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God, through His Son Jesus, provides eternal grace for our failures and human limitations.

2 Corinthians 12.

(2013)

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But also shows how you can know God for yourself.

Teach it, don't demand it.

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2 Corinthians 12.

Topics.

- Paul talks of his visions and revelations.
- I know that this man was caught up into paradise about fourteen years ago.
- I heard things that cannot be told.
- I will not boast, except of my weaknesses.
- A thorn in the flesh.
- When I am weak, then I am strong.
- The signs of a true apostle.
- Children are not obligated to save for parents, but parents for children.

The Previous Chapter: in the previous chapter Paul told the Corinthians that he had betrothed them as a pure virgin to one husband and warned them receiving a different Jesus, a different Spirit and a different gospel. Paul boasted of his ministry to the Corinthian's and his persecution, suffering and beatings to undermine the claim of false apostles and deceitful workmen who disguised themselves as apostles of Christ and as servants of righteousness even though he felt like a mindless and egotistical person doing it.

NOTE: for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

- In certain chapters this letter is written as though Paul is having a conversation with the Corinthians (i.e., he asks them a question and then answers it etc.).
- Though Paul's letter is directed to the Corinthian church the content applies to any church or believer in the same situations.

Paul talks of his Visions and Revelations.

2 Cor. 12:1-6 ----- ¹I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. ²I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. ³And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— ⁴and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter. ⁵On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. ⁶Though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me.

The words, “I must now go on boasting” (v1) link back to the previous chapter in which Paul even though he felt like a mindless and egotistical person doing it was boasting of his ministry to the Corinthians and of his persecution, suffering and beatings in an attempt to undermine the self-appointed false apostles and deceitful workmen who had disguised themselves as apostles of Christ and not only appeared as servants of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:13-14) but were also influencing the Corinthian brothers and sisters away from Paul's teachings, away from the simplicity and grace of the gospel and away from the Lord Jesus Christ.

I will go on to Visions: after all Paul has stated in the previous chapter he still feels it is not enough to undermine the super-apostles (v11) influence so he now focus on the spiritual aspects of his life and speaks of a revelation of the Lord that he had experienced. He tells the Corinthians, “I will go on to visions” (v1).

Visions can relate to a spectacle gazed at by the eyes or a movie played out in the mind. In most cases God gives the picture or vision then the prophet speaks or writes it in their own words. Because many of these biblical visions, events or experiences often appear as real events to the person experiencing them they can be spoken of in the following two ways: -

1. As an actual and real event.
2. As a vision (an image or mental experience within the mind).

Often the person themselves maybe left in confusion as to whether it was a vision or an actual event.

This is because many biblical visions appear so real the emotions and the body functions as though it is an actual real event, even though it may simply be playing out in vivid colour and crystal clear pictures on the imagination of the mind. The reason for this is that the human nervous system does not have a mind of its own and therefore cannot discern the difference between a real picture being played out on the imagination of the mind or an imaginary one so the nervous system responds to both the real image and the imaginary image in the same manner.

This is why in many chapters the same event is written as a real experience in some verses and as a vision in others since the biblical character is not always sure what they actually experienced (2 Cor. 12:1-3).

A biblical vision is always under God's control and can appear as a movie played out on the screen of the imagination of the mind (similar to a dream) or it may appear as a hologram appearing in the air that is actually seen by the eyes of the prophet or to whoever God chooses to give the vision to. The vision communicates the LORD'S will or future events to the prophet who then proceeds to tell the vision to the people, sometimes in their own words and at other times in the exact words the LORD has spoken to them in the vision

I know that this Man was caught up into Paradise.

Paul shares the vision as though he is talking of another man, this is a style of writing that avoids him having to say, "I was caught up" (v3). The reason why Paul spoke of himself in the third person rather than directly was because he did not like to glory and boast of himself so in this manner he could speak of a man without there being an impropriety in boasting.

It is not uncommon for biblical authors to write in such a manner. John in his Gospel hides his name in his writings on account of his modesty and because he no-doubt did not want to appear to be putting himself forward or mention his own name as connected with the friendship of Christ in the remarkable manner in which he enjoyed it since it might have cherished pride

(John 13:23-24) (John 19:26) (John 21:20).

About Fourteen Years Ago.

Paul had kept this experience secret for fourteen years it is certain he had often thought of it and no-doubt the remembrance of that glorious and majestic moment was one of the reasons why he bore trials so patiently and was willing to endure so much.

Up until now he has had no occasion to mention it since there were many other proofs in abundance that he was called by the Lord to the work of an apostle and therefore to mention this awe-inspiring experience would only cherish pride and showiness. It was only when Paul was compelled to refer to the evidences of his apostolic mission to undermine the influence the self-appointed super apostles were having over the Corinthians that he refers to it now.

The Heavens.

The Bible speaks of three heavens and among the Jews in the apostolic ages the heavens were also divided into three: -

1. The sky the clouds and the atmosphere (the heavens above us, until we come to the stars).
2. The heavens in which the sun, moon, and stars appear to be situated (the starry heavens).
3. The heaven that is spoken of as not only being the dwelling place of God and the angels, but the heavenly regions where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father, it was this highest heaven to which Paul was taken in some manner and saw wonders so glorious our finite mortal minds cannot even begin to imagine.

Heaven and Paradise: in this context are interchangeable (v2, 3) i.e., they are the same place, the dwelling place of God, of Christ and of the angels.

NOTICE: this event was so real to Paul's mind that he does not know whether it was a vision or whether his spirit in some manner literally went to the dwelling place of God and the angels.

I Heard things that cannot be Told.

The words, "I heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter" (v4) is the only instance in the Bible where we read of anyone who was taken to heaven (either in reality or in vision) and who returned again to the earth. Paul of all men would now be fully qualified to communicate the majestic and glorious truths about the heavenly and eternal world from personal observation and experience yet he was not permitted to speak about anything he had seen which raises the following questions: -

- Why did God not allow Paul to speak of the glories of heaven?
- Why not come and convince a thoughtless world about its reality?
- Why not share such a majestic, glorious and awe-inspiring testimony?

Why did God not allow Paul, who He had permitted to behold the glories of paradise to testify to what he had seen and tell us what was there? Obviously it is impossible to give an answer to these questions that we could prove to be the true one so the following thoughts are only some suggestions of why Paul was forbidden to speak of the glory he saw.

- Because of the enormous persecution trials and suffering Paul was about to endure (since this vision was very early in his ministry) God gave him majestic and glorious views of heaven so that he would be strengthened and encouraged in his trials by a conviction of the undoubted truth of what he taught and since this vision was for Paul alone it would not be proper for him to communicate to others what God had revealed for him personally.
- Since all the eternal glories of heaven would no-doubt be so unlike what we see in this temporal world and so elevated above our highest comprehension, (most likely even now) and so unlike what we now anticipate of heaven that even if Paul did have a full revelation of all the eternal glories of heaven we would not be able to comprehend it with our fallen mortal finite minds.
- The purpose of the Bible is to communicate enough to win us, to Christ, to eternal salvation and to comfort. It is to strengthen our faith and teach us God's wisdom and right and unselfish behaviour. There are no-doubt boundless truths in eternity that multitudes of books could be written should we know them all, but while in this mortal body and temporal world it is not needful for us to know them now since we have enough to safely guide us to heaven and to comfort us in the trials of life.
- The Bible reveals enough of heaven for our guidance and comfort in this temporal world. God has told us eternity will be a world without sin; without tears; without wrong, without injustice, without fraud and without wars. It will be without disease, pestilence, plague, death, from these it is easy to think of a

world where all shall be pure and holy; of a world free from all that we now behold that is evil; free from pain, disease, death; a world where friends never depart and enemies never come; a world where all shall be in harmony and full of love and where all this glory will be eternal. As we ponder such a beautiful world we clearly see that God has revealed enough for our comfort and encouragement while we live in faith in this fallen and temporal world.

The highest hopes of mankind are fully met when we anticipate an eternal heaven; the heaviest trials may be cheerfully borne when we have the prospect of an eternal world of everlasting righteousness, justice, joy and peace for all.

- Another reason why God did not allow Paul to speak about what he saw and why God has withheld greater revelations from mankind about eternity may well be that it is God's purpose that we all walk by faith and not by sight. We are not to see the reward, nor to be told fully what it is, but rather are called to have such confidence in God that we will undoubtedly believe that He will fully reward and bless us and in this confidence we are to live and act in this fallen and temporal world.

Besides, if all the eternal glories of heaven were revealed and made as attractive to our mortal view as they possibly could, then it might appear that those faithfully following Christ were influenced solely by the hope of the reward. Whereas as it is now there is enough revealed to support, comfort and give hope, but not enough to make it the only reason why we faithfully serve God and endure the troubles and trials of life.

- The words, "I heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (v4) embrace not only what Paul heard but what he saw since this was a majestic and glorious vision of eternity, since I am not bold enough to venture at what he saw except to say this vision was full of the royal majesty of thrones, of God of the resurrected and glorified Christ of the angels of harmonious heavenly music of a world of beauty and glory that is impossible for our fallen mortal minds to comprehend and therefore the words, "Which it is not lawful for a man to utter" may mean, "It is impossible to say it" (i.e., "It is impossible to explain it").

Especially since Paul was not even clear whether this experience was a vision or an actual real and it is likely that once he was out of the rapture of this heavenly experience he may not of had a very clear idea of much of what he saw and heard to be able to put it into words that could be understood clearly by others.

It should be mentioned: there are today in some religious churches men who claim they have been to heaven, talked with Christ and seen its glory, if Paul one of the greatest apostles was forbidden to speak of his heavenly experience it is most likely that these men are enormously deceived and simply boasting for the following two reasons, firstly, to stroke their own pride and ego and secondly to elevate themselves above their congregations.

We have all the truth and revelation which we shall ever have (while in this temporal world) about heaven and eternity recorded in the written word of God. No other messenger will come with more; none of the pious dead will return, no one needs to go to heaven to bring back any greater understanding of eternity than what is recorded in the canon of God's Holy Book. We have all the truth and revelations needed for our eternal salvation, our comfort and to excite the mind and the emotions in the glorious hope of the eternal and breath taking reward all recorded in the Bible, God will communicate no more.

I will not Boast, Except of my Weaknesses.

The following words show how insightful Paul was to the workings of fallen corrupted human nature (i.e., the flesh), "On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast except of my weakness" (v5). Paul was fully aware of pride and ego, he did not want to go anywhere near their poison, we know this because in the next line he says, "Even though I might wish to boast and would be speaking the truth I choose to refrain from it" (v6).

It is most likely Paul had experiences with Christ that we will never know of until that glorious and breathtaking day when the Lord returns and we are all gathered together in glory and spend one-day of eternity in awe-inspiring and breathtaking fellowship (one-day because in eternity there is no time and no end). Paul recognises that within him is the desire to share his many amazing experiences, but he doesn't (unless he is compelled to for the advantage of others) the following are two reasons Paul restrains himself from commending himself: -

1. He would appear to be foolish (to those who understood the Spirit of the Lord at least) (because it is prideful and egotistical).
2. So that no-one would think more of him than what they see or hear him speak and proclaims (v6).

Paul's humility contrasted to the super apostles' pride: -

How different is Paul's attitude of humility to the prideful teachers of religion full of self-ambition who openly and boldly commend themselves and boast of their talents, gifts, spiritual experiences and long prayers to all and not for the benefit of others, but to exalt themselves above others. This is in total contrast to Paul one of the greatest prophets and apostles of the Bible who in no way wanted people exalting him above what they saw him do and say.

We only have to read Romans chapter seven and we see that Paul struggled with all the same aberrations and dysfunctions dwelling within each one of us. This is no-doubt one of the reasons he says, if he is going to boast he will only boast of his weakness (v6) since he did not want others exalting him or thinking he was superior to them in any form or manner.

A Thorn in the Flesh.

2 Cor. 12:7-9 ----- ⁷So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. ⁸Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Buffet: means, to smite with the hand or maltreat in any way.

Thorn: refers to a sharp thorn or prickle it carries the idea of something being troublesome and painful as a sharp thorn would be in the flesh of the body.

Paul's Thorn was Not Sin.

Whatever Paul's thorn in the flesh was, it was neither sin nor sinfulness because these cannot not be given (especially from God) nor can they prevent anyone from being exalted above measure since sin never has and never can save a person from pride since pride is one of the greatest strongholds of sin.

To Keep Me from Becoming Too Elated.

The words, "To keep me from becoming too elated" (v7) means lest I should become spiritually proud, vain and self-confident and suppose that I was a special favourite of God's. This is a great warning to us all since if Paul who was so close to Christ was in danger of spiritual pride, who of us is not? Pride is naturally in every person's heart whether secular or converted. Knowledge, gifts, and revelations have the potential to puff a person up with spiritual pride, unless counterbalanced by the grace of God.

Paul was saved as we all are (i.e., by grace since he like all of us was not already perfect and therefore was not exempt from the danger of pride). Had Paul been permitted to share the glorious heavenly vision he had fourteen years ago there might well have been a danger of him being made proud by the flattery and admiration of his friends, perhaps this another reason God in His wisdom did not allow Paul to share it with others.

If brothers and sisters in Christ wish to keep themselves from the danger of this insidious and seductive sin of pride they might be wise not to speak of the most treasured and favoured moments of their communion with God unless it is for the benefit of others or to undermine false teachers as Paul was compelled to do.

NOTE: it is interesting to notice that Paul had a very clear a view of why this thorn was given to him, he fully understood that it was to keep him humble and stop him becoming so egotistical that he might begin to think he was a special favourite of God over and above most others. There was absolutely no confusion or question in Paul's mind about the purpose of this thorn that afflicted him so badly that he prayed three times for God to remove it.

Paul clearly understood that the purpose of the thorn was to stop him from becoming prideful (because of his many gifts and revelations) and of becoming elated in regards to the majestic and glorious vision he had which is spoken of in the previous verses. Obviously this heavenly experience of Paul's was so phenomenally glorious it had the potential to arouse pride, this may well be another reason that Paul was forbidden from speaking of it, since had he done so it may have cherish and charmed pride.

What was Paul's Thorn?: there has been much controversy over what this thorn was amongst many great scholars who all have their own various reasons, evidences and proofs to support their theory. I am not going to be dogmatic since it is not clear, but the following are the most common four: -

1. Sickness, a physical disability or a Bodily Affliction.
2. Poor eyesight.
3. The inability to speak with eloquence.
4. False teachers opposed to him and his teaching.

The following are the evidences and proofs why certain Biblical theologians believe Paul's thorn was a sickness, poor eyesight, the inability to speak with eloquence or false teachers.

1. **Sickness, a Physical Disability or a Bodily Affliction.**

Among the Hebrews it was customary to attribute severe and painful diseases to satan, in the book of Job it is written: -

- The LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head (Job 2:6-7).

And Jesus in the book of Luke said: -

- Ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day? (Luke 13:16).

Added to these Paul said: -

- You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus." (Gal 4:13-14).

Based on these verses and others like them it is easy to see why many would consider Paul's thorn to be a sickness, a physical disability or a bodily affliction.

2. **Poor Eyesight.**

Some think Paul's thorn may have been his eyesight, because he said to the Galatians, "If it was possible, they would have gouged out their eyes and given them to him" (Gal 4:15). Also a logical reason to think Paul's thorn may have been poor vision.

3. The inability to Speak with Eloquence.

Others think Paul's thorn may have been his inability to speak eloquently or as well as the so-called super apostles were able, this idea is held by some because of the following words of Paul to the Corinthians "Christ sent me to preach the Gospel and not with words of eloquent wisdom lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (1 Cor. 1:17) and the fact that the so called super apostles were enticing the Corinthians away by their enticing, articulate and eloquent speeches.

4. False Teachers Opposed to Him and His Teaching.

The phrase "The messenger of satan" (v7) is another way of expressing what Paul calls the thorn in the flesh they are the one and the same thing thus in this context the messenger of satan can refer to human men who oppose Paul and the Gospel he proclaims. Paul himself said he was the apostle (messenger) of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:1) so it is not beyond reason to expect messengers of satan to be human men. In the previous chapter Paul said: -

- What will I do in order to undermine those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ and it is no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light so it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness" (2 Cor. 11:12-15)

So it is only reasonable to conclude that the messengers of satan in this chapter refers also to human men, most likely to those in opposition to his teaching and the persecutions and beatings he received from the Jewish leaders and all the suffering and hardships he endured from men because of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus sent Paul to proclaim his Gospel, and throughout his ministry satan, (a name that embraces everything that is in opposition and acts as an adversary to God's will and His truth) sent men to oppose Paul's teaching by severely beating (buffeting), withstanding and opposing him.

The Canaanite People were Thorns in Israel's Side.

It is interesting to notice that the Canaanites were in the land to be thorns in the eyes and sides of the Israelites: -

- Know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you, but they shall be a snare and a trap for you, a whip on your sides and *thorns* in your eyes, until you perish from off this good ground that the LORD your God has given you. (Joshua 23:13).

Here it is very clear human men are the thorns that are afflicting the people of Israel, so once again it seems very reasonable to say that Paul's thorn in the flesh were those men who opposed him and his message not only by buffeting him but also by disguising themselves as ministers of Christ and of righteousness proclaiming another Jesus and another gospel as the false apostles at Corinthian were doing.

When I am Weak, then I am Strong.

2 Cor. 12:10-11 ----- ¹⁰For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. ¹¹I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing.

Weakness: here does not refer to Paul's sinful infirmities (those we all have reason to be sorry over and grieved at), but rather to his afflictions, reproaches, lack of necessities, persecutions, and distresses that he suffered for Christ's sake (v10).

The words, "When I am weak, then am I strong" (v10) is a Christian paradox (i.e., apparent contradiction or at least appears as one) How is that a person can be weak and strong at the same time, the answer to this dilemma is simple, when we

are weak in ourselves we are strong in Christ, because we then we go out of ourselves to Christ, and then receive strength and comfort from him that not only supersedes our own strength (or lack of it), but also surpasses our natural understanding. Paul is basically saying, as long as he is serving the Lord he is content regardless of mockery, troubles and persecutions because, "When he is weak, then he is strong" (v10) such is the mystical principle of the Christian faith, it is when we are at our lowest ebb (whether it's an extreme crisis in life or a life and death situation) that God's strengthening and comforting Spirit through our faith in Christ becomes the strongest.

I personally have known occasions of enormous mental torment, which while longing for the trouble triggering the anguish to be removed, I was aware at the same time of how close I was in the presence of the Lord which I have not experienced since. This no-doubt is because of the following two reasons: -

- 1 I at that time had no-other place to go, all hope was gone my back was up against a brick wall so everything within me was of course looking to God for help.
- 2 I haven't needed that depth of spiritual strength or comfort as much as I needed it on those occasions.

I have absolutely no doubt that there are literally thousands of Christians who have experience very similar situations in their own lives.

Paul's Weakness.

Paul's weakness can of course refer to any weakness we experience, so the following two are just a couple of the more obvious ones: -

1. In the previous chapter Paul told the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:30-33) that his weakness was in that he fled from the governor who was guarding the city of Damascus. In this context Paul's weakness was the fact that he escaped rather than allowing himself to be caught, which he did do on other occasions, so that he could witness to those in positions of leadership.

This story shows that at the very beginning of Paul's ministry (when this event took place) he was fearful of being taken prisoner (as anyone would be) but especially for Paul since it could mean whipping or even death thus in this story his weakness was his fear (the story is in Acts 9:22-25). Not only the fear he experienced in Damascus, but the fear of persecution that he constantly and violently experienced in many cities he visited.

1. It may have been the pressure, burden, stress, anxiety and worry he felt daily for all the churches (2 Cor. 11:28) since any form of worry shows that we are lacking to some degree faith and trust that the Lord has our lives held in his hand (meaning in his eternal control).

Often we will experience things in life that neither we nor anyone who knows us could ever understand how such an event could ever work to our good, but providing we remain in faith enduring through the pain, it is certain that a day will come when the crisis will appear distant and we will notice that not only have we have grown mentally, emotionally and spiritually stronger because of those sorrows, but also grown much stronger in our faith and so much closer to God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

NOTE: the pressure, burden, stress, anxiety and worry Paul felt daily for all the churches (2 Cor. 11:28) though at one level may be a sign of weakness on another level it shows the deep love and care Paul had for the churches and brothers and sisters he ministered to since no one is going to stress or worry about someone else if they do not love and care about their well-being.

A Courageous Man: a fearful person would not face all the dangers that Paul did (see 2 Cor. 11:23-28) unless there was another force or power working within them, that power of course was Paul's love not only for the Lord Jesus Christ, but also for the lost and the Spirit of the Lord God Almighty working in Paul through his faith in Christ.

Since Paul was made of the same clay that we are all molded from it is certain that he feared being imprisoned, beaten and whipped (any normal man would). All the horrific suffering Paul faced and endured for Christ's sake not only manifests the amazing power and glory of God that was working in his life but also shows that he was a very courageous man indeed.

I have been a Fool.

The words, "I have been a fool!" (v11) refers to Paul's boasting, he hated the idea of commending himself, so much so that he felt like an egotistical madman (2 Cor. 11:23) and told the Corinthian brothers and sisters that the way he was speaking of himself was absolute foolishness (2 Cor. 11:1), how different is this to those who are in the ministry for their own selfish ambition, they never stop boasting of their encounters with God, their long prayers and their visions etc., not for the benefit of others but to boost their own religious empire and exalt themselves above their followers.

Paul should have been Honoured by the Corinthians.

When Paul made the statement, "I ought to have been commended by you" (v11) it must have been tremendously hurtful for him. Paul introduced the Corinthian brothers and sisters to Christ, he loved them like a father loves his own children he took money from the generosity of other churches to nurture them into the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He supported himself working long hours and having sleepless nights ministering and making tents rather than place any burden on them and now they are turning from him to self-appointed so called super apostles simply because they were skilful in the art of oratory and were therefore able to preach a sermon with better eloquence and articulation than Paul was able. It is certain they also proclaimed a Gospel that appealed to self, ego and pride.

There can be no greater hurt to a true shepherds heart than to see those they have raised in the Lord from spiritual babyhood through childhood and on into their spiritual (as it were teenage years) simply to see them being enticed away by false and self-serving teachers whose care is not toward those they are teaching, but to expand their own empire (how Paul must have grieved, is it any wonder he was daily anxious for the churches and suffered sleepless nights).

Even though I am Nothing.

The following words of Paul, "For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing" (v11) are absolutely tragic and must have been emotionally painful for Paul, since those who should have loved and honoured him most considered him inferior to the false super apostles and treated him as nothing, a nobody, how many tears Paul must have shed over these brothers and sisters he loved and had given so much of his heart to.

NOTE: when we think of Paul's sufferings immediately persecution, whippings, beatings shipwrecks and prison comes to mind, but since he actually loved those (unlike many teachers) who he shepherded it is quite likely that the emotional hurts he felt were far more painful than any physical beating, imprisonment or shipwreck he experienced.

The Signs of a True Apostle.

2 Cor. 12:12-19 ----- ¹²The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works. ¹³For in what were you less favoured than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? Forgive me this wrong! ¹⁴Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. ¹⁵I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? ¹⁶But granting that I myself did not burden you, I was crafty, you say, and got the better of you by deceit. ¹⁷Did I take advantage of you through any of those whom I sent to you? ¹⁸I urged Titus to go, and sent the brother with him. Did Titus take

advantage of you? Did we not act in the same spirit? Did we not take the same steps?
¹⁹Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and all for your upbuilding, beloved.

The Signs of a True Apostle.

One may wonder, "How did the Corinthian brothers and sisters become so bewitched by these so called super apostles?" "How were these false teachers able to sway them so easily?" To find the answer we only have to look at the following words of Paul: -

- Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge" (2 Cor. 11:6)

Based on these words it is clear that the so called super-apostles in contrast to Paul were highly skilled in the art of oratory and eloquent and articulate speaking, but unlike Paul not in the knowledge of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, nevertheless the Corinthian brothers and sisters were attracted to the skilled speakers even though they presented a false Gospel.

It is obvious that the Corinthians preferred dynamic speech rather than Paul with his abundant knowledge. Human nature is attracted to speech that is entertaining and demonstrative which was the situation that existed in the Corinthian church and exists in many churches today and why it is so easy for false teachers (religious or secular) skilled in the art of oratory to flourish and deception to increase.

NOTE: it should be mentioned here that it is not being skilled in the art of oratory that is at fault, since those who preach the true gospel and are gifted with the skills of oratory can greatly enhance the glorious message of Christ to the hearers. The fault lies in the false teaching of the super apostles and teachers using these skills to emotionally and deceptively manipulate the hearers into a particular response.

The character of so called super apostles is one of cunning and egotistical pride they put on airs, exalt themselves and boast of their own self-efforts and their religious achievements. They are fully convinced that they are important and for some even famous. These deceitful teachers who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ appear as workmen of righteousness, but are full of selfish ambition and while they claim to work on the same terms as the apostles they lead brothers and sisters in Christ thoughts astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ by teaching a distorted gospel (mostly by twisting and lifting individual Scripture out of their original context).

At the time of Paul they were accusing him and those ministering with him of living a worldly lifestyle and undermining their message by proclaiming another Jesus and another Gospel opposed to the one the apostles and Paul proclaimed. No-doubt their message not only appealed to self, ego and pride, but was one of self-effort and of keeping ceremonial laws and religious practises to be saved or to maintain their salvation which promotes self-righteousness and not the righteousness of God that comes through faith and grace.

While they appear as angels of light they not only take advantage of their congregations and use them as merchandise for their own gain (to expand their own religious empire), but also make slaves of them by bringing them under the law rather than under grace. The spirit of a super apostle is self, ego and pride which in a religious leader always disguises itself to appear as an honest, caring, nice and charming person (i.e. Satan's angels of light) (2 Cor. 10:2-7) (2 Cor. 10:12-14) (2 Cor. 10:18, 20). False super apostles are also called satan's and Serpents (2 Cor. 11:5).

The Signs of a True Apostle.

To be a true apostle a person had to have been with Jesus from the time of the Lord's baptism by John and also have witnessed his crucifixion and resurrection so that they could personally testify to the reality of it (Acts 1:21-22) (Acts 4:33). The signs of a true apostle refer to the majestic signs, wonders and miracles they did.

Though Paul was not with Jesus during the time of the Lord's ministry nor did he witness Christ crucified and raised from the dead, he is nevertheless counted as an apostle for the following three reasons: -

1. Jesus appeared to him on the road of Damascus and called him into the ministry. The Lord himself in a vision told a disciple named Ananias that, "Paul is a chosen instrument of his to carry his name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:4-15) thus Christ himself personally appointed Paul into the ministry.
2. Paul did not learn the Gospel, but received it by revelation.
3. He was gifted with amazing miraculous power that only a man with God's Spirit flowing through him could possibly do.

The character of a true apostle: is one of humility and service, they do not put on airs, exalt themselves or boast of their own self-efforts no-matter how great neither are they self-serving. They are honest, sincere, without pretence or hypocrisy and willing to suffer loss for those they shepherd (i.e., material wealth and riches, time, mental anxieties and sleep etc.). They are well versed in the knowledge and gospel of the Lord, but never use their knowledge to emotionally manipulate their congregations to a particular response, but simply proclaim the gospel and trust the Holy Spirit to effect and influence the heart of those listening.

They are not in the ministry for self-ambition, but rather to encourage and bring those they teach to a sincere and pure devotion to Christ through faith and grace in contrast to self-effort and keeping ceremonial laws and religious practises. They live in a manner that honours God and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and never use or take advantage of their congregations for their own gain. The spirit of a true apostle is others first in contrast to the false super apostle which is, "Me first."

Were you less Favoured than the Rest of the Churches.

The Corinthians would have had no answer to Paul's question: -

- For in what were you less favoured than the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not burden you? (v13).

For the following reasons, the Gospel was first preached to them by an apostle; they were converted under the ministry of an apostle; they were planted as a church by the means of an apostle and in this respect no church could boast of more. They had the same Gospel preached to them with as much power and purity as other churches; they had received the same Spirit, the same graces, and the same gifts of the Spirit, both ordinary and extraordinary; so that they came behind other churches in no gift whatever (2 Cor. 1:7).

Added to all these, they had the same miraculous works done among them, as where in other places, for the confirmation of the Gospel. The only thing in which they differed from other churches was that Paul was not burdensome to them, because he took no wages of them, but chose to work with his own hands, and supply his own necessities rather than to be troublesome to them.

Paul's words: -

- Forgive me this wrong (v13).

Does not mean that Paul actually did wrong or that he even thought he had caused them any real injury, in fact if any wrong was done it was to Paul not to the Corinthians, but it is an ironical way of speaking, and no-doubt a sharp rebuke to them, for their ignorance in heeding the accusations of the so called super apostles and for their ingratitude.

I will Most Gladly be Spent for your Souls.

Prior to this letter Paul has previously visited the Corinthian church twice (v14).

NOTICE: his self-sacrificing love for the Corinthians, “I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls, can I love you more?” (v15). Paul here is saying, “I am willing to give you my life, how can I love you anymore?” or “What more can I do to love you?” This was not just shallow and hollow words, Paul really did suffer enormous persecution and loss for the sake of Christ and those he ministered to.

Here we see that Paul’s love for those he shepherds is unyielding even though the Corinthian’s have allowed the super apostles to poison their love for Paul he still calls them his beloved (v19). There can be no-doubt that Paul was overwhelming and emotionally hurt by the fact the super apostles had led the Corinthian church astray especially since he did not see himself as their teacher, but as a father and loved them as his own children.

I was Crafty, and Got the Better of you by Deceit.

The meaning of the word crafty in the following words of Paul, “I was *crafty*, you say, and got the better of you by deceit” (v16) in this context carries the idea of sending persons to obtain money on false pretences. These words clearly show that some (most likely the false super apostles) amongst the Corinthian church had accused Paul of being cunning and deceitful. The false super apostles and those speaking against Paul and against those ministering with him were probably telling the Corinthian church something along the follow lines: -.

- Paul certainly did not burden you by asking for any financial aid, but it’s a trick, he is deceiving you because he is going to accomplish it in another way. It is true that when he was with you he said that he did not come to seek your property but your souls, but he has contrived another way to get your money, by being very clever (crafty), he has appointed others to do it for him by sending them to you under the pretence that they are collecting money for the poor at Jerusalem. You should know that Paul is only using this as pretence to obtain money for his own private use.

Remember Paul had sent Titus to take up the collection the Corinthians had been putting aside each week for the last year or so for the poor saints in Judea (2 Cor. 8:1-7). To guard against this kind of false accusation was no-doubt one of the reasons why Paul was so anxious to have trusted men appointed by the churches to take charge of this very large and generous financial contribution (1 Cor. 16:3) (2 Cor. 8:19-21).

We have Been Speaking in the Sight of Christ.

The words, “It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ” (v19) means that God knows Paul’s motives are pure in all he speaks in Christ’s name. Paul’s motivation for boasting as he has in this chapter was not to esteem, exalt or prove any worth of himself, but for the benefit of the Corinthian brothers and sisters (v19). God who sees the heart of us all understands that Paul hated commended himself and was only doing it to undermine the deceitful super apostles who were leading the Corinthians brothers and sisters astray.

Children are not obligated to Save for Parents, but Parents for Children.

Paul sees the Corinthian brothers and sisters as his children and himself as the parent (father), because he gave spiritual birth to them. The words, “Children are not obligated to save up for their parents but parents for their children” (v14). Is a biblical principal, but it only applies while the children are children and the parent is the parent. Once the children are adults they are then expected to look after their parents.

It is not a biblical principal for a Mum and Dad to support their children their entire life, rather the principal of God is that the children would look after their parents in their old age (especially during the biblical era since there was no superannuation, no retirement villages nor was there any support for the aged except from their own families).

NOTICE: as much as Paul was a strong and courageous man he was not afraid to show his affections or emotions, he often expresses in his writings his feelings of care and love toward those in Christ.

Paul fears the Corinthian church will fall into their old sins

2 Cor. 12:20-21 ----- ²⁰For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarrelling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. ²¹I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.

Paul fears that if he visits the Corinthians a third time (v14) he will find quarrelling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder and sexual immorality in the Corinthian church and if so he knows he will not only be brought to great sorrow and enormously grieved, but also humbled because he has boasted of the Corinthian church to many brothers and sisters in other churches.

NOTICE: Even though it would be the Corinthian church that humbles Paul, Paul says that, “His God will humble him” (v21). This and many other similar instances show that Paul's relationship with God was very personal and that he considered that nothing that came to him was outside of God's control. Though it is certain he was fully aware of the natural way events unfolded in his life he nevertheless viewed all circumstances that affected him (Good or bad) through a spiritual perspective in contrast to our natural view of things and therefore saw all things that personally affect him and his life as being from God.

End