

# Letters to the church in...



# Corinth

Focus: 2 Corinthians 12:1-21

## Lesson 29-Humility and Labors in Christ

- **Visions, Revelations, boasting and a humble mind (v.1-6)**
  - (v.1) Paul had seen visions from the Lord before (Acts 22:17, etc.)
  - (v.2-5) Paul knew of a man who'd experienced some very heavenly revelation from God. Whether just in vision or actually in person, Paul wasn't sure. **"...the third heaven...Paradise..."(v.2,4). There are three heavens biblically speaking: The sky, the realms of Space, and the Place where God dwells. (1) God made the "heavens and the earth" in six days (reference to the skies and the earth) (Gen. 2:1). (2) "I...have stretched out the heavens..." (Isaiah 45:12; Jeremiah 10:12) (reference to outer space and the stars—the starry heavens; Psalm 8:3). (3) "I came down from Heaven"-Jesus (the Place) (ref. John 6:38). Paul was here mentioning the place where God dwells; the highest place of all—"the third heaven."**
  - **Paul would rather boast and glory of another than of self (v.5).** Let us not boast of ourselves, but rather, **"in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3).** Let us **"put on therefore...humbleness of mind..." (Colossians 3:12).** **"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ" (Phil 2:5).**
  - (v.6) **"...lest anyone should think of me above what...[is necessary]."** Not wanting other minds to think too much about us, for all glory is to be in Christ and God the Father. Jesus' prayer was to the Father, **"Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory...forever..." (Matthew 6:13).** And if we glory in anything, let it be the **"cross of Jesus Christ" (ref. Galatians 6:14).**
- **A thorn in the flesh to keep one humble (v.7-10)**
  - (v.7) **"...a thorn in the flesh...a messenger of Satan to buffet me..."—something to keep Paul of a humble mind.**
  - **Spiritual pride (or any pride for that matter) can be a serious problem.** The Lord hates **"...a proud look" (Proverbs 6:16,17).** **"All the proud" will be consumed in the fires of the last day (ref. Malachi 4:1). Pride and self-glory was Satan's original sin** that caused him to start a rebellion and loose heaven; **"Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty..." (ref. Ezekiel 28:17).**
  - (v.8) **"...I pleaded with the Lord..."—this was very earnest seeking (3 times even!!).** Then, the answer came to him...
  - (v.9) **Finally, a very clear answer came to Paul... "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness."**—This **"thorn in the flesh" was a limiting physical condition. It was NOT a matter of sin. God hates sin!—and He would never permit us to remain in that state of disobedience to Him. Human weakness and limitation helps us to keep a humble mind, and it lets the glory go to God, where it belongs. God our Father is glorified when it becomes evident that we are weak and human. Then we see that the strength, grace, and power comes from Him. Human weakness reveals God's power to work beyond it!! (He is far greater than us and our limitations). So, what was this**

**human weakness of Paul?** We believe this weakness was a condition of blindness or partial blindness. We can **see Galatians 4:13-15**. This also could relate something which came from Paul's conversion experience, as noted in Acts 22:11-13. Paul had been blinded once before at his conversion, but then his sight was given back. We think that perhaps in later times, Paul had some trouble seeing clearly (based on Galatians, etc.).— This seems likely to have been his weakness in the flesh, which was allowed by the Lord.

- **We always need something to help us keep a humble mind...**especially if we are tempted to pride by some certain circumstances. **Don't ever flatter people** with your words. We don't want to set a "snare" for anyone's soul. **Help people to keep a humble heart and mind**. Do not praise ministers or others!! It's okay to give some encouraging comments or feedback at times to people, but do not praise or exalt them ever! We do not want to puff people up with pride—this could cause someone to fall under the snare of Satan (ref. 1 Timothy 3:6).
- (v.9) Let us **glory rather in our infirmities or weakness** (with a genuinely humble mind), **that the "power of Christ" may rest upon us**.
- **(v.10)** Paul "took pleasure" in his trials and weaknesses (not in some form of sin!!) **"...for when I am weak [and know it], then I am strong [through God's awesome power]."** Remember too, **"Sin is imperfection, but not all imperfection is sin."** —*Human weakness is not to be censured along with sin.*
- **The signs of Paul's Apostleship were evident (v.11-13)** (v.13) *"...forgive me for this wrong."*— *that I did not ask of you any money, he says.*
- **Paul pleads with these few sour minds in Corinth (v.14-18)** *He appeals to straight forward and clear reason based upon the evidence. Paul and his fellow workers were of the same mind to love and help the Corinthians. In no way did they ever reach out to mistreat or to use them.—And, Paul appealed to that truth. "...the third time I am ready to come to you" (v.14)—We know he'd been with them once before to establish the church. Then, he'd hoped to have seen them the second time (perhaps as just passing through but hoping to winter with them—ref. 1 Cor. 16:5-7; 2 Cor. 1:15,16).—We don't have a clear record of that 2<sup>nd</sup> visit happening. Paul sent Titus to them instead. Now he is hoping and planning "the third time" to come and visit them.*
- **Paul expressed his desire and concern to find the brethren walking in a state of godliness and not evil (v.19-21)** (v.19) *WE do all things "dearly beloved" for you; As parents would do for their children (v.20,21). Paul fears to find sins running loose in the church, to which he would then have to deal against such things, as a faithful minister of God...and he was hoping not to find such things!*

*Question (s) for the Heart:*

**Is it your desire to have a humble mind through Christ? \_\_\_\_\_ And, to live a life of unselfish service for others? \_\_\_\_\_**