

2 CORINTHIANS 12 The Vision of Paradise; The Thorn in the Flesh; Signs of an Apostle; Love for the Church

OBSERVATION

Monday 7:00pm, H 105 (1st floor, High School--foot of stairs, behind the gym, by the vending machine area), Tuesday 7:00am, Family, Room, CCCM – Phil Twente, cell #714 425 9221; email – ptwente@gmail.com For past studies, audio plus notes, go to: www.ptwente.com Click on “Latest Studies” on the right side. References include commentaries by numerous pastor/teachers.

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

2 CORINTHIANS 12 The Vision of Paradise;

This section is the climax of Paul’s defense of his apostleship and his love for the believers at Corinth. He was reticent to write about these personal experiences, but there was no other way to solve the problem. In fact, to avoid exalting himself, Paul described his experience in the third person rather than the first person. He shared with his readers three experiences from God. As Paul brought his letter to a close, his great love for the Corinthians constrained him to make one last appeal. He did not want his third visit to their church to be another painful experience for them and for him. He had opened his heart to them, explained his ministry, answered their accusations, and urged them to submit to the Word of God and obey the Lord. What more could he say or do? In this closing section of the letter, Paul used three approaches in his attempt to motivate the Corinthians toward obedience and submission. Glory: God Honored Him (2Co_12:1-6) Goodness: God Humbled Him (2Co_12:7-8) Grace: God Helped Him (2Co_12:9-10)

2Co 12:1 *It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord:*

2Co 12:2 *I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught (har-pad'-zo - to seize, catch away/up, pluck, pull, take by force). to the third heaven.*

2Co 12:3 *And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—*

2Co 12:4 *how he was caught up into Paradise (royal garden) and heard inexpressible words, which it is not*

v. 1 Reluctantly boasting since the last chapter, Paul will now boast of his own visions and revelations of the Lord. He would much rather write about Jesus! But the worldly thinking which made the Corinthians think little of Paul was also making them think little of Jesus, even if they weren’t aware of it.

v. 2 **Speaking in** the third person of this remarkable third heaven experience, whereas he described his humble experiences in **2Co 11:23-30** in the first person. No one would think he was glorifying himself as the “super apostles” did. But here, he walks more carefully. He is doing everything he can to relate this experience **without bringing glory to himself**. He had many revelations or appearances of the Lord -Cf. His conversion (**Acts 9:3-6; 22:6-11; 26:12-20**); Macedonian man (**Acts 16:9-10**). In Corinth (**Acts 18:9-11**); In Jerusalem (**Acts 23:11**); Shipwreck (**Acts 27:23-25**). **Fourteen years ago**: This dating by Paul doesn’t help much in knowing when this happened, because we’re not sure when 2 Cor. was written. The important thing to notice is that Paul kept quiet about this for **fourteen years**, and now he mentions it reluctantly. How unusual this is!

v. 3 **Whether in the body or...out of the body**; Paul doesn’t really know if he was **in or out of the body** during this vision. Was he carried up **in the body** to heaven, or did his spirit separate itself from his body and go there? If Paul didn’t know, we can’t know. ... **caught up to the third heaven**: Common terminology in that day. The “blue sky” is the *first* heaven, the “starry sky” is the *second* heaven, and the **third heaven is the place where God lived and reigned**. Paul, himself, had a vision or an experience of the throne of God, just as Isaiah (**Isa 6:1**) and John (**Rev 4:1-2**) did.

v. 4 **caught up into Paradise**: He identifies this **third heaven** as **Paradise**, which means a luxurious, royal, garden. He describes hearing inexpressible words, not lawful for a man to utter. In describing this heavenly vision, Paul doesn’t relate anything he saw; only a shadowy description of what he heard! There is nothing self-glorifying, self-aggrandizing, or foolish in his description of his experience. What did Paul hear? We don’t know! God didn’t want us to know, so He didn’t give Paul permission to speak.

v. 5 Paul is saying that this “nameless” man who had the vision really had something to boast about. But “Paul himself” really could only boast in his infirmities, which was exactly what he did in **2Co 11:23-30**.

v. 1 – Paul’s reluctance in boasting about himself, is overridden by his desire to protect his apostolic calling and hence protecting the gospel by relating his own visions and revelations of the Lord. **Notice his concern for his calling and ministry trumps his personal desire for any attention related to the large number of visions that he has been shown!**

v. 2 – If we had such an unusual experience, would it be typical of us to **keep this a secret for 14 years**? Would we speak of it in the third person? **Or would we brag about it, as a first person experience, to everyone?**

v. 3 – We need to know that **the only way we can get to the third heaven is to be blood bought by our Lord Jesus Christ! May we pause and pray for those lost ones that the Holy Spirit is putting on our hearts.**

v. 4 – Notice that Paul only describes what he heard; not what he saw. We usually think of heaven in terms of what it will look like!

v. 5 – Noticing how Paul is putting himself in the background, except in respect to his infirmities. His glorying in his other self, to which the revelations were vouchsafed, was not in order to give glory to his fleshly self, but to bring out in contrast the “infirmities” of the latter, **that Christ might have all the glory. Are you and I practicing that same thing?**

2 CORINTHIANS 12 The Vision of Paradise; The Thorn in the Flesh; Signs of an Apostle; Love for the Church

OBSERVATION

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INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

2Co 12:6 For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me.

The Thorn in the Flesh;

2Co 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

2Co 12:8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

2Co 12:9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

2Co 12:10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

v. 6. *desire to boast...I not be a fool:* Paul, again, is contrasting himself with the “eminent (super) apostles” among the Corinthians. They would *boast* about this kind of vision, probably write books, make tapes and videos, and go on speaking tours. If they did, they would **be a fool**. Paul will not **be a fool**, so he will not boast in this vision. But it was important for Paul to let the Corinthians know **that he really did have such experiences. His proof of those profound experiences was found in his transformed life and powerful, truthful, ministry.** Paul was given this vision, not to boast about it, but it was given for you and me, so we would benefit. Also, it was given because what God told him through this vision, sustained him through all this ministry, finishing his course.

v. 7. *exalted above measure...* Paul’s vision was so impressive that it would have been easy for him to be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations. He could have gloried in himself, or caused others to glory in him. ***was given to me.*** He reckoned his great trial to be a gift., not that there was inflicted upon me a thorn in the flesh. What is a thorn in the flesh? A minor irritation. The root word Paul uses describes a tent stake! A thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet or punch me. The thorn was both given by God, but Paul was also buffeted by a messenger of Satan.

v. 8. *pleaded with the Lord:* Paul did what he told others to do in trouble., he pleaded with the Lord three times. He repeatedly prayed about this thorn in the flesh. His first instinct was to ask God to take it away. His not being healed added another dimension to this trial; now physical as well as mental and spiritual. We’re not told what Paul’s problem was. It has been suggested it was a physical or mental ailment, possibly an eye problem. *Cf. Mark 14:32-41*

vs. 9-10. *My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness:* Instead of removing the thorn from Paul’s life, God had given, and **would give, His grace to Paul.** The grace God gave Paul was sufficient to meet his every need. Two ways of taking away a burden. It can be done by *removing* the load, or by *strengthening* the shoulder bearing the load. God’s grace make the difference because it; because it was available all the time; because it was the very strength of God. So much of the power of this world is expressed in things that can only bring harm and destruction. But God loves to show His power through His goodness and grace. Through his infirmities, God made Paul completely dependent on His grace and on His strength. But it was all for good. **Paul’s continued - even forced - dependence upon God made him stronger than he would have ever been if his revelations had made him proud and self-sufficient.**

v. 6 Paul said, “I shall not be a fool” - Who that had got such honor from God would have been fourteen years silent on the subject? How special would his experience have been to each one of us. **Would we have been able keep such a thing a secret for fourteen years?**

v. 7 Notice the measures which the Lord allows, seemingly extreme to us, **so as to prevent pride**, which would naturally be extremely built up from such an experience, from hindering the work that He wanted to do through Paul. **How much is our pride hindering what He wants to do through us?**

v. 8 To his first and second prayer no answer came. To his third the answer came, which satisfied his faith and led him to bow his will to God’s will. **How satisfied would you and I have been in such a situation?**

v. 9 “*My grace is sufficient for you.*” The present tense of the verb, is sufficient" reveals the constant availability of divine grace. God would not remove the thorn, as requested, but would continually supply him with grace to endure it (cf. *1Co 15:10; Col 1:29*). (*Php. 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*) “*for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*”

v. 10 *For when I am weak, then I am strong:* What triumph! What can the world do to such a man so firm in the grip of Jesus? God did not allow this thorn in the flesh to punish Paul, or to keep him weak for the sake of weakness. God allowed it to show a divine strength in Paul. **Have you ever taken pleasure in infirmities?**

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INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

Signs of an Apostle;

2Co 12:11 I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing.

2Co 12:12 Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.

2Co 12:13 For what is it in which you were inferior to other churches, except that I myself was not burdensome to you? Forgive me this wrong!

Love for the Church

2Co 12:14 Now for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be burdensome to you; for I do not seek yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children.

2Co 12:15 And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved.

v. 11. I have become a fool in boasting: Since he began this section in 2Co 10:1, Paul was forced to boast more than he wanted to before the Corinthians. Paul is almost apologizing for writing so much about himself, because he would much rather write about Jesus. *...commended by you; for in nothing was I behind....* If Paul thought his “boasting” was foolish, why did he do it at all? Not for his sake, **but for the sake of the Corinthians.** They were not defending Paul’s character and standing as an apostle before the **most eminent apostles** who put Paul down.

v. 12. . . perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds: Paul could also point to patience and the *signs and wonders and mighty deeds* which **were accomplished** among the Corinthians. Each of these were evidence of Paul’s apostolic standing.

v. 13.what is it in which you were inferior....: If Paul is inferior in any way, it is only in that he refused to take money from the Corinthians. So, he sarcastically asks their forgiveness: **Forgive me this wrong!**

v. 14.the third time.... On his first visit, Paul founded the church and stayed a year and six months (Act 18:11). His second visit was likely a brief, painful visit in between the writing of 1st & 2nd Corinthians. Now he is prepared to come for a third time.

...I will not be burdensome to you: When he comes, though he will receive a collection for the saints in Judea, but not for his personal support. He will continue his previous practice of supporting himself, and will not be burdensome to the church. **For I do not seek yours, but you:** This is the testimony of every godly minister. They do not serve **for what they can get from God’s people, but for what they can give to God’s people.** They are shepherds, not hirelings.

...children ought not to lay up...: Part of the reason why Paul did not want to receive support because he was their spiritual “father,” and they were his spiritual “children.”

v. 15. I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls: Paul did not resent the lack of support from the Corinthians. He would have appreciated it, but more for what it *said about them* than for what it *did for him*. Paul was glad for himself that he had this heart, even though the Corinthians were unappreciative. In fact, Paul puts it painfully: **the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved.** Yet, Paul would not allow that hurt to cripple him, or even to rob his joy in serving and living. He would still **very gladly spend and be spent** for the Corinthians. We can give, and give in any number of ways. But do we resent it when we give or serve? Paul’s service was unappreciated by the Corinthians, yet he did not resent it. Instead, he would very gladly spend and be spent for your souls.

v. 11 Paul considered himself the least of the apostles, yet he says, “In nothing am I behind the most eminent apostles, though I be nothing.” Someone should have defended him but, apparently, no one did.

Do we normally defend our pastors or criticize them as did the Corinthians?

v. 12 Paul would rather see a church grounded in the gospel doctrine through His word rather than be excited by signs and wonders! **Do you think that you are more moved and spiritually grow more through signs, wonders and deeds or by taking in the Word of God?**

v. 13 **How much do you appreciate the position taken** by Paul as the pastor of the Corinthian church in not taking anything from them because he didn’t want to stumble them into thinking he was loving and ministering to them for money?

v. 14 **This is the heart of Jesus towards us.** We often think that what God really wants is what we have; **but He wants us.** Jesus selflessly seeks our own good, and has the complete heart for us, not for what we have or what He can “get” from us. **Jesus says, “I want you!” Does He have you?**

v. 15 We can give, and give in any number of ways. **But do we resent it when we give or serve?** A good way to measure this is to see our reaction when our service is unappreciated. Do we resent it?

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INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

Concern for the Church

2Co 12:16 But be that as it may, I did not burden you. Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you by cunning!

2Co 12:17 Did I take advantage of you by any of those whom I sent to you?

2Co 12:18 I urged Titus, and sent our brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did we not walk in the same steps?

2Co 12:19 Again, do you think that we excuse ourselves to you? We speak before God in Christ. But we do all things, beloved, for your edification.

v. 16 I caught you by cunning! Here is Paul at his sarcastic self again. He was being accused by some among the Corinthians of *being crafty*. Their accusation probably was that Paul won't take any support money from you. But he will trick you by taking the collection, supposedly for the Jerusalem Christians, and putting it in his own pocket." In a sarcastic response, Paul said, "You bet I'm *being crafty*! I've *caught you by cunning* and tricked you superbly!"

v. 17 Did I take advantage of you? Paul proves that the charge he is *being crafty* is false. He reminds the Corinthians that neither Paul nor any of his associates had ever behaved in a financially inappropriate way before the Corinthians.

v. 18 take advantage... Paul is trying to point out these false teachers are putting me down. Notice the emphasis they are putting on money! The emphasis as far as your supporting them, giving to them so that they can live a lavish lifestyle. Notice how they are doing that. Peter wrote that there were false prophets among them who used feigned words or deceitful words in order to make merchandise of you, the mark of prophet, the deceptive words, the deceptive gimmicks to make merchandise of the people. But those that I sent, didn't they walk in the same way that I did?

v. 19 Again, do you think that we excuse ourselves to you? We speak before God in Christ. Paul is concerned that his defense before the Corinthians may just be taken as excuse making. But he is not making excuses because he has nothing to excuse. Instead, he boldly says, "*We speak before God in Christ.*" Paul was pouring out his heart here, proclaiming the truth before God, not excusing himself. *We do all things, beloved, for your edification:* Everything Paul did for the Corinthians, he did to build them up in the Lord. Every letter he wrote, every visit he made, every prayer he prayed was with one goal: to build up the Corinthians in Jesus Christ. His heart was for **them, not for himself**. If Paul's opponents were to speak honestly, they would say: "We do all things, beloved, for **our** edification." But Paul was a different kind of man.

vs. 16-17 Paul didn't use clever methods; he preached the Word of God in simplicity. He didn't send other men along after him to make a gain out of the Corinthians. Paul had no personal motive in gaining anything from the Corinthians. **How pure are our ministry motives are we in this regard?**

v. 18 Do you see the awesome, supernatural unity here described between two brothers in the ministry, Paul and Titus? **Can the same be said among those with whom we are ministering?**

v. 19 Paul is demonstrating his awesome responsibility that he feels toward the Corinthians, here by saying "*we speak before God*". Cf. *Gal 1:20* (Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.) Paul is saying that his commitment to edify and build the Corinthians up is so important, that when he speaks to them, it is as though he is speaking before God Himself! **How important is it to us, is the ministry He has given us? Whose edification is the primary goal of your ministry – your or those - to whom you are ministering?**

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INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

2Co 12:20 *For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits (swellings), tumults (battlefields);*

2Co 12:21 *lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced.*

WHEN WE ALL GET TO HEAVEN – E.E. Hewitt – Joslin Grove Choral Group

1 Sing the wondrous love of Jesus, sing His mercy and His grace; in the mansions bright and blessed, He'll prepare for us a place.

Refrain: When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be! When we all see Jesus, we'll sing and shout the victory.

2 Let us then be true and faithful, trusting, serving every day; just one glimpse of Him in glory will the toils of life repay. [Refrain]

3 Onward to the prize before us! Soon His beauty we'll behold; soon the pearly gates will open; we shall tread the streets of gold. [Refrain]

v. 20 *when I come, I shall not find you..* Paul is worried that he will find the same old problems among the Corinthians when he visits a third time, and that they would not have repented. He lets them know exactly what he is writing about! *lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults.* These all were the fruit of the worldly thinking the Corinthians had bought into, and these must change before Paul comes for his third visit to Corinth. If the Corinthians are still showing this ungodly fruit from worldly thinking, then Paul says, “*I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish;*” If the Corinthians were not in a state pleasing to Paul, hence before the Lord, then they would find him to be in a state not pleasing to them!

v. 21 *Lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you:* If the Corinthians were still stuck in their worldly thinking, Paul would be humbled among them. He would have reason to think, “I must not be a very good apostle or leader, because these Corinthians will not respond to me.” That was not the whole truth, but it would still be humbling for Paul. *And I shall mourn for many:* If the Corinthians were mired in their worldliness when Paul came the third time, he would be angry. And he would be firm. But he would also be *humbled*, and he would also *mourn*. As much as anything, the worldliness of the Corinthians grieved Paul and made him *mourn for many*. Notice that Paul reveals to us the mind of a true and sincere pastor when he says that he will look on the sins of others with grief. *Who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced:* Paul’s anger and mourning would not be directed to those who had sinned. More specifically, it would be directed to those **who have sinned before and have not repented**. Paul was **not asking for perfection; he was asking for repentance**.

v. 20 Paul fears that when he comes to visit Corinth for the third time that he will find some who have not repented from their persistent sins. He will not like that! And if that occurs they will not like what he will think and do! If they have gone back to their previous sins, his visit will not be a pretty picture. **Do you love those you minister to, with this love and passion for their purity, that is exhibited here by Paul?**

v. 21 Paul reveals the mind of a true and sincere pastor when he says that he will look on the sins of others with much grief. *Who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced:* Paul’s anger and mourning would not be directed to those who had sinned, but specifically, it would be directed to those **who have sinned before and have not repented**. Paul was **not asking for perfection; he was asking for repentance**. **How clearly do we understand and practice the difference between perfection and repentance?**

Practical Lessons From 2 Cor. 12:1-10

- 1. The spiritual is far more important to the dedicated believer than the physical.** What God does in developing our Christian character is far more valuable than physical healing without character.
- 2. God knows how to balance burdens and blessings, suffering and glory.** When properly blended, they help us.
- 3. Not all sickness is caused by sin.** There are times when God permits Satan to afflict us so that God might accomplish a great purpose in our lives.
- 4. There is something worse than sickness, and that is sin; and the worst sin of all is pride.** The healthy person who is rebelling against God is in worse shape than the suffering person who is submitting to God and enjoying God’s grace.
- 5. Physical affliction need not be a barrier to effective Christian ministry.** Paul did not permit his thorn in the flesh to become a stumbling block. In fact, he let God turn that thorn into a stepping-stone.
- 6. We can always rest in God’s Word.** He always has a message of encouragement for us in times of trial and suffering.

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INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines - 2 Corinthians 12:1-21 –

While we often extract parts of this chapter for devotional blessings, we must keep in mind Paul’s purpose in answering his critics and proving his apostolic calling. In the previous chapter, he had decided to recount those things that showed his infirmities, that Christ might receive the glory. We find in this chapter four proofs of Paul’s apostleship.

I. His Revelations from Christ (2Co 12:1-6)

The “man” Paul is talking about here is, of course, himself. Imagine being able to keep a thrilling experience like this secret for fourteen years! (Imagine, too, bearing suffering silently for fourteen years!) Certainly Paul was given divine revelations that no other man saw or heard. He was God’s chosen instrument to reveal to the world the greatness of God’s grace (note carefully Act_26:16). The “third heaven” (2Co_12:2) is paradise, the very heaven of the presence of God. What Paul heard from God, we do not know. Paul himself said nothing about this experience lest any Christian start honoring him more than he deserved. What humility! God would not have given these revelations to Paul if he were not his chosen servant. As Paul argues in Gal_1:11, the truths he taught came directly from God; Paul did not receive them secondhand from another apostle.

II. The Thorn in His Flesh (2Co 12:7-10)

We do not know what this thorn was, but the best suggestion is an eye ailment. Paul was supernaturally blinded when converted (Act_9:9), and it is possible that some weakness remained even in later years. Gal_4:15 and Gal_6:11 (“with what large letters”) suggest eye trouble. This would have been a trial to Paul both physically and emotionally, and could honestly be called a thorn (stake) in the flesh. (Sometimes prisoners were impaled on stakes and left to die a horrible death.) Whatever the thorn was, it was a burden to him, and it brought pain. He asked to have it removed. The presence of this thorn was proof of his heavenly experience related in 2Co_12:1-7; for God gave him the thorn (what a gift!) to keep him from getting proud. The enemies at Corinth had been accusing Paul of being weak (see 2Co_10:1 and 2Co_10:10; 2Co_11:6 and 2Co_11:29), and now he admits that he was weak, but that his weakness was a gift from God. The very weakness they accused him of was actually an argument for his apostolic authority!

There are several very practical lessons to be learned from Paul’s experience with the thorn:

(1) Spiritual blessings are more important than physical ones. Paul thought he could be a better Christian if he were relieved of his weakness, but just the opposite was true. “Faith healers” who preach that sickness is a sin have a hard time with this chapter.

(2) Unanswered prayer does not always mean the need is not met. Sometimes we get a greater blessing when God does not answer our prayers! God always answers the need even though it seems He is not answering the prayer.

(3) Weakness is strength if Christ is in it. Read 1Co_1:26-31 for proof; remember Gideon’s pitchers, David’s sling, and Moses’ rod.

(4) There is grace to meet every need. Grace enabled Paul to accept his weakness, glory in it, and take pleasure in it! Paul knew that his weakness would bring glory to Christ, and that is all that mattered. See 2Co_4:7.

III. His Apostolic Signs (2Co 12:11-18)

Paul is not exalting himself when he claims to be second to none of the apostles; he is simply defending his office. Note that Paul lists several “signs” that proved his apostleship, starting with patience! We expect him to mention miracles and wonders, but not patience! Yet it was Paul’s steadfast endurance under trial that gave evidence that he was divinely called and commissioned (see 2Co_4:1-18).

He mentions too his attitude toward money. It can be stated as an accepted fact that the servant’s attitude toward material things indicates his spiritual life and outlook (Luk_16:1-15). A true servant of Christ cannot have a love of money. Paul reminds them that he and Titus proved their sincere love for the church in the way they supported themselves and generously helped the Corinthians. Miracles and signs alone are no proof that a man is sent from God, for Satan himself has miraculous credentials (see 2Th_2:1-17). When a servant’s life and motives are pure, then we can trust any miracles that God may give; but when his or her life is not right, those miracles cannot be from the Lord.

IV. His Courage in Dealing with Sin (2Co 12:19-21)

“When I come to you, you will see how weak I am!” writes Paul. “I would rather you start cleaning up the church now,” he advises. “If you wait for me to do it, you’ll see how humble I can be in the hands of the Lord!” When the hireling sees the wolf coming, he runs away (Joh_10:13), but the true shepherd stays and protects the sheep. Paul was not about to run away. He even went so far as to name the sins that were rampant in the church. Though they had taken care of the offender mentioned in 1Co_5:1-13, there were other sins now that needed attention. “A little leaven” had indeed leavened the whole lump (1Co_5:6).

There are two types of sin mentioned here: the social sins (2Co_12:20) and the sexual sins (2Co_12:21). There were both prodigal sons and their elder brothers in the church, and both needed to repent. What began as factions in 1Co_1:10 had now grown into debates, strifes, and tumults! Satan was in command, for God is not the author of confusion. False teaching leads to false living. This chapter might well serve as a test for Christian servants. While none of us receives special divine revelations today, we all must be in communion with God and receive our messages from Him only. We all must have grace to endure suffering. There dare not be any love of money or any fear of man that would hinder us from dealing with sin. May God help us to be the kind of servants that God can commend and bless!