

2 Corinthians 12:1- *"It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord."*

Paul had already received direct revelation from the resurrected Jesus concerning the gospel of grace. He makes this clear in Galatians 1:11–12, where he writes that the gospel he preached was "not according to man," for he neither received it from man nor was taught it, "but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ."

The word visions refers to supernatural sights or impressions given by God, while revelations are divine truths that God makes known. Throughout Scripture, God used visions and revelations to communicate His will and purposes to His servants.

Paul does not mention these experiences to elevate himself or impress those in Corinth. He is stated that the false apostles were boasting in themselves and if anyone could boast it would be Paul, yet he refused.

2 Corinthians 12:2- *"I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven."*

Although Paul is speaking about himself, he does so in the third person, saying, "I know a man in Christ." This reflects his humility. Rather than drawing attention to himself, he distances himself from the experience because his purpose is not to boast but to defend his apostleship against the false teachers in Corinth.

Paul says this event occurred "fourteen years ago," indicating that he had kept this extraordinary experience private for many years. He did not build his ministry around it or use it to gain influence. Only when the Corinthians were being misled by false apostles did he reluctantly mention it.

Paul was "caught up to the third heaven." The phrase "caught up" comes from the Greek word *harpazō*, meaning to seize suddenly, snatch away, or carry off by force. It conveys the idea that God sovereignly took Paul into this experience; Paul did not initiate it or seek it.

The expression "third heaven" was understood by the Jewish people as referring to the dwelling place of God. In biblical thought, the first heaven is the atmosphere where birds fly (Genesis 1:20), the second heaven is the realm of the sun, moon, and stars (Genesis 1:14–17), and the third heaven is God's heavenly presence.

2 Corinthians 12:3- *"And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows."*

I believe Paul was speaking of himself.

2 Corinthians 12:4- *"How he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter."*

Even after receiving such extraordinary revelations, Paul did not use them to elevate himself or gain influence over others. Instead, he remained focused on preaching Christ and the gospel of grace.

2 Corinthians 12:5- *"Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities."*

The word "infirmities" in Greek is *astheneia*. It can mean sickness, but it also means weakness. In the context of this passage, Paul is referring to the weakness he experienced because of all the persecution he endured, not to sickness.

2 Corinthians 12:6- *"For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me."*

Are there times in your life when you have the right to say something, but in wisdom you choose not to? If anyone could have stated his credentials for credibility, it was Paul.

Many healing ministers try to post every miracle and healing on social media to increase their following. The heart should always be to glorify the Lord. There is nothing wrong with proclaiming His works, but we must ask, "What is the motive?"

Paul is saying, "I'm not going to use this to gain influence or elevate myself." His desire was to point people to Christ, not to himself (Galatians 1:10; 1 Corinthians 4:20).

2 Corinthians 12:7- *"And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure."*

What is going on here? Paul had just been spreading the gospel throughout Asia, and his ministry was gaining traction. Many were repenting and turning to the Lord, and this caused much friction among the people.

There is an exaltation that is godly. Many believe God sent this thorn to humble Paul and keep him from boasting, but I believe that is inaccurate. God exalted Joshua, and He even exalted Jesus. The reason Paul was being exalted was among the people was because he was bringing liberty to captives and influencing entire regions because of the revelation of grace he had received from the resurrected Jesus.

This is where many people say Paul had a sickness because he mentions a "thorn in the flesh." Paul was a Pharisee of Pharisees and was using terminology that his listeners would understand. Numbers 33:55, Joshua 23:13, and Judges 2:3 all refer to a "thorn," and it is never a reference to sickness. Rather, it refers to persistent enemies who oppose and persecute God's people.

This verse also states that the thorn was from Satan. A "messenger" (Greek: *angelos*) means "angel" or "messenger." Since one-third of the angels fell with Satan, this was a demonic attack sent directly from the devil.

It was sent to buffet Paul. The word "buffet" in Greek refers to repeated blows, like waves continually striking the shore or a boxer receiving blow after blow. This is what Paul was experiencing for the sake of the gospel.

2 Corinthians 12:8- *"Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me."*

Many people say Paul was asking the Lord to remove his sickness and that God simply told him to endure it. However, it is important to ask what Paul wanted the Lord to remove. Paul was under intense persecution, and his request was for that persecution to be taken away.

Believers are redeemed from sickness through Christ (Galatians 3:13), but we are not redeemed from persecution. In fact, 2 Timothy 3:12 says that all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. God's response to Paul was not that He had sent the persecution, but that His grace would sustain Paul through that season and enable him to fulfill his calling.

2 Corinthians 12:9- *"And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."*

Nowhere in the Bible do we find someone boasting in their sickness. Rather, people rejoiced and boasted when they were healed.

I was listening to someone this morning say, "The Lord gives and takes away, and He is putting me through suffering to refine me." I do not believe this is biblical, and it presents a disappointing picture of God's character.

God is not the One pushing you out; He is the One who has called you in (1 Peter 2:9). If you believe God is the author of your suffering in that way, you can develop a very distorted view of His nature. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus (John 14:9; Hebrews 1:1–3).

2 Corinthians 12:10- *"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."*

All of the reproaches and persecutions Paul went through were mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11. The entire context of chapter 12 is about persecution, not sickness.

God wants you well. Period.

2 Corinthians 12:11- *"I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing."*

Paul did not exalt others by lowering himself to an inferior position. Rather, he was saying, "I have chosen to humble myself, even though I could have exalted myself."

The way up in the Kingdom is down. Two brothers wanted to be promoted and become the greatest in the Kingdom. Jesus did not rebuke them; He simply showed them how. He taught them that greatness comes through serving others.

The key to success in the Kingdom is to serve your way to greatness.

2 Corinthians 12:12- *"Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds."*

The last thing Jesus left mankind was not heaven—it was power (Acts 1:8). When the gospel is preached, signs follow. Paul's ministry was accompanied by signs, wonders, and mighty deeds, confirming that he was a true apostle sent by God.

The gospel is not simply proclamation but also demonstration. If you are only preaching but not healing then you have not fulfilled the Great Commission (Mark 16:15-18).

Jesus said no one knows the day or the hour in which He will come. But I believe we can unpack our bags because He also said in Matthew 24 that once the gospel of the Kingdom is preached, then the end will come.

The gospel of salvation is being preached, but the gospel of the Kingdom is not. The gospel of salvation answers the question, "How do I get into the Kingdom?" while the gospel of the Kingdom asks, "Now that I am in the Kingdom, how do I rule and reign?"

Much of the church is teaching believers how to escape the earth, while Jesus is shouting, "I left you to invade it."

2 Corinthians 12:13- *"For what is it in which you were inferior to other churches, except that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong!"*

Paul's love for the church at Corinth was no different than his love for the other churches. In fact, he loved them so much that he chose not to receive financial support from them.

When Paul says, "*Forgive me this wrong!*" he is being sarcastic. The only way the Corinthians were "treated differently" was that he refused to be a financial burden to them. What some viewed as a fault was actually an expression of Paul's love and concern for the church.

2 Corinthians 12:14- *"Now for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children."*

Paul was preparing for his third visit to Corinth.

Just as a parent provides for their child and does not take from them to gain profit, Paul was unwilling to put himself in a position to be wrongfully accused.

2 Corinthians 12:15- “And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved.”

Paul said he would not only spend his money but also spend himself for their souls. The key to loving others is learning to die while you're still alive. Paul was able to love them because he was dead to himself (Philippians 1:21).

The more Paul sought to advance the gospel, the more opposition came his way. Yet this never moved him from his assignment. The anointing will always attract opposition, this is not strange from the enemy but strategic (1 Peter 4:12).

2 Corinthians 12:16- “But be that as it may, I did not burden you. Nevertheless, being crafty, you caught me by cunning!”

Paul is being sarcastic. Some people take his statement literally, but he is repeating the false accusations that had been made against him. Although he had not been a burden to the Corinthians, some claimed he was crafty and had deceived them.

2 Corinthians 12:17- “Did I take advantage of you by any of those whom I sent to you?”

Paul sent Titus and others to collect an offering for those in Jerusalem.

The people Paul sent were faithful men, and Paul had no doubt they operated with the same integrity that he did.

2 Corinthians 12:18- “I urged Titus, and sent our brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did we not walk in the same steps?”

Accountability is essential in the Christian walk. No one should be an island unto himself. We are first accountable to God, then to ourselves, and then to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

2 Corinthians 12:19- Again, do you think that we excuse ourselves to you? We speak before God in Christ. But we do all things, beloved, for your edification.”

Paul's motive was not condemnation but obedience and the encouragement of the believers. Everything he did was for their edification and spiritual growth. His ministry was never a performance to gain the approval of people. What he did was no secret or hidden from God, for he spoke and ministered before God in Christ.

The word "excuse" (Greek: *apologeomai*) means "to make a defense" or "to give an answer." It is the word from which we get "apologetics," the discipline of defending the Christian faith.

Paul was not defending himself because he was insecure or trying to win the Corinthians' approval. Rather, he was defending the integrity of his ministry so that the believers would continue to trust the gospel he preached and be built up in their faith.

2 Corinthians 12:20- *"For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults."*

The reason for this letter was restoration. Paul hoped to find the church in a healthy spiritual condition upon his arrival. His desire was that the Corinthians would have repented so that his visit would be one of encouragement rather than correction.

2 Corinthians 12:21- *"Lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced."*

Paul was not ignorant of the sins that those in Corinth found themselves in. It is interesting that although they were caught in sin, they still were able to operate in the gifts (1 Corinthians 12).