

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

2 Corinthians: God's Pattern For Victory Over Severe Ministry Opposition

Part XII: Responding To Challenges Of One's Ministry Calling From God, 2 Corinthians 10:1-13:14

4. Exposing The Enormously Surpassing Extrabiblical Vision Of God's True Servant (2 Corinthians 12:1-10)

I. Introduction

- A. A big push exists in various evangelical circles that claims "God . . . speaks to His people today *apart* from the Bible," John H. Armstrong, gen. ed., The Coming Evangelical Crisis, 1996, p. 77.
- B. However, it threatens "the historic doctrine of the sufficiency and finality of Scripture", Ibid., p. 78.
- C. This threat is answered in recalling the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 with 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

II. Exposing The Enormously Surpassing Extrabiblical Vision Of God's True Servant, 2 Cor. 12:1-10.

- A. The false apostles had boasted in the visions they had allegedly received of the Lord to verify their credibility, so Paul turned his attention to revelations he received of the Lord to show his experience far surpassed what any other believer would ever have in the dispensation of the Church, 2 Corinthians 12:1.
- B. Specifically, Paul reported in the third person (out of humility) how that over fourteen years before, he had a spiritual experience either in the body or outside of it, he was not sure, 2 Cor. 12:2a,b. This event may well have occurred when he had been stoned and left for dead by his ministry opponents at Lystra in Acts 14:19-20. [We know Paul spoke of himself in the third person in 2 Corinthians 12:1-5 due to his claim in 2 Corinthians 12:7 that God gave him a thorn in the flesh lest he should become proud for having received such revelations! (Philip E. Hughes, The Second Epistle To The Corinthians (NICNT), 1980, p. 430)]
- C. In this vision, Paul was caught up to the "third heaven," God's abode above the first heaven of the earth's atmosphere and the second heaven of the stellar bodies, 2 Cor. 12:2c-4a KJV; Ibid., Hughes, p. 432-433.
- D. Paul wrote that he heard in heaven in this experience "inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell," something no other Apostle of Christ officially recognized as such by Jesus' original disciples (Galatians 2:9 and 2 Peter 3:15) is Scripturally revealed to have experienced, 2 Cor. 12:4b NIV. [Note how this contrasts with those today who claim they have been caught up to heaven, and they report what they saw or heard as if it was not so great that they had to stay silent about what they experienced!]
- E. Paul said he would glory in such a person, but not in the sense of touting his humanity, but in glorying in his human weaknesses and sufferings in connection to this revelation, 2 Corinthians 12:5. Paul wanted to be judged by his readers only through the evidence they could see and verify, and the fact that he suffered so much was evidence that his readers could easily verify, 2 Corinthians 12:6; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978 ed., fn. to 2 Corinthians 12:6.
- F. To explain Paul's reference to suffering so visibly in connection to his great revelations, he noted in 2 Corinthians 12:7 how Christ had assigned him a persecuting "thorn in the flesh" apparently in the form of a demonic spirit who buffeted Paul constantly to keep him humble regardless of his surpassing visions!
- G. So troublesome was this demon that Paul asked God three times if it might leave him, but God had said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness," 2 Corinthians 12:8-9a NIV.
- H. Consequently, Paul boasted all the more gladly in his weaknesses, first for the fact that their abundance was evidence that God was trying to keep him humble regardless of his great revelations, but also because his weaknesses gave opportunity for Christ's compensating power to rest upon him, 2 Corinthians 12:9b.
- I. Thus, for Christ's sake, Paul delighted "in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties" since, as he faced them, he was strong in Christ's compensating strength, 2 Cor. 12:10 NIV.

Lesson: *God gave Paul such a surpassing experience of somehow being in His heavenly presence to hear things not permissible for him to repeat that God assigned him a demonic presence to afflict Paul that he stay humble and dependent on the Lord that God's power might remain in his life and ministry.*

Application: *If Paul, certified to be a true apostle by Christ's own disciples, had a revelation surpassing all other Biblically revealed revelations by other Biblical apostles, and he of all men wrote that written Scripture provides us all we need for life and service information (2 Timothy 3:16-17), we must not heed the big push today to heed extrabiblical visions, etc. The Bible alone is sufficient for our needs!*