verse 1.