

TITLE: PAUL'S DEFENSE CONTINUES

TEXT: 2 CORINTHIANS 12

INTRO: For those who accept Paul's defense, and realize the incredible suffering he endured for the Cause, it's probably easy to put Paul on a pedestal for these things. But this is **NOT** what he (or God) wanted. He's going to emphasize this to us once again as he continues his defense in ch. 12.

I. PAUL EXPLAINS HIS BOASTING (v. 1-10):

A. REASON FOR PAUL TO BOAST (v. 1-5)

(v. 1) *It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.*

1. *It's not expedient for me to glory/boast.* NAS-*"Boasting is necessary though it is not profitable"* (difference is in one Greek word—"doubtless" or "necessary"). If "boasting is necessary," it only refers to Paul in this context. Either way, this boasting is *not* expedient (profitable). Recall **11:1,16,17,21,23**. Again Paul says that this boasting is not what he wants to do!
2. Paul's next topic – *visions & revelations*. He's already said his glory is in his sufferings for the kingdom. Now he continues w/visions & revelations – things seen (given by God) & things revealed (made known by God – the purpose of visions).

(v. 2-4) *I knew a man in Christ above 14 years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knows;) such an one was caught up to the 3rd heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knows;) how that he was caught up into paradise, & heard unspeakable words...not lawful for a man to utter.*

1. I know (not "knew") a man in Christ (a Christian) 14 years ago (approx AD 43-44). Who? Some say Paul, others Steven.
2. What is this 3rd heaven? First of all, it implies a 1st & 2nd heaven. We know these two are 1) God's home and 2) the "heavens" (universe). The only real option for #3 is Hades ("unseen"—realm of departed souls—where souls go to await final judgment)—c.f. **Lk 16:19-31**—the rich man & Lazarus were in 2 areas of Hades. Jesus went to Paradise after death (**Lk 23:43**). This is obviously what Paul means, because he equates "3rd heaven" with "paradise" in v. 4, which is *not* Heaven.
3. To go to Paradise requires death (separation of spirit from body—**Jam 2:26**). Yet Paul couldn't explain whether this was in or out of the body. So either this man died & went to Paradise (out of body), or had a vision of it (in the body).
4. Either way, there he heard unspeakable (unsaid, unspoken, inexpressible) words (things humans can't speak or understand).
 - a. "Unlawful"—probably a reference to Jewish law forbidding man from saying God's name (YHWH). This wasn't a law from God. God forbids using His name in vain. "We cannot have views too exalted of the majesty of God" (A. Clarke).
 - b. What were these words? We cannot say (literally)! We weren't told, nor could we have been (apparently)! And this is the point. What this man experienced was so amazing that it should put all human struggles into perspective.

(v. 5) *Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.*

1. Who is this man? Remember the context: Paul is defending *himself!* In **11:7-9** it was *Paul* who refused to take money from the Corinthians (a topic that continues immediately following this—**12:13f**). It was Paul who endured all the sufferings for the church (**11:16-33**). So it must be Paul he's discussing now. The context all but demands that it is Paul himself.
2. I'll glory of one like this, but not of myself (except in my infirmities). How can he say this if the man is really him? This is so major an event he experienced that it would be easy for the Corinthians to over-exalt him. But this is *not* what he wants. In all this "boasting," he's defending himself; he doesn't want to be slandered (negative effect on the gospel), but he also doesn't want to be exalted (made clear in v. 7). As in **11:24-33**, his glory is in his infirmities (weakness, sickness, etc.).

B. REASON FOR PAUL NOT TO BOAST (v. 6-9a)

(v. 6) *For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.*

1. Even if I were to glory in this event, I wouldn't be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth (it's not *negative* boasting if it's true). But boasting in the negative sense is foolish (as Paul has been saying repeatedly). But this was an amazing, miraculous experience, which Paul indeed *could glory in*. He could rejoice in what happened to him. But...!
2. But I forbear (spare, restrain, abstain) from glorying in this. Why? Again, Paul is defending himself (& the gospel) from being defamed, but in doing so he doesn't want to be exalted beyond being an approved, authorized rep & servant of Christ!

(v. 7) *And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations (so clearly the man in v.1-5 is Paul), there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.*

1. Every time I hear this verse discussed, it's in speculation of what the thorn is (eyesight? **Gal 4:13-15; 6:11**). We aren't told!
2. The point isn't the *what*; it's the *why*! "Lest I should be exalted above measure"—this was a real possibility. It's easy for us to this! But *no* man can boast before God (**Eph 2:9; Rom 4:2**)! Respect Paul as authoritative, but *do not* exalt him!

(v. 8-9a) *For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."* So maybe even *Paul* needed to keep these things in perspective (humbled).

1. God said "No" 3 times (this prayer *wasn't* unanswered)! Even Jesus was told "no" (**Mt 26:39; Heb 5:7**). (cf. **1 Jn 5:14-15**).
2. "My grace is sufficient"—God obviously provided some sort of help/comfort for him to deal with this (cf. **1 Cor 10:13**).
"My strength is made perfect/complete in (your) weakness"—1) if we'll ask, He can help; He wants us to rely on Him, & 2) otherwise we'll take the credit for everything *He* does (cf. Gideon's army—**Judges 7:2**—too many; they'll claim *they* did it)!
- Application: Knowledge puffs up (preachers have to be careful about this)! But it all comes from God! It's *His* doing!

C. SUMMARY (v. 9b-10)

(v. 9b-10) *Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*

1. These are the things I'll rejoice in: infirmities, reproaches, etc. (but again, as long as these things don't effect the gospel)!
2. *When I'm weak, then I'm strong* -because *then* God helps; *then* it's His power, not mine! This makes me spiritually strong!

CONCLUSION: Paul has successfully shown himself worthy of love & respect as Christ's messenger. But he's also shown the danger of pride. We aren't to exalt anyone, including ourselves! If *Paul* isn't worthy of this exaltation, and is in danger of desiring it, then what about us?

II. PAUL DEFENDS HIS INTEGRITY (v. 11-21):

A. GENUINE IN HIS CREDENTIALS (v. 11-12)

1. (v. 11a) *I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled* (constrain, necessitate) *me*: Again (11:1,16,17,21,23;12:1), I've become foolish in boasting; I shouldn't have to do this! But it's *your* fault! He's not talking to the false brethren only; but to those listening to them! You're forcing me to do what is, under normal circumstances, foolish (mindless, stupid, w/out reason). Had they been stronger, they would've sent these guys packing! But they actually listened to them!
2. (v. 11b-12) *For I ought to have been commended of (by) you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, & wonders, & mighty deeds.*
 - a. You doubted me when you should've commended me (backed me up; substantiated me; proved me to the adversaries).
 - b. You had no reason not to! You saw the miracles I did, proving me to be an apostle (compared to these "chief apostles" –11:5)! Paul shouldn't have to say, "I did miracles"! They **know** he did, unless they've conveniently forgotten!

B. GENUINE IN HIS ACTIONS & ATTITUDE (v. 13-19)

(v. 13) *For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except it be that I myself was not burdensome to you? forgive me this wrong.* This continues from 11:7-9 (& 1 Cor 9). **This is sarcasm!** Corinth was **not** inferior to other churches, regardless of whether or not Paul required/accepted their money! Some commentators actually think Paul is saying that since he didn't take their \$ (didn't allow them to participate in supporting his ministry), he truly had caused them to be inferior, and was *literally* apologizing for this! They fail to see his extreme sarcasm. Paul was not wrong; he had not sinned in this! He's helping them to understand how foolish it was for them to listen to these attacks against him (as if he really considered them inferior)!

(v. 14) *Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children.*

1. If Paul was serious in v. 13, then he obviously didn't know how to repent, because now he says "I'm coming to you again, & I still don't plan to take your money!"
2. Why so firm on this? So they'll know his motive! "I seek you, not yours! I want your heart, not your cash" (if only all the "preachers" today had this attitude)! [3rd time: 1st was in Ac 18–MJ2; if he writes from Macedonia (7:6), then it seems this 3rd visit happened in Ac 20:2 –"Greece"-on MJ3]. When was the 2nd visit? We're not told, so it doesn't matter.
3. *For the children...* –he isn't saying children have no responsibility to their parents (Mk 7–Jesus' chastised the Jews for this). "Lay up" means "to amass, reserve, store." Plus this is obviously meant spiritually. Paul sees them as his spiritual children (1 Cor 4:15), still in need of his deepest care (i.e., still spiritual children, not adults).

(v. 15) *And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.*

1. I'll gladly spend (incur cost) & be spent ("spend utterly"; only time in NT). I'll pay for everything, even to an extreme!
2. And, I'll do it regardless of your lack of love. Like a good parent, Paul loved even without receiving it in return.

(v. 16) *But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile.*

1. But either way, I didn't burden you. Regardless of the lack of love (from some of you), I took no money from you.
2. But I fooled you...I caught you (got your \$) by guile (deceit/tricks)! I won't take your money, but I'll have my friends do it! This was their further accusation, probably claiming he was using their Jerusalem money for personal use.

(v. 17-18) *Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you? I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps?*

1. He may have been accused of this, but let's look at the evidence. From the start he was concerned with this: 1 Cor 16:3–*"whomsoever ye shall approve...them will I send to bring your liberality to Jerusalem."* *See 2 Cor 8:18-22.
2. Titus (& the other brother) didn't take any personal money (for themselves or Paul). Titus & Paul were the same!

(v. 19) *Again, think ye that we excuse* (defend) *ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying.* Paul's defense is **not** just to them (as if they stood in God's place). "We speak before God..." (He knows). When people are against you & make false accusations, it generally doesn't matter what you say; you'll never convince them. This wasn't Paul's goal. God knows the truth. And God knows that Paul's ultimate goal was **always** for their edification!

C. GENUINE IN HIS DISCIPLINE (v. 20-21)

(v. 20) *For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings* (jealousy), *wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings* (arrogance), *tumults:*

1. Basically Paul is finished defending himself. He is spotless in these matters. Now he turns his attention to them!
2. I'm afraid that when I arrive, you won't receive me the way I want, because these matters still won't be resolved.
 - a. Here we see in more detail some things that were plaguing the church (envy, strife, jealousy, wrath, etc.). These things are the result (& cause) of refusing to simply follow Jesus (1 Tim 6:3-5), and have **no** place in the Lord's church!
 - b. And therefore (when I arrive), I won't be as you want me to be either. I'll come with rebuke & discipline (v. 21).

(v. 21) *And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness & fornication & lasciviousness which they have committed.*

1. If all this is still going on when I come, God will humble me among you. This obviously refers to the disciplinary actions he'll have to take against them. It is never a pleasurable thing; it's something we never enjoy. For Paul, it would mean that Corinth is going in the opposite direction than what he had taught them. This is a humbling, humiliating situation for Paul!
2. I'll bewail (grieve, mourn) for those who have not repented of their sins. There's joy over sinners who repent (Luke 15:7), but great sadness for those who won't. Whether it's a non-Christian who rejects God, or a Christian who won't fully repent, the end result is the same – Hell. This ought to cause more sadness & grief than anything in the world!

CONCLUSION: Hopefully we can understand how Paul felt and why he had to say these things. His #1 concern was **always** the church – helping people know the truth, obey it, and go to Heaven! He sacrificed everything for this mission (he spent & was spent–v. 15), & it's amazing that his physical suffering was outweighed by his spiritual suffering (for the church, even when they treated him like this)! But he did all this because he loved souls so much (even enough to rebuke them when necessary)! How much do *you* love souls?