

2 Cor 12:1-13:14

Corinthians, Session Seventeen

“Faith is engendered and grows by proclaiming the word, not by parading experiences” (Valleskey, 221).

Paul’s Visions: AD 36—On the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-9)
AD 51—Macedonian call (Acts 16:9-10)
AD 52—In Corinth (Acts 18:9-11)

A Vision of God (12:1-10)

Paul is speaking of his own experience and vision. This is likely new material, something he hadn’t previously disclosed, especially since “there is nothing to be gained” (v. 1). What is the meaning of “third heaven”? This happened 14 years ago, so if this is written in AD 57...

What did he see? What did he hear? Why would God give Paul this vision? (Rom. 8:18)

We don’t know what the “thorn in the flesh” (v. 7) was, but who gave it—God or Satan? What was its purpose?

“Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.” We sincerely entreat God and yet sometimes He says “no” for a greater purpose, which is what exactly?

Why would you thank God for the thorns? Why would Paul choose to boast in weakness?

Does boasting in weakness mean talking down about yourself? Are the weaknesses because of internal or external factors?

“We are dealing with a paradox here. The world says, ‘Only when I am strong, only when I have status, power, influence, wealth, only then I am strong.’ The Christian says, ‘Only when I am weak, only when I realize that the world’s symbols of strength mean nothing even if I have them all, only then I am strong.’ Thank God for thorns, whatever form they may take, for they remind us that we are weak. And when we know we are weak, then we can be strong—in Christ. Those who find their strength _____ Christ can then, with Paul, be strong _____ Christ” (Valleskey, 229).

Learning to Relate to People (12:11-21)

Preaching the gospel in its fullness accompanied by signs, wonders and miracles is the mark of an apostle. In v. 13, what was the one thing he didn’t do in Corinth that he did elsewhere?

This is language of a spiritual parent (1 Cor 4:15). He is interested and devoted to one thing: their spiritual well-being. Look at the language of sacrifice! “I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls” (v. 15). He doesn’t want their possessions. He wants *them*.

Notice how the opponents have also made accusation of Titus. This is not unsurprising. But since there is another brother, and Paul had good practices about money, these charges are rather easy to dismiss. Four rhetorical questions in v. 18. The answers are no, no, yes, yes.

V. 19: Don't misunderstand. This isn't about me. It's about you and for your own good.

These eight vices (v. 20) are all _____ and, left unaddressed, will destroy any church. It doesn't mean that things are in disarray, but it doesn't mean the work is done either.

What grieves Paul's heart?

A Warning and a Blessing (13:1-14)

"There is nothing new in what Paul says in this chapter. All of it can be found, sometimes more than once, in the main body of this letter. It is repeated here more as a reminder of a summary, in the same way, a parent after a long telephone conversation with a son or daughter who is away in college will close the visit by saying, 'Now don't forget that...'" (Chafin, 294).

"Paul asserts that he will not spare any who defiantly persist in their sin despite patient and prolonged admonition. As spiritual leaders in Christian congregations today deal with those who are persisting in sin and refusing to repent, they will see in Paul a worthy model to emulate. They will want to be no less patient than Paul. On the other hand, they will want to be no less firm" (Valleskey, 243).

The power of Christ is on display in through the transformed lives of the Corinthians! Paul is weak because Christ was weak. Paul lives, as Christ lives, by the power of God "to serve you."

"Examine yourselves." How do we do this?

"If the Corinthians do not fail the test, if their self-examination reveals they are in the faith, this means that Paul has not failed the test either" (Valleskey, 246). The Corinthians are "a letter from Christ, delivered by us" (2 Cor. 3:3).

The word for "restoration" (v. 9, 11) is also used in mending torn nets; the idea is getting something back to the way it should be. How we treat one another is a sign of God's presence and even a means of grace!

Luther: *"Everything is less burdensome if you have a brother with you; for then the promise applies (Matt. 18:20): 'Where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them.' Therefore solitude should be shunned and the companionship of familiar people sought, especially in spiritual perils."*

The synagogue tradition of a "holy kiss" (v. 12) was a sign of honest acceptance. Men kissed men, women kissed women.

T / F This is the only letter in which Paul mentions all three persons of the Trinity in his parting words.