

## **II CORINTHIANS 12**

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to II Corinthians chapter 12, as we continue our study through the Word of God. Tonight, we will be finishing up this powerful letter that Paul wrote to the church in Corinth.

If you remember from our last study, Paul came against those false teachers who were mixing Law and Grace together for salvation and Paul points out that this is a different Gospel.

You see, we are saved by Grace through Faith and not by the Law through Works.

These false teachers spoke of another Jesus, a “*super-Jesus*” who never suffered, enjoyed the easy life, and the Scriptures don’t support that at all!

In fact, Paul said this in II Corinthians 11:12-15, “**But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.**”

Paul wanted to cut off these false teachers from spreading their false doctrine!

And they are good and what they do, that is why deception works so well. Even Satan pretends to wear a white hat you might say, but make no mistake about it, he is not a good guy!

And his workers are no different, they pretend to be speaking for God, spreading the Word of God, and yet, they are workers of unrighteousness, they are deceivers!

And here's the thing. These so-called "*super-apostles*" were professors of Christ, they spoke about Jesus, but it was another Jesus. Like the Mormon's do, like the Jehovah Witnesses do. Like the Hebrew Roots movement does. But it is not a salvation by grace for them, but by works!

In other words, they are professors of Christ, but they were not possessors of Christ, and that is Paul's point. It was the difference between their life and his! It was the difference of being saved and not being saved!

Remember what these "*super-apostles*" in Corinth boasted about. They boasted in all they had.

Paul boasted in the persecution he received for his faith in Christ.

Paul's credentials were the scars on his body, the hardships he went through.

Clarke points out, "I will not boast of my natural or acquired powers, neither in what God has done by me; but rather in what I have suffered for Him."

Now Paul is going to boast about something, even though he really is not about boasting, but his point is that he is a follower of Jesus Christ, and these false teachers, these "*super-apostles*" were not!

With that as our background, let's begin reading in II Corinthians chapter 12, beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word.

## II CORINTHIANS 12

### VERSES 1-6

First of all, keep in mind that these false teachers boasted in the visions and revelations they received, and Paul is going to show the Corinthians their error in their boasting.

Paul would rather boast about Christ, but he saw this as necessary even though it would not be as profitable to boast in himself.

But the Corinthians were worldly focused and Paul is going to burst their bubble by what he is going to say because they got caught up in all those visions and revelations, but it did not manifest itself in the way they lived, it did not impact their lives!

Now in this section we see Paul speak of himself in the third person, and because of that, some feel Paul is not talking about himself, but someone else. I think he is speaking of himself!

Then why does Paul speak in the third person here when he is speaking of himself?

I think it was because Paul did not want to bring himself glory.

Now some may argue that we cannot know for certain that Paul is speaking of himself here, right?

I believe we can be sure because in II Corinthians 12:7 Paul speaks in the first person and it relates back to these verses we have just read.

Listen to what he said in II Corinthians 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.**”

We will deal more with what this is all about in a few minutes, when we come to this verse. But what I want you to see is that Paul is speaking in the first person here and thus, I believe it relates back to him being the person who was caught up to the third heaven!

What I also find interesting is that this vision that Paul had was fourteen years ago and he has not spoken of it for all that time, until now! People today speak of anything and everything, true or not! Paul did not want to boast about anything except the Lord!

First of all, when did this occur or what incident is this speaking of?

Paul could be speaking of the time he was stoned and left for dead in Lystra, (Acts 14:19-20), we don't know for sure. Fourteen years ago, would have put the date around 43 A. D., during his first missionary journey!

We are told of that event, **“Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.”** Acts 14:19-20.

This could have been the event; we are not sure.

And what happened to him? It says that he was **“... caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”** II Corinthians 12:4.

Here's the thing, when Paul was **“caught up”** or HARPAZO in the Greek, he wasn't sure if he had died and gone to heaven or was alive and went to heaven.

The Greek word translated **“caught up”** is the same word used in I Thessalonians 4:17, for what is called the rapture. So Paul was ***“raptured”*** to the third heaven!

So if Paul was dead or alive and taken into heaven, we are not sure. But, in either case, he was in the third heaven.

What does that mean?

The first heaven is the atmosphere where birds fly.

The second heaven is the stellar heaven where the planets, moons, and stars are.

And the third heaven is the place where God dwells and that is what Paul is speaking of here.

And here is the problem I have today with people who say they have been taken up into heaven, they have these so-called “near-death-experiences,” and they have no problem speaking of what they saw, boasting about it, writing books, being on television shows and-so-on.

First of all, what they say about meeting Jesus, going to heaven, is many if not all the time contrary to what the Scriptures tell us. Remember, if the Devil can get you comfortable about death as you believe in a different Jesus, another gospel, he doesn’t care because you are not going to heaven but to hell!

Let me give you one example of a boy who supposedly died and went to heaven, only to come back. We are told,

Nearly five years after it hit best-seller lists, a book that purported to be a 6-year-old boy’s story of visiting angels and heaven after being injured in a bad car crash is being pulled from shelves. The young man at the center of *The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven*, Alex Malarkey, said this week that the story was all made up.

The book’s publisher, Tyndale House, had promoted it as “a supernatural encounter that will give you new insights on Heaven, angels, and hearing the voice of God.”

But Thursday, Tyndale House confirmed to NPR that it is taking “the book and all ancillary products out of print.”

The decision to pull the book comes after Alex Malarkey wrote an open letter to retailer LifeWay and others who sell Christian books and religious materials. It was published this week on the Pulpit and Pen website.

“I did not die. I did not go to Heaven,” Alex wrote. He continued, “I said I went to heaven because I thought it would get me attention. When I made the claims that I did, I had never read the Bible. People have profited from lies, and continue to. They should read the Bible, which is enough. The Bible is the only source of truth. Anything written by man cannot be infallible.”

He concluded, “Those who market these materials must be called to repent and hold the Bible as enough.”

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Did you get that? The Bible is enough, and it is the final authority to all that we believe! And yet, we buy into these lies because they tug at our hearts, which are wicked, and we buy the book and the teaching instead of what God has said in His Word!

Let me share one more with you because Christians are so easily taken in by these things and we need to use the discernment that God has given to us. We are told,

*Heaven is for Real* is a nonfiction account that documents the experience of a three-year-old boy who believes that he visited Heaven. The story is told by the boy's father, an evangelical pastor. He and his wife initially seem to be rather startled by their son's revelations, which he shares over a period of about three years.

There is nothing *not* to like about this Christian family, and much that is quite admirable. The little boy is a typical three- or four-year-old--hardly precocious, but simply matter of fact in relating what he seems to have experienced.

That experience took place when three-year-old Colton was undergoing emergency surgery for a ruptured appendix. Not too long afterward, he told his parents that he saw them praying for him outside the operating room. When they asked how he knew what they had been doing he said, "Cause I could see you. . . . I went up out of my body and I was looking down and I could see the doctor working on my body. [Scripture tells us that death takes place when the spirit vacates the body. Yet there was no medical report of a clinical death during Colton's surgery.]

And I saw you and Mommy. You were in a little room by yourself, praying; and Mommy was in a different room, and she was praying and talking on the phone" (pp. xx-xxi). The accuracy of Colton's disclosure rocked his parents to the core. But that was just the beginning of revelations that far and away defy natural explanations.

Colton's other revelations included: angels singing "Jesus Loves Me" to him; his sitting on Jesus' lap; meeting John the Baptist and the angel Gabriel; petting Jesus' rainbow-colored horse; his descriptions of Jesus' wounds and attire, including a crown with a pink diamond that Jesus wore; the prevalence of kids in Heaven; his description of everyone there having wings like the angels-all except Jesus, that is; his being recognized by his great grandfather, who died decades before Colton was born; and the description of God as "really, really big."

Although most of Colton's observations in Heaven are not outside the realm of possibility of what *could* take place there, they are nevertheless extra-biblical insights and information, some being more problematic than others.

For example, Colton explains that "Everyone kind of looks like angels in heaven," sporting wings (the size of which are dependent on the individual's size) and a halo. Since the resurrection of believers transformed physical bodies has yet to take place, their form now in Heaven must lack physical attributes. Hence the need for wings of whatever size makes no sense.

Moreover, other than the descriptive visions of the heavenly creatures known as cherubim and seraphim and the decorative designs in the Temple and upon the Mercy Seat, angels that appear to humanity are never described as having wings.

Many supporters of the book claim that any and all objections pale in the face of the supernatural knowledge that Colton reveals-things that were humanly impossible for him to know.

For example, he said that he had met his other sister in Heaven. When told by his mother that Cassie was his only sister, his shocking response was, "No . . . . I have two sisters. You had a baby die in your tummy, didn't you?" (p. 94).



Colton had never been told of the “painful episode” of the miscarriage, and his parents never knew the gender of the fetus.

Colton added, “In heaven, this little girl ran up to me, and she wouldn’t stop hugging me . . . She said she just can’t wait for you and Daddy to get to heaven” (p. 96).

That revelation seemed to be the most convincing for Colton’s parents that their son had indeed visited Heaven: “We had wanted to believe that our unborn child had gone to heaven. Even though the Bible is largely silent on this point, we had accepted it on faith. But now, we had an eyewitness: a daughter we had never met was waiting eagerly for us in eternity” (p. 97).

Was Colton truly an *eyewitness* in Heaven to everything he described? Much of it is quite mindboggling, notwithstanding the fact that *all of it* is extra-biblical. Yet it provides alleged insights about Heaven; e.g., a girl dies as a fetus, grows into a little girl in heaven, and then is eagerly awaiting her parents’ arrival. What if one or both parents reject the gospel? Would there then be disappointment in a place of perfect bliss?

Consider how Colton’s father mentioned that “the Bible is largely silent” on a certain issue. It is also completely silent on the specific things that Colton has revealed. This raises the question as to why God would leave out something of value for us in His inerrant Word, which was given through His prophets “as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21) - only to reveal it later through a little boy (as well as many others who make similar claims). On the back cover of the book we read, “*Heaven is for Real* will forever change the way you think of eternity, offering the chance to see, and believe, like a child.” . . .

At the time and in the years following Colton's experience, his dad was very interested in having him describe Jesus. He wrote that "as a pastor, I wound up spending a lot of time at hospitals, in Christian bookstores, and at other churches - all places where there are lots of drawings and paintings of Christ. . . . When we came across a picture of Jesus we'd ask Colton, 'What about this one? Is that what Jesus looks like?'" (p. 93).

Time after time, Colton would reject the dozens of misrepresentations. Then, nearly three years after Colton's surgery, he was shown a portrait of Jesus painted by a young girl named Akiane, who also claims to have visited Heaven beginning at the age of four. Colton's reaction was, "Dad, that one's right." His confirmation convinced his father: "Knowing how many pictures Colton had rejected, Sonja [his mother] and I finally felt that in Akiane's portrait, we'd seen the face of Jesus. Or at least a startling likeness" (p. 145).

In Exodus, we find a definitive statement against anyone attempting to make an image of God (Exodus 20:4-5). That applies to images of Jesus, whether of statues or great religious paintings or on the silver screen. One of the many problems is that they inevitably lead to idolatry, which in turn breeds superstition and occultism. Another related problem is that they must *all* be false representations because they have no basis in Scripture - other than being condemned. Jesus therefore could not encourage a young girl to paint His portrait.

Those who believe that He did encourage Akiane (because she could then point people to Him through her amazing art skills and her testimony concerning Him) need to compare with Scripture what she, at age 16, says about Jesus: “Jesus shared with us: ‘I am the way, the truth and the light. No one comes to my Father, but through me.’ I feel that he invited us to participate in the divinity. Each of us is one of kind [*sic*] original path to the way of truth and light, and without our individual love and effort we cannot understand and reach God” (<http://akiane.com/blog/?tag=akiane>).

Her interpretation rejects Jesus as being the only way for mankind to be reconciled to God. It opposes what Jesus taught in favor of Satan’s promise of divinity to Eve (Genesis 3:5). Akiane’s paintings and words clearly reflect “another Jesus.”

What puzzles many people is how Colton, as a three-year-old at the time of his experience, could attain information, most of which was completely foreign to him at his young age. His parents don’t know for sure but believe their son received the visit to Heaven as a gift from God.

Their “faith,” however sincere and biased toward their little boy, does not have the support of Scripture. How, then, was he able to describe what he did without the input gained from actually being in Heaven?

No one can say for sure - not even little Colton. He was in an operating room, surrounded by attending medical personnel, and under the influence of an anesthesia-produced altered state of consciousness.

What we do know about that and other types of drug-induced conditions of mind (even dream states, meditation, and an overworked imagination) is that multitudes of people have reported experiences that seem to validate everything from clinical or near-death events to past-lives journeys to abductions on UFOs.

They also reveal information for which they had no basis of knowledge prior to their experiences. It may be that an altered state of consciousness creates a condition in which the mind is like a blank screen, open to outside input. Spirit entities, whose goal it is to undermine the Word of God and deceive the world, might have that ability to program the blank screen and could therefore take advantage of anyone in such a highly susceptible condition (see Dave Hunt, *Occult Invasion*, pp. 187-90). But again, no one knows for sure how such things take place.

The critical issue for discernment is not “how it works” but “what is being communicated.” All that a Bible-believing Christian can do in ascertaining the truth of a matter is to be vigilant by “searching the Scriptures” to see if what is being presented is true to the *full counsel of God’s Word* (Acts 17:11).

If we don’t do that, whether we are young believers or mature in the faith, we are just as vulnerable to false teachings as those whose circumstances have directly opened them to deceptive experiences. . . .

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Be careful, be warned!

For Paul, what he heard could not be expressed in human words; it would take away from the beauty. So he did not share them!

Think of it like this, how do you explain the beauty of a sunset to someone who is blind?

You can try but words can't express the beauty of what is seen with the eyes.

The "*super-apostles*" or false teachers had no problem boasting in what they saw, but Paul could not boast for it would bring him glory and take the glory away from God!

You see, Paul is saying, "*Don't judge me by the revelation I have received but the life I live for Christ. Let my actions speak louder than my words!*"

#### VERSE 7

Think about all that Paul just said about being caught up to heaven, all that he saw and couldn't speak of, this awesome revelation of God, this vision of paradise, a mountain top experience you might say, and now this!

And when Paul speaks of this "**thorn in the flesh**" it is literally speaking of a tent spike some 18 inches long that was driven into the ground to hold a tent in place. That is what this felt like!

Now it was not literally a tent spike that Paul walked around with, coming out his back or wherever! But that is what it felt like!

Why did God allow this? Paul was serving God so how in the world could the Lord do this to Paul?

Paul tells us that this was used to keep him humble, not to see himself as some sort of "*super-apostle*" but a man that was used by God, but still a man.

You see, this was far different from what the false teachers were saying about their own lives.

Now, what was the thorn in the flesh that Paul is speaking of, this affliction that just beat him up?

There is much speculation regarding this; from eye trouble, which Paul did have; to malaria, to persecution and the list goes on.

The thing is we don't know for sure. Why is that?

I think Moorehead rightly put it, "The precise nature of it has been concealed perhaps that all afflicted ones may be encouraged and helped by Paul's unnamed yet painful experience."

When we look at Christians and see how they are blessed, what are we looking at?

I would tend to think that many times we look for someone who is a Christian where everything in their life is coming up roses, but let me say this, that is usually not the case. There are thorns in those roses!

You see, the most used Christians are the ones who are being buffeted and beaten and yet, they endure until the end!

Think about Paul. He was punched about by the devil! So unfair, and yet, as Redpath writes, "Perhaps you have looked into the face of a Christian who is always smiling, who never seems to have any worry, is always happy and radiant and, as you have thought about your own circumstances, you have said in your heart, 'I wish I were he! He seems to have no problems. He doesn't have to take what I do.' But perhaps you have lived long enough, as I have, to know that sometimes the most radiant face hides great pressures, and often the man who is being most blessed of God is being most buffeted by the devil." How true that is!

When we go through difficult times, when things are messed up, we tend to drop out, we tend to stay away, we tend to be overwhelmed and do nothing, but not Paul!

Now, how could Paul handle this and ministry?

Was he in intense therapy to try and deal with this thorn in the flesh? No!

One writer put it this way, “It is interesting to consider what a counselor without a Biblical perspective would have said to Paul. Imagine that Paul tells the counselor about his great infirmity, his troublesome “thorn in the flesh,” and how Paul feels weak and powerless to continue on against it. We might imagine that the counselor would say, ‘Well Paul, what you need is a positive mental outlook to meet this problem.’ Or, he might say, ‘Paul, the power is within you to conquer over this infirmity; you should look deep within the inner man to find the resources for success.’ Perhaps the counselor would then tell Paul ‘What you really need is a support group of caring individuals.’ Or he might even seek to challenge Paul by saying ‘Paul, if you really had faith, you would be delivered from this thorn in the flesh.’ Some of this advice might be good in different circumstances. But Paul will take his problem to the Wonderful Counselor, and He will have something different to say.”

And let me also say this. Not all sickness is healed. Not all suffering is removed. Our strength comes from the Lord in the midst of these things! Never forget that.

Now, as we read on, we will see what Paul has to tell us, how he handled this situation he was in for we can learn a lot that will help us as we have those thorns in the flesh in our own lives!

#### VERSE 8-10

What was the first thing that Paul did when he was faced with this thorn in the flesh?

He went out and bought a book on Positive Thinking! No, he didn’t do that!

The first thing that Paul did was **PRAY** - he brought his burden to the Lord.

Remember what Paul said in Philippians 4:6-7, **“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”**

In other words, what he told others he put into practice in his own life!

Paul brought his request to the Lord regarding the removal of this thorn in the flesh at least three times.

Some feel Paul used a Hebrew figure of speech here that speaks of more than three times.

In either case, he still brought his request to the Lord instead of carrying it himself, which would have broken him!

He did not get angry at God, forsake God, bad-mouth God, but he gave it to God and now it was up to God to take it away or give him the strength to endure it!

And what does the Lord tell Paul? **“... ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ ...”** II Corinthians 12:9.

Did you notice what Paul didn’t try to do.

He didn’t try to “bind” Satan.

He didn’t take authority over Satan and command the devil to depart in Jesus’ name as the Word of Faith teachers are teaching.

Paul knew that this was something that God had allowed and to fight against it would be to fight against God and His purposes for Paul’s life. And yet he still hoped that the Lord would take it away from him.



And as the Lord answered the prayer of Paul, it is probably not the way that Paul thought it would be answered. “**My grace is sufficient for you.**” And the word “**sufficient**” means *“bear you up; carry you.”*

And what I want you to see is that the Lord will carry us through these times. I don't always understand it, but I trust the Lord, and that is faith! He will see me through anything that happens in my life!

We need to follow Paul's example and not harden ourselves to what God wants to do but be open and receive it with joy knowing it is what is best for our lives, not necessarily the easiest, but the best!

And when God does answer it, don't fight Him over it, be like Paul and just forge ahead in the work being strengthened by Him!

And yes, God at times removes the burden from our lives, the thorn in the flesh. But at other times He strengthens us to bear the load, to handle the thorn in the flesh, not by our strength but by His grace.

You see, we need to come to the end of ourselves so that we can rest in Him.

Paul realized that he was strong when he was weak, which sounds like he is contradicting himself, but he is not.

Paul is saying that he did not rest upon his own strength, in fact the times he was the strongest was when he was the weakest and rested in the Lord, the One who strengthens all of us.

It is Redpath said, “God works through man who has been wiped clean and turned inside out, his life emptied before the Lord until he is hopelessly weak, that no flesh might glory in His presence.”

The so-called “*super-apostles*” gloried in themselves while Paul was humbled through this experience and gave the glory to God!

What about you? Are you allowing the thorn in your flesh to bring glory to God or are you resisting God’s grace and see the thorn in the flesh as a curse rather than a blessing?

### VERSES 11-13

First of all, Paul spoke of two things that validated his apostleship. He had seen the risen Jesus. And, he was given power to work miracles by the Holy Spirit.

And we see Paul here finishing up his boasting you might say. Yes, Paul boasted of himself for the sake of the Corinthian Christians who listened to these “*super-apostles,*” these men who were putting Paul down and they refused to stand up for Paul and the work he was doing for the Lord and for them!

And you can’t miss the fact that Paul is being a little sarcastic here. He is saying that the church in Corinth did not support him even though he ministered to them.

He was not a burden to them, and he sarcastically asked them to “**forgive me this wrong!**”

Folks, it is a blessing to support the work of Christ, to support the ministry, laying up for yourself treasures in heaven instead of treasures here on earth that will fade away!

VERSES 14-18

Remember Paul's first visit to Corinth was to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the people of Corinth. And once they came to saving faith, he established the church there. And Paul spent 18 months there with the Corinthians, leading them to Christ and then building them up in Christ! (Acts 18:11)

It would seem that Paul had a brief second visit to Corinth between the writing of I Corinthians and II Corinthians and now he was preparing to come a third time to Corinth.

Some feel that Paul never made that second visit but wanted to go. It would seem by what Paul is saying here that he did make it a second time before writing this second epistle to them.

When Paul arrives, he is going to receive the offering for the saints in Jerusalem but will not receive anything from them in regard to his own support, he does not want to burden them, which again may be a little sarcastic since they could afford to support Paul.

Now here is the key for every minister who is serving Jesus Christ, it is not what you can get from people but what you can give to them – you are a servant!

In Mark 10:45 Jesus, our example, said, “**For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**”

In some churches the bigger title you have the more you sit back and let others minister to you and that goes contrary to what the Scriptures teach!

Not only is it a title that stops some from serving but also how they are treated or mistreated.

And yet, look at Paul, he said, “**And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved.**” II Corinthians 12:15.

Paul ministered to them and they responded in an unloving way and yet it did not stop Paul from ministering to them, from serving them.

In fact, Paul was willing to give his all for their care, which is *AGAPE LOVE*, unconditional love! May we serve the Lord and minister to people with that kind of *LOVE!*

Now, in II Corinthians 12:16 Paul spoke about them thinking he was “**crafty.**” What was that all about?

I think he is being sarcastic once again, maybe these “*super-apostles*” were accusing Paul of taking money that was supposed to be given to the church in Jerusalem and using it for himself.

Thus, Paul would look good by receiving this gift, not being supported by the Corinthians for the ministry he was doing, and yet taking money that was not for him.

But of course, that was not the case, that was not true.

Paul goes on to say, “**Did I take advantage of you by any of those whom I sent to you? 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?**”

Neither Paul, nor any of his associates did any wrong regarding financial matters; they did not take the money from the saints in Jerusalem!

#### VERSES 19-21

Paul is not making any excuses; he did nothing wrong except speak the truth in Christ.

And keep in mind that Paul spoke this way to the Corinthians so they would grow in the Lord, to be built up in the Lord while these “*super-apostles*” did things for their own edification!

Hughes rightly tells us, “It is not his purpose to make the Corinthians squirm, but to bring them to their senses, to help them to rid themselves of the narcotic effect produced on them by the false apostles who had invaded their community.”

Make no mistake about it, it was time for them to wake-up from their spiritual sleep and walk in the Lord! And how true that is today!

And as you hear these words of Paul, can’t you can just hear the heart of Paul breaking over his concern that some will still be in their old ways, they had not repented yet? I hope so.

You see, what was taking place when Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians was still going on in the lives of some of the Corinthian believers, “**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, tumults.**” II Corinthians 12:20.

Folks, legalism and immorality are frequent bedfellows and these false apostles mixed Law and Grace and the Corinthians, some of them, were living this out – living a worldly life! There was no change in their lives.

And Paul wants them to repent, to change before he arrives!

And if things don’t change by the time he gets there, he will mourn over their condition.

Not only that, but he would also deal with them.

That is the heart of Paul and as Calvin tells us, “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.”

I can’t agree more, it is not that you rejoice in their sin, their condition, but you mourn at how the enemy has ripped them off, how they are hurting themselves and those around them!

That is the heart of God and it was manifested in Paul's life and it should be also manifested in our own lives!

An interesting chapter when you think about it.

Paul opens up with the third heaven and hearing inexpressible words, and he closes with ugly, vile sins on the earth, with vulgar words and actions.

But in-between Paul gives us the remedy, Christ resting on Paul and that is the remedy for us, Christ in our lives!

As the Lord told Paul, "... 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'..." II Corinthians 12:9.

And now, in II Corinthians chapter 13, we have Paul's conclusion to his letter to the church in Corinth!

### **II CORINTHIANS 13**

#### **VERSES 1-4**

Remember that on Paul's first visit to Corinth he founded the church, staying there some 18 months.

His second visit to Corinth was a short, and a painful visit. He went there the second time between the writing of I Corinthians and II Corinthians.

And now Paul tells them he is coming to them a third time. And, interestingly enough, he uses Deuteronomy 19:15 to highlight this visit.

And what Paul is saying is that when he comes this third time, he is going to judge their sin.

Paul has given them warnings in these two letters, and now it was up to them to repent and get right with God or face Paul who will not hold back!

Some of these “*super-apostles*” saw Paul as weak and now he is saying that if they want to see proof of Christ speaking through him, fine, he will come and expose their sin, he will do some house cleaning you might say!

Think of it like this, Paul is saying, “*Either clean your house before I get there or when I get there, I will do some house cleaning for you!*”

And look at what this false teaching manifested in the life of these believers, what was seen in Paul’s first letter continued on in the writing of this second letter, “**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, tumults; 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.**” II Corinthians 12:20-21.

Again, take care of these things or Paul will when he gets there! Do a heart check and deal with these things! A stern warning to them!

Paul will speak on this as we read on, examine yourselves!

#### VERSES 5-6

This is a sobering question that Paul wants the Corinthian Christians to consider.

***“Are you really a Christian?”***

Now I don’t want to freak any of you out, but it is important to know where you stand.

Does that mean we can lose our salvation?

No!

Does that mean we don't have the assurance of our salvation?

No!

Jesus said in John 5:24, **“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.”**

And in I John 5:13 we are told, **“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”**

Then what is Paul saying here?

As I have stated earlier this evening, some people are professors of Christ but not possessors of Christ, Christ is not in them, He is not their Lord and Savior.

They know of Him, but they do not know Him!

Yes, they may speak of Him, work for Him, but they have never asked Him to be in their lives, they were not born again!

And also, you can't mix salvation with Law and Grace like some in Corinth were doing and some still try to do today!

We are saved by grace through faith and anything you add to grace doesn't improve it; it only cheapens it! Makes it worthless!

If your salvation is based upon the work you are doing, you are not saved!

It needs to be based upon the finished work of Christ on the cross of Calvary and we receive that free gift by faith!



And please understand what Paul is doing here. It is as Warren Wiersbe put it, “Paul made it clear that he did not want the Corinthians to fail the test just to prove that he was right. Nor did he want them to live godly lives just so he could boast about them. He did not mind being despised and criticized for their sakes, so long as they were obeying the Lord. He was not concerned about his own reputation, for the Lord knew his heart; but he was concerned about their Christian character.” Exactly.

And here’s the thing. Isn’t it easy to put others to the test but the reality is, where do you stand?

That is Paul’s question to them as individuals.

Redpath tells us, “That was the trouble at Corinth. They criticized Paul and failed to examine themselves.”

And make no mistake about it. Paul knew that some in Corinth would be disqualified because they were of the world and not of the Lord.

Of this Spurgeon tells us, “Now, what is it to have Jesus Christ in you? The Roman Catholic hangs the cross on his bosom; true Christian carries the cross in his heart; and a cross inside the heart, my friends, is one of the sweetest cures for a cross on the back. If you have a cross in your heart – Christ crucified in you, the hope of glory – all the cross of this world’s troubles will seem to you light enough, and you will easily be able to sustain it. Christ in the heart means Christ believed in, Christ beloved, Christ trusted, Christ espoused, Christ communed with, Christ as our daily food, and ourselves as the temple and palace wherein Jesus Christ daily walks.”

And to show this, Paul uses his life as an example to them, that he has examined his life and he knows that he is not disqualified. He has the assurance of his salvation along with his fellow workers in Christ and we can also have that assurance if we are ***IN CHRIST!***

#### VERSES 7-10

Why would it seem or appear to the Corinthians that Paul was disqualified?

Because they judged Paul by worldly standards – he had no power, no success in the world’s eyes, no wealth. Paul had hardships, sickness, a thorn in the flesh and thus, they came to the conclusion that he must be disqualified, just look at his life!

But again, they looked at his life through the eyes of the world and not through the eyes of God!

Who does that remind you of? To me it sounds just like Job’s friends who blamed Job for some sin in his life for all the calamity that had come upon him, that he was not right with God like he said for if he was, these things would not have come upon him.

Well, they were wrong for God says that Job was a righteous man, a good man!

Yes, bad things do happen to us at times because of our behavior, our sin, but that is not always the case.

Look at how our Lord suffered and as His servant we should expect no less!

As I have said, they looked at the things that were happening to Paul and saw him as disqualified, but if the Corinthians were fruit inspectors, they would see that Paul was bearing fruit for God and these light afflictions were not to disqualify Paul but to build him up in the faith, keep him humble.

We can't look at a person's heart, but we too can be fruit inspectors and judge a person accordingly!

Judge by God's standards and not the worlds!

And, once again, Paul wanted them to get their act together before he got there.

His heart's desire was to see them grow, built up, but if they refused, destruction would come their way!

But it is a choice we all have to make, even as Christians.

We can go down a path that brings destruction to our lives, chaos, hurt or we can go down that path that God has for us and it will be for edification!

#### VERSE 11

Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to be "**complete**" and he uses the Greek word KATARTIZO, (kat-ar-tid'-zo) which is the same Greek word that is used in Matthew 4:21 and it speaks of mending their nets.

In other words, Paul is saying to the Corinthians, they need to mend their ways, they need to get right with God, don't allow your life to be torn apart, ripped open by your refusal to repent and get right with God!

#### VERSES 12-14

Paul concludes by telling the Corinthians to greet each other, the brethren in Christ with a holy kiss.

Today we might speak of a handshake or a holy bear hug as we greet our brothers and sisters in the Lord!

And, as Paul ends this letter he does so with a blessing from the Holy Trinity – The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

What a great way to end a letter, with a blessing from God!

It is as Hodge put it, “For a Christian is one who seeks and enjoys the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost.”

Thus, **“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? - unless indeed you are disqualified.”**

Or as The Amplified Bible puts it, **“Examine and test and evaluate your own selves to see whether you are holding to your faith and showing the proper fruits of it. Test and prove yourselves [not Christ]. Do you not yourselves realize and know [thoroughly by an ever-increasing experience] that Jesus Christ is in you - unless you are [counterfeits] disapproved on trial and rejected?”** II Corinthians 13:5.

If you want to enjoy all that God has for you, make sure you are of the faith and that you are walking in the faith, having the fruit of your faith in your life!