**PAUL'S VISIONS AND HIS THORN**

**2 CORINTHIANS 12 & 13**

**2 Corinthians 12:1** It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. **NLT - This boasting will do no good, but I must go on.**

* Chuck Smith – Paul probably felt compelled to boast a little in his own defense. He hated it but felt forced into it by his detractors and critics.
* In Chapter 11 he told of the difficulties and sufferings that he had endured in order to minister to the Corinthians. Why did he share that? To illustrate his love for them.

1b I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord:

* Listen to this…

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 up to the third heaven.

* The bible DOES describe three heavens: The atmosphere, the celestial, and the heaven where God is.

3 And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—4 how he was caught up into **Paradise** and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

* 14 years before writing this Paul was in Lystra, (Turkey) preaching and being used by God to do miracles among the people. To thank him, the religious people of Lystra stoned him to death… they thought. Paul was left for dead and everybody thought he had died.
* As he lay covered in his own blood and a pile of stones… this vision took place… He will not speak of it for 14 years…
* When Paul regained consciousness he insisted on returning to Lystra to minister some more.
* Paul says to try to describe what heaven was like would be unlawful to do so…
  + Oh my! We are left to try and imagine what he saw!
  + How beautiful must heaven be if the beauty of our earth is cursed? If our sunsets are cursed, how beautiful must heaven be?
  + If our snow topped mountains are as beautiful as they are… AND THEY ARE CURSED… How beautiful must heaven be?
  + Chuck Smith thought that arriving in heaven would be like a blind person whose eyesight is restored by surgery, everything they knew by touch was now relearned by sight…

5 Of such a one (Himself) I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. 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.

* IE, I need to be careful that you don’t think too much of this… Paul did not want to be lifted too high… Refreshing, RIGHT?

**MY THORN**

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.

* Ironic, is it not, that after Paul got to see heaven, God touched his vision for the rest of his life…
* WHY? Why would God do this to Paul? To You? To Me? To our loved ones?

**MY ANSWER**

8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 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. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, **HUMBLE** then I am strong. **Like Joni Earekson-Tada Paul learns to appreciate the handicap.**

**CONCERN FOR THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH**

11 I have become a fool in boasting; **(IE, I apologize)** you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended **(defended)** by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing.

* We all have favorite preachers and teachers, but let’s be careful not to put them on pedestals… PRAY for them. Don’t idolize them.

12 Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among **(In front of)** you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds. **THE PROOF OF APOSTELSHIP IN THOSE DAYS**

* **Why do you deny the evidence of your own senses?**

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! **SARCASM**

* **Would you have preferred me to be a burden to you?**
* **Would you have defended me better if I had treated you worse?**

**SEEKING SOULS NOT STUFF**

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, **(Your stuff)** but you. For the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children.

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.

16 But be that *as it may,* I did not burden you. Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you by cunning! **NLT - Some of you admit I was not a burden to you. But others still think I was sneaky and took advantage of you by trickery.**

17 Did I take advantage of you by any of those whom I sent to you? **DID ANY ON MY TEAM RIP YOU OFF? NO!**

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? **NONE OF US TOOK YOUR MONEY**

**GOD WILL JUDGE US**

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. 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, ***(HOW WOULD THAT BE?)*** lest *there be* contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions , back-biting, whisperings, conceits, tumults; 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. **NLT - Yes, I am afraid that when I come again, God will humble me in your presence. And I will be grieved because many of you have not given up your old sins. You have not repented of your impurity, sexual immorality, and eagerness for lustful pleasure.**

* Like any family, when one family member suffers… the whole family suffers. When one family member is victorious – the whole family celebrates. When one family member fails – the whole family mourns… WHEN… A family member gives their heart to the Lord – the whole family rejoices…
* PAUL WANTS TO RETURN & REJOICE WITH THEM!

**CHAPTER 13**

**13:1** This *will be* the third *time* I am coming to you. "BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY WORD SHALL BE ESTABLISHED." **DET 19:15**

* **IE, If you want to, we will have a hearing…**

2 I have told you before, and foretell as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare— **(IE, I’m warning you)** 3 since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you.

4 For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you. **CEV - Although he was weak when he was nailed to the cross, he now lives by the power of God. We are weak, just as Christ was. But you will see that we will live by the power of God, just as Christ does.**

5 **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. 6 But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified.

* **Look, either Jesus is your Lord, OR YOU ARE. It cannot be both ways.**
* **PLEASE… Ask yourself IF Jesus is the Lord of your life.**

7 Now I pray to God that you do no evil, not that we should appear approved, but that you should do what is honorable, though we may seem disqualified. ***TO YOU…***

* **CEV - We pray that you will stop doing evil things. We don't pray like this to make ourselves look good, but to get you to do right, even if we are failures.**

8 For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. 9 For we are glad when we are weak and you are strong. And this also we pray, that you may be made complete.

10 Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the authority which the Lord has given me for edification and not for destruction. **LIKE ANY DAD, PAUL WANTS THEM TO SUCCEED.**

* **The daughter of one of my friends bought her own car this week… My friend was SO proud of her… THAT is what Paul wants – for the Corinthians to mature… Abd buy their own chariot? (NO) To grow up.**

**FINAL GREETINGS**

11 Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. **MATURE** Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

12 Greet one another with a holy kiss. **(We suggest a fist bump)** 13 All the saints greet you. 14 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit *be* with you all. Amen.

NEXT WEEK – Galatians!