

**BOOK OF 2 CORINTHIANS
PAUL'S VISIONS AND REVELATIONS
2 CORINTHIANS 11:30-33; 12:1-6**

Introduction

I want to make a foundational statement for this message this evening:
Every believer in Christ needs to learn that human weakness and divine grace go hand in hand together.

Now a statement like that runs contrary to much of what we see in this modern culture. **ANY kind of weakness is deemed bad, unwanted, and something to be shunned, if at all possible.**

That is our natural tendency and desire. None of us want weaknesses in our lives! We want to be strong: **physically, emotionally, spiritually, mentally, and strong in our relationships!** We don't want any deficiencies in our lives!

Many do whatever they can do to be as strong as they can be! That may include working out or practicing various disciplines in a wide range of areas in order to be strong. And there is nothing wrong with that! It is wise for us to try to be strong in each aspect of life. But even with strength, there comes some problems.

Several dangers can arise:

One danger is pride – Pride is one of the devil's chief tools to chop us down and destroy our confidence in God. It can even happen right in the midst of our trying to do something that is good.

Another danger is self-confidence – Self-confidence is really just another form of pride. It is when we begin to depend upon our own abilities and powers and capacities while neglecting trust in the Lord.

And yet another danger is obsession with self – We focus our energies and time on building up ourselves to the neglect of learning to rest in dependence upon the Lord.

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Understand that the Lord is always at work in our lives developing our trust in Him as well as our dependence upon His strength rather than on ours!

Sometimes, to bring us to the place where we draw closer in our dependence of Him, He sends along a *"thorn" or "suffering"* in some form to actually minister to us. Now, we might think *"suffering"* to be a strange minister. Nevertheless, the *"ministry of suffering"* has helped along countless numbers of God's people through the years. Our *suffering* can take different shapes and sizes. Its design, though probably not apparent to any of us immediately, is effectively designed by God for us to bring us into a more intimate knowledge of Christ and His sufficiency.

To help us understand this, I want us to take a closer look at Paul's *"thorn in the flesh,"* as he called it, considering **why it came to him, who delivered it, and what it accomplished.**

PAUL SPEAKS OF VISIONS AND REVELATIONS. (Vs 1-6)

Keep in mind that Paul here is continuing to address his struggle with the false teachers in Corinth. They had tried to undermine Paul's authority as an apostle in order to chip away at the sufficiency of Christ alone in the Gospel!

We saw last week how Paul reluctantly resorted to speaking of himself, which was something that he found "foolish"; yet it appeared necessary due to the outlandish claims of the false teachers.

These Corinthian believers had been duped by the false teachers. They found their boasts to be acceptable and readily accepted their abusiveness as a privilege instead of seeing it for what it truly was.

So, Paul reveals here a particular, personal experience to let the Corinthians know that he was not a second-rate apostle. These false teachers had made some great claims; but their boasts were empty!

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So again, Paul tells of his own experiences but does so in the third person so as not to draw undue attention to himself.

I. WHAT WERE THESE VISIONS AND REVELATIONS?

1. Possibly insights and advanced looks into the future.
2. Revelation of God that we've now received in terms of the various epistles of Paul.
3. He saw some things that he could not speak of due to: hearing "*unspeakable words*" (a term used of divine secrets unintended for human ears); seeing and hearing what was unlawful for him to speak of due to it being part of another realm and world that awaits believers.
4. He pinpoints this as being 14 years before this time. We know Paul had numerous extraordinary experiences:

The blinding light on the Damascus Road;

The vision of the man from Macedonia asking for help

The Lord standing next to him while he was in Corinth for his initial work, to encourage him to continue preaching without fear.

But none of these would be this present vision he is talking about due to the timeframe.

This would be during the early obscure years of Paul spoken of in Galatians 1:15-24. It was in that period when he was dropped from the Damascus wall in a basket to head for Tarsus, until Barnabas chose him as an assistant for the work in Antioch.

Paul very clearly tells us little about what he saw or heard.

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He tells us more about what he does not know concerning the nature of how it happened than what happened. He was not permitted to speak about these things. They happened, and the impression of them, were emblazoned on Paul's mind; but he had previously said nothing and could say nothing more than what he says here.

II. WHY WERE THESE VISIONS AND REVELATIONS GIVEN TO PAUL?

We don't know, but I think quite simply, he needed these special visitations from God in order to give him courage to face extraordinary suffering for the sake of the Gospel.

He was "*caught up to the third heaven,*" which means that he was in the very presence of God.

Francis Schaeffer explained it this way, "*The point is that this man was caught up into Heaven, and then he came back*" [The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer, vol. 3, 237].

Can't you imagine that Paul's whole perspective on everything in this life changed in light of what he saw in the life ahead. There can be no doubt that it had a profound effect on his life!

III. ARE WE TO DEPEND UPON RECEIVING SIMILAR VISIONS AND REVELATIONS? NO!

There are some who would and even do espouse this kind of teaching. But there are some distinct differences in Paul and us!

A. Paul Did Not Have The Complete Canon Of Scripture As We Do!

He had access to the OT writings, but he was used, along with others, in writing what would become the final written revelation of God.

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B. Paul's Work Was Foundational!

He laid the groundwork for the spread of the early Church.

Because of that, he was viciously attacked by the opponents of the Gospel, so he needed an unusual preparation for maintaining courage in the face of the constant difficulties he faced!

C. Paul Had Been Set Apart By The Lord As An Apostle.

Apostles bore the special responsibility of being the foundation for the Church through their testimony of the Gospel and the revelations given to them!

Ephesians 2:20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

There is no basis for **“continuing revelation!”**

Even if there were, they would be consistent with Scripture or previous revelations! Present day revelations do no such thing!

III. WHAT EFFECT DID THESE VISIONS AND REVELATIONS HAVE ON PAUL?

They overwhelmed him! He talked about *“the abundance of the revelations”* there in verse 7.

There is no doubt that he was sustained and strengthened by them but they also had another effect. Because Paul saw and understood what others did not know or understand, he found himself slipping into a prideful spirit.

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He faced the temptation of exalting himself among the rest of the Christian church or even Christian leadership. He discovered out of this that it was better to admit weaknesses rather than to become puffed up by boasting of grand experiences.

So, we notice that he does not tell great details here of what he saw or came to know; just that it happened and was of such a superlative nature that it was necessary for the Lord to give him a thorn in the flesh to counter the natural tendencies of the flesh for boasting or pride or egotism.

We need not think that we are immune from such tendencies either! Boasting in the flesh turns attention to self and away from God. The adversary works destruction by the devices of prideful boasting. So a *“thorn in the flesh,”* some distinct form of suffering, actually became a minister to Paul as we will see in our next study!