

## I. REVIEW

### A. 2Cor. 12:1-6

- i. Paul felt he needed to go on boasting and decided to go from boasting in his weaknesses to boasting in visions and revelations.
  1. He speaks of himself in the third person “*I know a man in Christ*”
  2. He shares with them how 14 years ago, this “*man in Christ*” was caught up the third heaven
    - First heaven – atmosphere
    - Second heaven – outer space
    - Third heaven – spiritual realm
  3. He entered Paradise, that is, the realm of the righteous dead, and heard things that could not be told.
    - Interpretation 1:
      - i. Paul could not express in human words what he heard.
    - Interpretation 2:
      - i. Paul was not permitted to repeat what he heard.
      - ii. This interpretation seems to be the stronger one since Paul, at the second clause, says “*which man may not utter.*”
  - ii. To avoid the appearance of boasting about such a great experience, Paul chose to boast as if he were speaking about another man.
  - iii. But when it came to boasting about himself, he chose to boast about his weaknesses.
  - iv. If Paul wanted to boast about his flight to Paradise, it would not make him a fool, since he spoke the plain truth!
    1. This leads us to think that Paul’s critics, who were already labeled as false apostles and servants of Satan (11:13-14), were exaggerating the truth in their boasting.

## II. CONTINUATION

### A. 2Cor. 12:7 (ESV), “*So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.*”

- i. This verse shows that Paul was speaking of himself when referring to the “man in Christ”
  1. If Paul were actually speaking of a different man, why would that cause him to become conceited?
  2. Why did Paul change from the third person to the first person in describing this experience?
    - He probably did so because there was no danger that others would think too highly of him because of the outcome of his vision: a painful thorn!
  3. Now, since he was the one who actually experienced this greatness, he needed something to keep his ego in check:
    - God wanted Paul to remain humble and remain fully aware of his own weakness by giving him a thorn in the flesh.
      - i. The word “thorn” denotes a point or prickle, annoying and painful to the flesh.
    - The thorn in his flesh would puncture any pride that might surge within him because of his grand entry into Paradise.
  4. Who gave Paul this thorn?
    - God did by allowing a messenger of Satan to inflict him.
    - An example of Satan being used to inflict torment is found in the book of Job.
    - Satan is not a merciful being. This thorn must have been intense.

## 5. What was the thorn?

- The Bible never tells us.
  - Some say that perhaps it was a bodily illness:
    - i. Gal. 4:13-14 (ESV), “*You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first,<sup>14</sup> and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.*”
  - And from verse 15, some speculate that this bodily ailment may have to do with an eye sickness...
    - i. Gal. 4:15b (ESV), “*... For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me.*”
  - Or perhaps, it was some type of speech handicap (cf. 10:10).
  - But whatever it was, it was bad enough to cause Paul to beg the Lord to remove it from him...
- B. Cor. 12:8 (ESV), “*Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.*”
- i. Paul’s initial supplication for the Lord to remove this thorn indicates that he didn’t initially appreciate the significance of it nor was it something easily borne.
  - ii. A few people are able to value a difficult or unpleasant situation and they usually grasp its value only in hindsight.
    - 1. Paul may have first thought that is thorn would hinder his ministry so he desperately wanted it removed.
    - 2. He earnestly and repeatedly begged the Lord to take it away!
    - 3. Sometimes in our personal lives, we must learn to accept what is inescapable and then listen for what God is saying to us through it.
      - We might find that we are mistaken about what we think is best for us and for God’s work.
  - iii. Was Paul’s prayer answered? Yes!
    - 1. But it was not answered by his being delivered from the affliction, but by receiving the necessary grace to bear the affliction...
- C. 2Cor. 12:9-10 (ESV), “*But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.<sup>10</sup> For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*”
- i. Paul learns that the thorn will not hamper his calling and his ministry.
    - 1. He can make do with the grace he has already received and the power of Christ will become more visible as it works through his weakness.
    - 2. It was God’s grace that gave Paul the strength to endure all the difficulties and hardships he had mentioned previously in 11:23-28.
  - ii. We learn that God’s grace is not just the unmerited favor that saves us, but a force that also sustains us throughout our lives.
    - 1. It was this power that rescued Paul when he was undergoing unbearable pressure in Asia (cf. 1:8-10).
    - 2. And when the earthly tent (body) is destroyed, it is this very power that will raise Paul up and give him an eternal house, not made with hands, in Heaven (cf. 5:1)
  - iii. Paul was content to know that in his weakness, he recognized his need for divine help.
    - 1. Paul learned that when he felt weak; when he was subjected to trials, then strength was imparted to him and he was enabled to bear all what he had mentioned in chapter 11:23ff, including the insults he receives as a follower of Christ.