

## **2 CORINTHIANS: DEFENDING GOD'S SERVANT TO HIS CRITICS**

### **Part XVIII: Heeding The Credentials Of Godly Christian Workers, 2 Corinthians 11:16-12:10**

#### **B. Valuing The Great Spiritual Experiences Of Godly Christian Workers**

**(2 Corinthians 12:1-10)**

##### **I. Introduction**

- A. 2 Corinthians was written "to defend the authenticity of" Paul's "apostleship and his message" to a church of believers who were susceptible to heeding false teachers who critiqued him, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 552.
- B. Thus, Paul had to give his credentials much like what the false apostles gave to persuade weak believers to follow his teaching versus the teachings of the false apostles. Paul's report of his great heavenly experience from the Lord in 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 is valuable not only for his readers, but also for us today:

##### **II. Valuing The Great Spiritual Experiences Of Godly Christian Workers, 2 Corinthians 12:1-10.**

- A. Paul remarkably humbly told of an extraordinarily great vision he had received from the Lord, 2 Cor. 12:1-4:
  - 1. In addressing the matter of visions and revelations received, what a false apostle would gladly promote to his hearers to evoke their admiration, Paul prefaced his remarks of his experience of his vision by humbly noting there was nothing spiritually advantageous to be gained in his reporting on the event, 2 Cor. 12:1.
  - 2. Then, in giving the report of his extraordinary spiritual experience in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, Paul humbly referred to himself in the third person humbly to detract any focus on himself, *Ibid.*, p. 582.
  - 3. He then told how over 14 years earlier, possibly when he was stoned in Acts 14:19, he was either out of or in the body, he did not know, he was caught up to the "third heaven," God's abode, 2 Corinthians 12:2-3.
  - 4. In this "third heaven," otherwise called "paradise" (cf. Luke 23:43), Paul heard words that were not lawful for a man to utter in this life on earth, 2 Cor. 12:4. This experience would have been an astounding honor for a man living in this life, so the vision was possibly given when Paul needed to be greatly encouraged!
- B. However, in contrast to the false apostles, Paul expressed humility in regard to the event, 2 Corinthians 12:5-6:
  - 1. Paul claimed he could actually boast about the man who had had this vision since he had experienced it, but he chose rather to boast in his weaknesses in contrast to what the false apostles would do, 2 Cor. 12:5.
  - 2. Even if he chose to boast of this vision, Paul claimed he would not be a fool to do so since he would be telling the truth, but he chose not to boast in the vision lest others think highly of himself for his vision and not focus on believing the Biblical truth he spoke or what he did in his life, 2 Corinthians 10:6.
- C. Paul then explained why he gloried in his weaknesses regardless of his great heavenly experience, v. 7-9:
  - 1. The Lord knew Paul could become proud over having experienced his unique heavenly experience, so, to keep him humble and thus effective in serving the Lord, God permitted him to be assigned an afflicting demon from Satan, a "thorn in the flesh" to "harass" (ESV) him, 2 Corinthians 12:7.
  - 2. Paul asked the Lord three times to remove this "thorn," but God replied that His grace was sufficient, that Christ's strength in the believer's life and ministry was perfected in his human weakness, 2 Cor. 12:8-9a.
  - 3. Paul thus gladly gloried in his human weaknesses that the power of Christ might rest on him for effective life and service, 2 Cor. 12:8b. Paul delighted himself in "weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties" he faced due to the demon who harassed him, for when he was humanly weak, he was spiritually strong in God's compensating provision of Christ's power! (2 Cor. 12:10 NIV)

***Lesson:*** *On the subject of visions from God, Paul's experience was far greater than that of the false apostles, for he experienced being caught up into God's heavenly presence and hearing words there that were not lawful for him to speak in this life, all possibly provided for Paul's encouragement. However, Paul did not boast in this experience lest others heed him for his vision and not for the truth He taught and exemplified, and God even let a demonic spirit harass him to keep him humble regardless of his great heavenly experience lest he become ineffective in service. When Paul asked God to remove the demon, the Lord replied that His grace was sufficient for him, that God's strength was perfected in Paul's human weakness. Paul thus gloried in his weaknesses that included being insulted, facing hardships, persecutions and difficulties, for when he was weak, then the power of Christ was with him that he might be greatly effective in life and Christian service.*

***Application:*** *(1) If we know of a godly servant of the Lord who has been given a remarkable spiritual experience(s) from God that is entirely biblical, may we respect his calling and mission from the Lord. (2) However, may we also realize that God's power rests with the believer only if he is humanly weak, that the glory of what he achieves for Christ might belong to God and not the believer. (3) May we glory in our weaknesses for power in life and service!*