

“Sufficient Grace”

2 Corinthians Chapter 12

Since chapter 10 Paul has been defending his apostolic ministry. He has been comparing himself to the “super apostles” that have come into Corinth after him. So far we have seen:

Presence	Others were there	Paul Traveled on to Spread the Gospel
Finances	Others Charged a Fee	Paul a Tentmaker - Charged Nothing
Oratory Skills	Others Great Speakers	Paul wrote Good Letters/OK Speaker
Personal Appearance	Others were Impressive	Paul was Unimpressive
Message	Others Boasted of Themselves	Paul Boasted of the Lord

In this chapter Paul is going to touch on one more area of comparison. Visions and Revelations.

2Cr 12:1

1) Caught Up vs 1-6

Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.

- Paul is weary of boasting about himself.
 - 2 Corinthians 10:17 *“He who boasts is to boast in the Lord”*
- But the “super apostles” boasted and Paul found himself in need of defending himself not for his sake but for the sake of the gospel. If he was considered of no importance, his message too would suffer. He had to take that place of importance back. For the sake of the Gospel to the Corinthians.
- No doubt the “super apostles” boasted of mystical experiences. Paul addresses that he too had those experiences.
- Visions and Revelations do occur:
 - Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, had a vision of an angel (Luke 1:8-23).
 - The women who came to visit Jesus’ tomb had a vision of angels (Luke 24:22-24).
 - Stephen saw a vision of Jesus at his death (Acts 7:55-56).
 - Ananias experienced a vision telling him to go to Saul (Acts 9:10).
 - Peter had a vision of the clean and unclean animals (Acts 10:17-19 and 11:5).
 - Peter had a vision of an angel at his release from prison (Acts 12:9).
 - John had many visions on Patmos (Revelation 1:1).
 - Paul had a revelation of Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 22:6-11 and 26:12-20).
 - Paul had vision of a man from Macedonia, asking him to come (Acts 16:9-10).
 - Paul had an encouraging vision while in Corinth (Acts 18:9-11).
 - Paul had a vision of an angel on the ship that was about to be wrecked (Acts 27:23-25).

2Cr 12:2

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven.

- Paul is being very cautious in his writing. He is trying not to be like the “super apostles” in boasting of visions. He writes in a 3rd person style.
 - This has caused scholars to debate on whether he was talking about himself or someone else.
 - In verse 7 Paul reverts back to speaking of himself.
 - In the prior chapter Paul speaks of humbling experiences in the 1st person while experiences that would exalt him, he speaks very humbly to keep a proper perspective.
- The time is mentioned but not specifically. 14 years ago. The most common belief is that it was when he was stoned outside of Lystris and left for dead. (Acts 14:19) Then he arose and entered back into the city to preach again.
 - Again we do not know for sure when this occurred. But it is interesting that Paul does not make this the centerpiece of his ministry. He didn’t write a book about it. He only mentions it here and even here he doesn’t go into great detail.
- Paul doesn’t know whether he was in the body or in the spirit. It is refreshing to know that even the great Paul didn’t know and was not concerned if he used those words. *“I do not know”*. If Paul doesn’t know then it would be a foolish thing for us to try to speculate was it in body or spirit. God knows.
- This man (we know is Paul) was caught up to the 3rd heaven.
 - Ancients referred to heaven in three ways.
 - 1) The atmosphere birds fly in and we breath
 - 2) The Starry Sky
 - 3) The Place where God Dwells
 - This place where God dwells is the place Paul was caught up to.

2Cr 12:3 And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—

2Cr 12:4 was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.

- Paul refers to this third heaven as “Paradise”. This is a Persian word that describes a grand enclosure or preserve. It is a lush garden well watered where animals are kept
 - Luke 23:43 Jesus is there. On the cross he told the thief “*this day you will be with me in PARADISE.*”
 - Revelation 2:7 we know that the Tree of Life is there. And we will one day eat its fruit. “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.*”
- Paul does not go into detail. We do not get any information on what he saw. That is my first question. He doesn’t give anything. Nothing, Nada, Zip.
- He does tell us what he heard. “*Inexpressible words which a man is not permitted to speak*” Again, Nothing, Nada, Zip.
- Paul is being distinctly different than most men and probably the “super apostles” God encouraged Paul’s heart with a vision and it was for his heart. It was not to become a platform for him to build his ministry.

2Cr 12:5 On behalf of such a man I will boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses.

2Cr 12:6 For if I do wish to boast I will not be foolish, for I will be speaking the truth; but I refrain from this, so that no one will credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me.

- Paul clearly states that he WILL NOT BOAST IN THESE GLORIES, but he will boast in his weaknesses (infirmities) This is exactly what he has done in chapter 11.
- Paul also states that if he did boast in these glories that he would be speaking truth but that he refrains so that people will not perceive him to be something more than he really is.
 - This is the problem with Visions and Revelations. They are usually given as an encouragement to an individual. But we use them to inflate our image of “spiritual condition” among others.
 - Too often we believe that the only people who have profound experience are those who boast about them. This is not true. Many have such experiences and cherish such things in their heart.

2Cr 12:7 2) Sufficient Grace vs 7-10

Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!

- Paul was not immune to the danger of Pride.
- Paul writes “*because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations*” “*for this reason*” Paul was given a “*thorn in the flesh*”
- When a man or a woman operating in the gift and calling that the Lord has given them, it looks effortless. The crowd is in awe of the giftedness of such a one. It isn’t at all effortless. For God has given the “gifted one” a thorn to wrestle with. The struggle to be humble. To not allow pride to infect the glory due God.
- “*To keep me from exalting myself*” So often we focus on the thorn in the flesh. The point of the passage is that Paul struggled with the same malady all mankind struggles with. “**Exalting Oneself**”
 - Paul states it twice.
 - How many times do we hear a story from someone and we have to share our story that is a little better.
- Concerning this thorn - Often we think it was a minor nuisance that was a constant annoyance. But the word thorn (Gk - skolops) means a large point piece of wood used as a tent stake.
- This tent stake was in his flesh. We are not certain what it really was. But the mention that it was in his flesh implies that it was seen and known by those who had seen Paul

Some Possibilities of the thorn

- Spiritual Harassment
 - Persecution
 - Tertullian said it was severe headaches
 - Others said it was lustful thoughts
 - Recently Sir William Ramsey taught it was malaria that caused a "red hot bar thrust through the forehead."
 - And others teach that it was a pussy eye infection causing blindness.
- The truth is that we do not know. Spurgeon said the reason we do not know is so that we would be able to make this relevant to ourselves. If it was stated that it was an eye infection you and I might not apply this saying "I do not have an eye infection" It leaves it as a blank to fill in. What is your thorn? Where are you exalting yourself? By not stating what it was it forces us to examining ourselves and our own pride.

2Cr 12:8 **Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.**

- Paul prayed concerning this THREE TIMES.
- In Mark 14 Jesus prayed 3 times concerning his struggle in the Garden of Gethsemane.
- Some people believe it is a lack of faith to pray concerning something more than once.
- This could be a Hebrew figure of speech meaning to continually pray. So it is at least 3 times but it could be continually.
- Sometimes we think of Paul as a masochist. Because of the perils and troubles he goes through to fulfill his calling. But here we see he wants to be relieved of this thorn.

2Cr 12:9 **And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you,**

- God answered Paul's Prayer.
- If Paul had come to a modern day counselor or even come to you or me he might hear
 - Man do I have a book for you to read.
 - Come on Paul, Suck it up. You can conquer this.
 - Paul, if you only had faith...
 - At our church we have a support group for you.
- But God Answered God differently. "MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU!"
 - MY** - Whose Grace is it? It is Jesus' grace. Jesus never did anything second rate. It is perfect.
 - GRACE** - This is God's love demonstrated towards mankind.
 - IS** - RIGHT NOW! Not later.
 - Spurgeon "*It is easy to believe in grace for the past and the future, but to rest in it for the immediate necessity is true faith. Believer, it is now that grace is sufficient: even at this moment it is enough for thee*"
 - SUFFICIENT** - Alan Redpath said concerning not realizing how sufficient this grace is it would be "*As if a little fish could swim in the ocean and fear lest it might drink it dry!*" God's Grace will not run out. It is impossible to limit. His grace meets all the lack and inadequacies we have.
 - FOR YOU** - God said this broad enough to include all people and He said it specific enough to mean exactly YOU.

for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

2Cr 12:10 **Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.**

- The activation ingredient of this remarkable grace is "OUR WEAKNESS" Grace is empowered in our lives when we not embrace our weakness but allow those weakness to be God's tool for **shaping** us and **sharing** the Gospel to others

3) Foolish Boasting vs 11-18

I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody.

2Cr 12:11

- Paul summarizes chapters 10, 11 and 12 by saying
 - I should have been commended by you
Paul was their spiritual father. He was the 1st to bring the gospel where there was none
 - In no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles
Paul demonstrated his commitment to the call through the hardships.
 - Even though in respect to Greatness I am nothing.
Paul was kept, by God and His providence of a "thorn in his flesh" to remain humble

2Cr 12:12

The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.

- The signs of a true apostle were demonstrated by Paul:
 - **Must be a Servant to the Church not a Ruler of the Church**
 - Hebrews 3:1 "holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession"
 - Matthew 20:26-28 "whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."
 - **Must be an Example to Others Having Patience in Trials**
 - James 3:2-4 "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."
 - 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 Paul reluctantly lists his trials. He presents this list for the purpose of showing his superiority compared to the "super apostles" who were influencing the Corinthians.
 - **Must Preach the Gospel with Signs and Wonders Accompanying to Confirm**
 - Mark 16:20 The **Commission from Jesus** "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with [them], and confirming the word with signs following. Amen."
 - Acts 5:12 "At the hands of **the apostles** many signs and wonders were taking place among the people"
 - Acts 8:6 "The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by **Philip**, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing."
 - Acts 4:7-12 "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" Then **Peter**, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He is the **STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED** by you, **THE BUILDERS**, but **WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER** stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."
- As a note to the apostles. Jesus chose 12. There is not going to be apostles like the original 12. This was a special class of apostles who had a specific ministry at a specific time. There are others that are called apostles whose function are similar but they are not in the same class as Jesus' 12.
 - Acts 1:21-22 - the prerequisite was 2 fold. "Therefore it is necessary that of the men who **have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us--beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us--one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.**"
 - This replacement of Judas was the only replacement of any of the 12. After the others died there was no lots cast or election.
 - Other apostles (with only the exception of Paul) had diminished roles. Much like prophets in the New Testament existed for the building up of the church but they did not hold the authoritative role the Old Testament prophets had.

2Cr 12:13 For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!

- Paul compares his ministry at Corinth to his ministry at other churches.
- Paul tells them that the only thing lacking towards the Corinthians from Paul's ministry was that he did not receive from them financial assistance.
- Paul is facetiously making a point when he says "*Forgive me this wrong.*"

2Cr 12:14 Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for *their* parents, but parents for *their* children.

2Cr 12:15 I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls.

- Paul's first trip to Corinth he founded the church. He stayed 1 year and a ½
- The second trip was a very brief trip between the writings of 1st and 2nd Corinthians.
- Now he plans to come a 3rd time.
 - Paul will take up an offering for the Poor in Jerusalem
 - But Paul will NOT take up funds for his support. "*I will not be a burden*"
He uses an example that parents are to save up for children not children to the parents.
- Paul clearly demonstrates the heart of a true minister.
 - He does not serve for what they can GET from God's people, they serve for what they can GIVE to God's people
 - This was the heart of Jesus. He served for the sake of others even to the point of death.
- Paul will GLADLY be spent for the souls of the Corinthians.
 - This is a remarkable statement for all the problems in Corinth and even the disrespect and disloyalty to Paul he would still be GLAD to be spent for the sake of their souls.

If I love you more, am I to be loved less?

2Cr 12:16 But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself; nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit.

- Paul uses sarcasm here in response to the "super apostles" who have accused Paul of being "crafty" and using "deceit" to take up an offering for the poor but using it for his own purposes.
- 1 Corinthians 16:3-4 Paul recommends that the Corinthians select someone to travel with their gift to Jerusalem "*When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me.*"

Paul also shows his honesty in his previous conduct in sending Titus

2Cr 12:17 *Certainly* I have not taken advantage of you through any of those whom I have sent to you, have I?

2Cr 12:18 I urged Titus *to go*, and I sent the brother with him. Titus did not take any advantage of you, did he? Did we not conduct ourselves in the same spirit *and walk* in the same steps?

- Paul had been careful that those who he had sent were of the same spirit and same integrity.
- Titus was sent and did not take advantage of the Corinthians.

2Cr 12:19 **4) Twisted Lesson** vs 19-21

For 3 chapters we had listened to Paul defend his ministry and now he "Turns the Table" on the Corinthians. *All this time you have been thinking that we are defending ourselves to you. Actually, it is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ; and all for your upbuilding, beloved.*

- He caught me off guard. I thought he was trying to prove himself to me the whole time. But "NO" he was actually addressing issues in me.
- Paul purpose was to build up the church. Not to build up Paul.
- Paul is still lovingly nurturing the people of the church.
- In comparison the false "super apostles" are those who are looking to build themselves up.

2Cr 12:20 For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps *there will be* strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances;

- The defense Paul had been making this entire letter was to instruct the church to deal with issues in their lives.
 - In this verse 20 are listed social sins In verse 21 are sexual sins
- Paul doesn't want to come and find them as he hoped they weren't. (see list)
- If so the Corinthians will find Paul as they hope not. (corrective)
- Now is the time for them to repent of these unrighteous deeds. BEFORE Paul comes the third time.
- Proverbs 6:16-19 "These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him:
 - 1) *A proud look,* arrogance
 - 2) *A lying tongue,* slanders
 - 3) *Hands that shed innocent blood,*
 - 4) *A heart that devises wicked plans,*
 - 5) *Feet that are swift in running to evil,*
 - 6) *A false witness who speaks lies,* gossip
 - 7) *And one who sows discord among brethren."* Strife
- The Twist Applied in Our Lives: What are those issues that we need to deal with when we are critical or disliking another minister, ministry or Christian.

2Cr 12:21 I am afraid that when I come again my God may humiliate me before you, and I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of the impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced.

- First Paul did not want to see them unrepentant. He was warning them to repent.
- Secondly Paul did not want to come and mourn over their unrepentant state.
- Here we see yet another sign of a true minister. He mourns over the sins of the people.
 - The false "super apostles" were receiving money from the Corinthians and yet they were at best, tolerating their sin; at worst they didn't even care.
 - The true minister doesn't want people to sin and yet when they fall short grief from God is upon the minister to Pray, Confront, and Instruct.
 - To the point of being spent for the sake of their souls.

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