

II CORINTHIANS: MINISTERING TO BELIEVERS FACING FALSE TEACHERS

III. The Apostle Paul's Vindication Of Himself, 2 Corinthians 10:1-13:10

D. Paul's Reluctant Display Of His Ministry Credentials

(2 Corinthians 11:16-12:10)

I. Introduction

- A. False teachers, claiming to be apostles, had entered the Church at Corinth, and they had tried to promote their own views while discrediting the person and message of the Apostle Paul. (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 552)
- B. Paul had saved his most trying task for the last part of his letter, that of addressing the false apostles who had opposed him, and in opposing him, they had opposed Christ's true apostle, and thus Christ Himself.
- C. 2 Corinthians 11:16-12:10 presents Paul's reluctant display of his ministry credentials to combat the boasting of the false apostles at Corinth, and we view the passage for our insight, application and edification:

II. Paul's Reluctant Display Of His Ministry Credentials, 2 Corinthians 11:16-12:10 NIV.

- A. It is hard to discern if the "super apostles" in 2 Corinthians 11:5 NIV, ESV were what the false apostles called themselves or if they used the term to refer to Jesus' original Twelve apostles in the false apostles' effort to associate with the Twelve for their own credentials (Ibid., p. 580). Nevertheless, Paul's comparison from a human perspective left him surpassing both groups of apostles in terms of his ministry credentials! (Ibid.)
- B. Just before giving his comparison, in 2 Corinthians 11:16-21, Paul repeated his claim of being very reluctant even to stoop to using a worldly standard to make the comparison, but that it was necessary to help his readers.
- C. Paul then conducted the comparison in 2 Corinthians 11:22-12:10, and we report it here (as follows):
 - 1. If the "super apostles" were Hebrews, Israelites, and Abraham's descendants, so was Paul, 2 Cor. 11:22.
 - 2. If the "super apostles" were servant's of Christ, Paul was humanly more so, 2 Corinthians 11:23-12:10:
 - a. Paul had worked much harder, been imprisoned for Christ more often, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death many times more for his ministry than the "super apostles," 2 Corinthians 11:23.
 - b. He had received 39 lashes five times, and any single lashing could have killed him, v. 24; Ibid., p. 581.
 - c. Three times was Paul beaten with rods, once he had been pelted with stones, three times he had been shipwrecked, and once he had spent a night and a day in the open sea, 2 Corinthians 11:25.
 - d. Paul had constantly been on the move in his ministry, facing dangers from rivers, bandits, Hebrews, and Gentiles, and facing dangers in the city, in the country, at sea, and from false believers, 2 Cor. 11:26.
 - e. He had labored and often gone without sleep, he had hungered, thirsted and gone without food, he had suffered cold and a lack of adequate clothing, 2 Corinthians 11:27.
 - f. Besides all of these things, Paul faced the daily pressure of his concern for all the churches, identifying with the weak and burning inside of himself over believers who were being led into sin, 2 Cor. 11:28-29.
 - g. Paul added that if he must boast, he would boast of the things that displayed his weakness, asserting that God knew he was not lying in making this claim, 2 Corinthians 11:30-31.
 - h. In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas had put the city under watch in order to arrest Paul, but fellow believers had lowered him in a basket from a window in the city wall so he could escape, v. 32.
 - i. In comparing visions, Paul's experience had far surpassed that of the "super apostles," 2 Cor. 11:1-10:
 - i. Fourteen years before writing this epistle, Paul had been caught up to God's heavenly presence, the "third heaven," whether in his body or out of it, he could not discern, and there he had heard "inexpressible things . . . that no one is permitted to tell" in this life, 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 NIV.
 - ii. Paul here repeated his concern that his readers focus on his weaknesses more than this surpassing revelation (2 Cor. 12:5-7a), so he added that God had given him a "thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment" Paul to keep him from becoming proud over this great revelation, v. 7b NIV.
 - iii. He had pleaded with the Lord three times to remove this "thorn" from him, but Christ had replied, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness," 2 Cor. 12:8-9a NIV.
 - iv. Paul added that he would boast all the more gladly about his weaknesses, that Christ's power might rest on him, 2 Corinthians 12:9b. Paul thus delighted in his weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties, for when he was weak, then he was strong in the Lord, 2 Cor. 12:10.

Lesson: Paul loathed comparing himself in a worldly way with the "super apostles," but he did so since his readers needed it, and in doing so, he exposed not only his vastly superior credentials, but also his humility and holy walk.

Application: May we accept God's high credentials of Paul's ministry and heed his writings in obedience to God.