

2 Corinthians Class 13 Transcript

Greetings, and welcome back to FI Online. This is class number 13 in our series on **2 Corinthians: The Ministry of Reconciliation**. After this class we have one more in order to finish up the book.

From class number 12, last week we had **one question** turned in. So let's begin by addressing that.

Although Paul is longsuffering with the brethren in Corinth who are being swayed by false apostles and is taking great care to expose these so-called "apostles," would he not have had them marked and disfellowshipped?

Well, the concept of marking, I think, is probably one that has been misunderstood and misused at times in the past. It's based upon a statement from the *King James Version* of **Romans 16 verse 17**, where it says: *Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which you have learned; and avoid them.* This has sometimes led people to believe that there is some kind of a special public marking of those who are described here.

Interestingly, the same word is used in a very positive sense in **Philippians 3** and **verse 17**, where it says: *Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as you have us for an example.*

Now in the *New King James Version*, in both places the phrase is changed to *note* them, rather than *mark* them. In other words, we're told to beware of such people, whether good examples or bad, and to act accordingly around them.

So basically, Paul is telling us that we should not be foolishly naïve about those who may cause problems, even though they may be sitting in the midst of the fellowship. But we should be aware of those who may have a contrary spirit of belief.

Now, if those people persisted in their disruptive approaches, would they eventually be disfellowshipped? Well, probably. But, for a couple of reasons, Paul didn't choose to do that at this point. For one thing, I believe he still had hope that some of them might repent, and, if so, then there's not going to be any disciplinary action necessary.

On the other hand, remember that in 1 Corinthians he had already instructed the brethren in Corinth to put someone out of the fellowship because of their sin. Now, as he's writing 2 Corinthians, his accusers are saying: "Well, Paul is really strong in his letters, but when he's here, he's weak." If Paul were to send another letter saying, "Disfellowship these people," it probably would just add fuel to the fire for those accusations. So, I think it's logical that Paul would have said: "I'm going to wait until I get there, see what the attitudes are, and then we can deal with it from there."

So were they ever disfellowshipped? Well, we have no record to know. We hope that there was repentance. But, is it possible? Yes. It certainly is.

Thank you again for your question. Again, you'll have one more opportunity with class number 13 to turn in your questions for one hour after the class airs.

Now we want God's blessing on our class, so if you would, again, bow your heads and join me.

[Prayer]

[4:27]

We're making good progress, and we should be able to finish rather quickly, but we want to make sure that we thoroughly understand the things that Paul is covering.

Last time we finished up through **2 Corinthians chapter 11** and **verse 12**, where Paul has been addressing some of those individuals who have come into the area of Corinth and have created a number of issues—problems—in the Church. And especially, they seemed to be trying to undermine Paul and his leadership in that area, and, as a result, undermining the message that he brought.

So, Paul has had to address some of those things. And he has expressed, early on in this **11th chapter** of **2 Corinthians**, his concern that if there are individuals who come among the Church people—we're not really talking about what we see in the world around us—that there were those who would come among the Church people and teach a false gospel, a false Christ. And he said: "I'm afraid that you will believe them, you'll listen to them, you will give them space to give their messages when these things are completely incorrect."

So, Paul is very concerned, and he's letting the Corinthians know that they needed to be very, very careful about what they listen to, what they accepted. Now obviously, the lesson is not just for ancient Corinth, 2000 years ago. That's a lesson for all of us today because—as we'll see in this class as we go forward—we will see very quickly that the same power that was deceiving people in Corinth 2000 years ago is still on his temporary throne and still deceiving people today. *We* need to be aware of that. It's not a matter that those in the world have a special need to be aware—they're already deceived. The concern is for those who have been given God's truth and yet can be deceived.

We recognize from our own history—in the modern history of the Church—that no one is immune from that danger. Now, that doesn't mean we need to live every day in fear or that we need to be skeptical of everything we hear. But we do need to listen carefully. And, as the Bereans did back there in **Acts chapter 17 [verse 11]**, search *the Scriptures daily, whether these things are so*.

That's where we'll pick up today.

[6:54]

Paul continues on here in **2 Corinthians chapter 11 verse 13**.

He says: *For such (describing those who come along in this way) are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.*

Now remember, "apostle" is "one who is sent by one in authority with a specific message to a specific audience, and bearing the authority of the one that sent them." It was an ancient Roman term that was used of an emissary sent by the Emperor or the Senate. And it has come over into the Church, recognizing Jesus Christ's role as the living *Head* of the Church. *Apostles* don't come about because they apply for the job. *Apostles* don't come about because an individual decides for himself: he's an apostle. This is a function that Jesus Christ alone has the power to bring about.

So, Paul claims that he is an apostle. These individuals are coming along, and they are evidently claiming the same kind of authority, the same kind of backing. He calls them *false apostles*. He calls them *deceitful workers*.

The word that's used here for "deceit" is not simply a matter of deceiving someone. But it's a matter of using trickery, treachery, falsehood to *deliberately* cause someone to be deceived. So, there is an intention here. I think that's important to keep in mind as we go forward through the next few verses. Because we will find that, while there are certain principles here that can apply in a very broad way, Paul is specifically talking about people here who have an *intention* to deceive.

He says that they transform *themselves*—or masquerade—as *apostles of Christ*. The Greek word that's

used here is an interesting word. It basically means “to transform the outward appearance, while the inward remains the same.” In other words: to put on a costume. “Masquerade” is a good term. The person inside is still the same, but they put on a costume that makes them appear in a different way.

And he says: “That’s what’s taking place here. These individuals are putting on a costume of righteousness. It looks that way outwardly. And if all you do is look at the outward appearance, you might very easily judge: ‘These individuals must be righteous. How could you say such a person is not really a Christian? Look at what they look like, what they do’” —perhaps, as far as doing good deeds. Because there are **many** people out in the world who do good deeds. But keep in mind: atheists do good deeds. So are they Christians as a result of that? Is doing good deeds alone enough to make you a representative of Jesus Christ? And a lot of people seem to think that way.

[9:57]

So, what does Paul say as we go further?

He says: **verse 14** *And no wonder!* (Don’t be surprised that people do this.) *For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.*

The term here for “transform,” again, means to—he disguises himself; he masquerades as *an angel of light*. It’s the same word that was used in the previous verse that talks about changing the outward appearance, while the inside is still the same. Satan can appear as *an angel of light*. What does light do? Well, light reveals. So, Satan can come along as one who *reveals truth*. That: “Why—you didn’t know that before! I can reveal things to you!”

Isn’t that, in essence, what he told Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden? “Oh, God doesn’t want you to take of that tree *because*, if you do, then *you* will be enlightened. You will see like God sees.” [**Genesis 3:4-5**] He masquerades himself as *an angel of light*, as a *revealer of truth*. That happened in the Garden of Eden. And now—2000 years ago in Corinth—it’s happening there. Should it surprise us that it’s still going on today? That Satan still does this?

He goes on. I like this comment from one of the commentaries:

The prince of darkness puts on the garb of light and sets the fashion for his followers in the masquerade to deceive the saints.

Satan’s intention is to deceive. Now, can he have servants who don’t necessarily have that intention? Of course! They themselves are deceived. So, they may not realize what they’re doing.

But he goes on to say: **verse 15** *Therefore it is no great thing* (It’s not a surprising thing.) *if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.*

[11:58]

So, we see here that the *ministers* it describes here—the word that’s used here is *diakonoi*, and it means “servants.” Now, why am I emphasizing that? I think it’s very easy for us to look at this word “minister,” and we come up with the concept of the clergymen that are in false religions and that they are the ones who are the servants of Satan and are deceiving people. Well, yes, in many cases that’s very true. They really are. But, we would again understand they don’t necessarily mean to be. If we confine the term here, *diakonoi* or “servant,” to ministers, then we’re missing something very important.

“Minister” seems to refer to ordained clergy in our minds. That’s not the sense Paul had in mind in choosing this word. He doesn’t—now, that does not imply that ordained clergy are **not** included. They certainly **are**.

But Paul did not limit this to clergy. After all, false Christianity really didn't even get organized for some time after the life of Paul. Even though we may immediately think of maybe specific denominations, organizations that teach the world falsehood, Paul really wasn't thinking about it in that way. He wasn't using this term to refer to clergy people in competing religious organizations. There weren't competing religious organizations in the same sense at that point.

If we confine the word to ordained clergy, we're missing the wider intent of this passage. And, we end up accusing a very narrow group of people of being "Satan's servants." Are ordained ministers the only ones who think they are acting righteously when they're actually serving Satan? What about politicians? What about those who think that it is righteous when they approve such things as homosexual marriage? Are they not serving Satan in so doing? Doesn't this passage apply to them too?

What about prominent entertainers who take it upon themselves to try to influence society in ways that are completely contrary to God's way? They, likewise, are servants of Satan, not really intending to be there. But what we have to keep in mind is: *intent*, in this case, is irrelevant. If you're a deceiver and a servant of Satan, your intent is irrelevant. You're accomplishing the wrong thing.

If we leave the impression that the subject here is limited to ordained ministers—to clergy people—we're letting a lot of self-righteous, unordained servants of Satan off the hook. Our explanation should not leave people looking at clergymen with a critical eye. It should leave us looking at *ourselves* with a critical eye and making sure that we're not just putting on "the costume of Christianity," because, if that's what we do—and again, Paul's writing to the Church—if that's what we do, then how are we any different from those who are servants of Satan? He warns us about that. So it's very important to keep that in mind.

[15:31]

He goes on to say that their *end will be according to their works*. In other words, God isn't deceived. God judges. And He is going to deal with them in the appropriate way. Just remember, the judgment that we have to have is one of being extremely careful that we don't end up being deceived.

He says, going on: **verse 16** *I say again, let no one think me a fool. If otherwise (in other words, if you do think I'm being foolish), at least receive me as a fool, that I also may boast a little.*

The term *boast* is the same term that we saw back in **verse 10**, which has to do, not so much with "boasting" as we think of it, but of an individual who can speak confidently because he's sure of his position. And that's what Paul is saying: "Allow me, here, to be able to speak confidently to you. I don't have to apologize. I'm not boasting in the sense of claiming things that are not true. I can confidently tell you these things."

So, he explains that he's not going to write some things to them that you might expect to find from somebody who is being foolish. He assures them he's not foolish. But he is responding to the "fools" that they have been putting up with—the *false ministers*—in the way that Scripture says. Remember in **Acts [Proverbs] 26 verse 5**, it says:

*Answer a fool according to his folly,
Lest he be wise in his own eyes.*

[16:58]

Now, again, there are two verses there together, and it tells us that there are times when we answer in one way and times in another. But it certainly fits here with what we are told in Proverbs. Paul looks at these individuals who are trying to make themselves look so impressive, and he says: "Okay, I'm going to

respond in kind, lest they begin to think of themselves as being really special. That they somehow think that they are doing good things and are, therefore, *wise in their own eyes*.” If they perceive—again, Paul writing to the Corinthian congregation and telling them [that] if they perceive Satan’s servants as righteous people, their flawed perception may cause them to think that Paul is being foolish. But even if their perception is flawed, even if they’re looking through a distorted lens and judging Paul inappropriately, he says: “Okay, you still should be able to discern what is true and what’s false. And I only ask that you look at that.”

So he goes on to say: **verse 17** *What I speak, I speak not according to the Lord, but as it were, foolishly, in this confidence of boasting.*

In other words, he said: “I can’t find an example where Jesus Christ did it exactly this way, where He was attacked and responded in this way. So, it’s not like it’s a command that God says to respond this way. But,” Paul is saying, “I think it’s perfectly appropriate, and therefore I’m going to do this.”

Seeing [verse 18] that many boast according to the flesh, I also will boast.

Paul’s saying that boasting about the things he has, that he is... (Try that again.) Paul is saying that boasting about the things he’s accomplished, like his critics, is rather foolish since it is the spiritual that matters. “But, if they want to compare accomplishments, okay. I don’t need to apologize for my accomplishments,” he says. “Let’s talk about accomplishments. Let’s compare if you want to do that.”

Credentials from human beings—from men from various institutions—can be useful. They can be helpful. Many of you have enjoyed the FI Online classes presented by Dr. Levy. Dr. Levy earned a very legitimate PhD at an institution that required a great deal of work for him, and that should certainly be respected. However, if you know Dr. Levy, I’ve never known a time for him to come on FI Online or stand in a classroom and say: “I have a doctorate, and therefore, you should listen to me!” No. It was useful. It was helpful, and I’m grateful because I highly respect the work that he put in and the degree he earned. It wasn’t a “degree mill” that he went to and purchased it. He earned it very legitimately at a legitimate educational institution. So, that’s good. There’s nothing wrong with that. We don’t want to minimize that in any way. Neither, at the same time, do we want to exalt what man has to say because, after all, they don’t really understand God’s truth.

[20:11]

We have a library here at Foundation Institute with literally hundreds of books. And, in those books, it’s very rare to find a book written by someone who truly understands God’s truth. There are some, but there aren’t very many there. And, most of them have points here and there that are very helpful, that are useful for us to know about, but we also recognize that in spite of the great intelligence and the very, very hard work those theologians and writers put in, until God opens the mind, they really don’t understand.

So, Paul is saying: “If you want to compare education, you want to compare these things, these physical matters—okay, I’ll compare with you. Let’s take a look at it.”

He says: **verse 19** *For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise!*

Oh, there’s a little bit of a sting there, isn’t it? “You think that you are so wise. You have the ability to make judgments. You have the ability to judge Paul and others. Okay. Fine. Then since you’re wise, and you are therefore able to kind of—with your great wisdom, you’re able to look at someone who’s foolish and kind of be kind and condescending. Okay, since you’re wise, I hope you will put up with my foolishness.”

The *International Standard Version* puts it:

You are wise, so you will gladly be tolerant of fools.

There's an irony here. Another commentary puts it:

You have judged yourselves to be wise so you will show beneficent tolerance to the foolish who aren't as wise as you.

Apparently, Paul's saying something like: "Since you're so willing to put up with fools, you should be glad to put up with me if I speak as the fools do."

For (he says) [verse 20] you put up with it if one brings you into bondage, if one devours you, if one takes from you, if one exalts himself, if one strikes you on the face.

Now Paul is saying: "Have I ever done these things to you? Have I ever been guilty of this? Have I shown this to you?"

[22:26]

Now, it's fascinating when you read the phrase here: *brings you into bondage*. Virtually every commentary out there will say that Paul is saying this because these false teachers were trying to tell the people that *they* needed to obey the law of God, and that was *bondage*. And [that] Paul is saying: "That's terrible that you allow them to teach that." There is *no* place in Scripture where God's law is referred to as "bondage," where you are somehow enslaved by God's law. But that doesn't mean the concept of being enslaved doesn't exist. Yes, it does. What is it that enslaves, according to Scripture? Sin! Sin is a *slave master*.

I love the Bible study or sermon—I forget which it was—that Mr. Kilough gave a number of years ago, and he talked about the power of sin. And he said, "Sin will take you further than you ever thought you would go. It will take you there faster than you ever thought you would go. And it will hold you there longer than you ever thought you would stay." That's *bondage*! God's law doesn't put you in bondage. God's law frees you from the bondage to sin. But the commentators *completely ignore everything* Scripture says about sin bringing you into bondage. And every time they read something like this, they immediately say: "Oh, this is talking about God's law. And they were in *bondage* to the law." *No* such passage occurs *anywhere* in Scripture.

But it doesn't just do that. He talks about "one devouring you." When you're devoured, you're destroyed. It isn't—now in the next phrase he talks about *one takes from you*. Again, they can take things away from you. It isn't a matter of you giving it; it's a matter of being *taken* away. But "devouring" is a destruction of *you*, as a person. It isn't just your property. It's you.

And then it talks about the individual who *exalts himself*, who is presumptuous. We've all come across individuals like that, who feel that *they* should be treated in some kind of special way, some special honor. I think most of you can easily look around your local congregation, and you can see: how does your pastor conduct himself? Does he get up and say: "Well, you all need to honor me. You all need to show more respect for me."

I remember in one particular case, I was told of an individual in another organization who sent people ahead of time to tell those who were going to be there when he arrived: "Don't speak to him unless he speaks to you first." Really? That's kind of the standard that's used when you meet *royalty*. That isn't the way a servant of God is. What a ridiculous idea! These people exalt themselves.

And then he uses this phrase: *if one strikes you on the face*. This isn't a matter of trying to harm someone through punching them. This is referring to *slapping* someone. Have you ever been slapped, or seen this

happen? A slap is not intended to do damage. It's intended to show *disrespect* toward someone. "And," he said, "that's what these people are doing. They're taking from you. They're exalting themselves. They're slapping you in the face—showing total disrespect for you. And yet, you put up with all that." That's truly the antithesis of those that are described in **chapter 1 verse 24** of **2 Corinthians** who were *fellow workers for your joy*.

[26:09]

Paul goes on to say—and again, there's an irony in this: [**2 Corinthians 11:21**] *To our shame I say that we were too weak for that! But in whatever anyone is bold—I speak foolishly—I am bold also.*

Again, remember, *bold* here has the sense of "confidence." "These people are confident? Okay, I can match confidence with any of them. I'm confident with the work that Jesus Christ has done through me."

But, what does he mean here: I'm *too weak for that*?

Remember, we read earlier that these individuals were saying: "Oh, Paul is so strong in his letters, but when he gets here, he's weak." And Paul says: "Well, you know, I wouldn't be able to *exalt* myself and *strike you in the face* and be disrespectful, because after all, you remember, I'm weak. I can't do those things." But again, here are individuals who are spiritually *bullying* God's people. And, they see this as strength. And when Paul refuses to live that way, they accuse him of weakness. It's kind of a no-win situation for Paul. If he tries to be strong, then they accuse him of being an oppressor. And if he is patient, they accuse him of being weak. So Paul says: "Alright, I recognize what's going on. Let's talk about this."

Verse 22 He says: *Are they Hebrews? So am I.* —

Now this identifies something for us. It tells us these individuals who were coming to Corinth came from that Jewish background. Okay.

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I.

Now again, what are we talking about? We don't know for sure exactly [the meaning of] the phrase *Hebrews* here. Most feel that it is a reference to the strictest of the Jews, who, even in the Diaspora, as they're scattered around the world, would still maintain the Hebrew language and the Jewishness very rigidly in their own homes and would not compromise with the society they lived within. That's a part of it.

Israelites, wherever they lived, considered themselves to be a part of God's special people. So he said: "Okay. I say that if they're *Hebrews*, okay—fine. I am understanding that. Are they *Israelites*, part of God's covenant people? God made a covenant with them. Okay. I'm a part of that group. *The seed of Abraham*?" Remember that it is through *the seed of Abraham* that the covenant is—of eternal life—is promised. So being a *seed of Abraham* is very, very important. He said: "Are they? Okay. That's fine." If you want to look at all the basics that are involved, that his critics seem to put forward as their credentials, well, Paul says: "Okay, I can match all of those."

[28:59]

Now you'll notice something. When was it that Paul, in one of his letters, wrote to the people and said: "You need to understand that I'm a Hebrew. I'm an Israelite. I am of the seed of Abraham"? You don't find it. In fact, you find that Paul says: "You can be the seed of Abraham too, because God has opened the door to salvation to you." He says: [**Romans 2:28-29**] *... he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, ... but ... who is one inwardly; that circumcision is that of the heart, not of the flesh.* So, Paul is not one who sets himself apart and says: "Look at me." He's the one who says: "Hey, come join me. I'm happy to be with my brothers and

sisters and share this.”

He goes on. Now again, that talks about kind of the “Jewishness” that Paul brings to this. His understanding. His being taught at the foot of Gamaliel.

In **verse 23**, he says: *Are they ministers of Christ?* (Are they individuals who are serving Jesus Christ?)

He said: —*I speak as a fool*—

“Remember, I am talking like the foolish person. So, what do you think? I speak as one beside myself. Examine this. What do you think?”

He says: —*I am more*:—

And he begins to list things:

—*in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.*

Now, in the previous verse Paul claims equality with his critics. Now again, you notice he didn’t say: “I’m better than they.” He said: “I can match them. I can match what they say.” He claimed equality with them on the basis of nationality. But when he turns to accomplishments, he claims superiority to them on every count. But notice something else. Paul does not talk about things in which *he personally* is superior. Instead, he points out what God has done through him. So that, ultimately, what Paul is pointing out is just what he said: “I’m a servant of Jesus Christ. Here’s what Jesus Christ has accomplished with me. If you want to judge me, okay; that’s all right. You can judge. But what I want you to judge by is what Jesus Christ has done in and through me, not something less.” So, what is more important for the servants of Jesus Christ: their national heritage or humble service where it’s needed?

When it talks about here, *in deaths often*—now, again, we see—we know certain things. We’ll see a little bit more here about the *stripes*, the *prisons*, *in deaths often*. Some have tried to make that metaphoric, but basically, when you read through the history of Paul’s life, he faced death very realistically on a number of occasions. And yet Jesus Christ brought him through.

[31:53]

He says: **verse 24** *From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.*

Now, *forty stripes minus one* was *specifically* a punishment rendered by the authorities in the synagogues. This was not a Roman punishment. Thirty-nine stripes, based upon a passage back in **Deuteronomy [25:3]**, was a particular Jewish punishment. There are a couple of ways of explaining it. But Jewish law brought out—well, it shows us that this “39 stripes” was not some mild punishment. Jewish law had a provision that said if a man died while receiving his beating, the executioner was not liable as long as he did not exceed the prescribed 40 stripes. Now, again, there are different explanations of it. One explanation I read said that they could be beaten with a whip that had 13 straps of leather on it, and three strikes with that would’ve been an equivalent of 39 stripes. I think that’s probably a stretch. But, it’s possible. The Jews saw the Old Testament requirement was: “You cannot go beyond 40 stripes.” So their pattern of doing it was: “We won’t go beyond 39. That way, even if we miscount, we’re still safe.” So, there are various explanations there.

But Paul tells us, *five times* he received that. Where do we find that in the book of **Acts**? We don’t find it there at all.

He says: **verse 25** *Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a*

night and a day I have spent in the deep;

Now, again, *three times he was beaten with rods*. Beating *with rods* was a specifically Roman punishment. It was something that was illegal to do to a Roman citizen. And yet, Paul says he endured it three times. We know he endured it in Philippi. It tells us that. Where the other times were, we really don't know. We **do** know about the account where he was stoned—where it says he was stoned once. That was in Lystra. **Acts chapter 14 verses 5 through 19** tells us that.

But then he talks about *three times shipwrecked*. Well, the end of the book of Acts tells us about a shipwreck that Paul was on, but that hadn't occurred yet when Paul wrote this. So there are three other times when he is *shipwrecked*. He says *a night and a day* he spent in the water, and not knowing whether he is going to live or not. When you look at that and you see: well, none of these things are recorded in the book of Acts—why not? Is there something wrong with the book of Acts?

No, the book of Acts had a purpose. It was written for a reason. And—just like we said a few classes back as we were answering questions for class number 3—that the author has to choose what he's going to include or not. And for whatever reasons that are involved, Luke did not see the need to record all of that. But that doesn't mean it didn't happen. And it doesn't mean the book of Acts is inaccurate. Just as we said—as we looked at the background for this book—there are certain things that we really wish we knew more about, but, at this point we don't. Someday we will. But at this point, we don't. Such as: was there another visit to Corinth that we don't find in the book of Acts? Was there a “severe letter,” or was that 1 Corinthians? A lot of those things we'll have to find out later on. But, the book of Acts doesn't record all the details. But that doesn't mean these things aren't true. They are true. Paul put them forward, and there would be contemporaries in the first century who could verify these things were true.

[35:51]

He goes on to say in **verse 26**: *in journeys often*, —

Probably the sense of that is that he had no regular home that he could go back to. We don't find any place where Paul owned property and he went back to his home. He lived his life kind of in a nomadic way. As we're told: *strangers and pilgrims*—we are only moving through this world. So, that's probably a part of it.

He talks about:

—*in perils of waters* (which could be the sea. It could also be rivers, and so on), *[in] perils of robbers* (Paul very often traveled through dangerous areas.), *[in] perils of my own countrymen* (Obviously, there are times when Paul was in danger from the Jews.), *in perils of the Gentiles* (Oh, it wasn't just the Jews were out to get him; Gentiles were as well.), *in perils in the city*, —

Now there were places—again, we use the example of Lystra as a city. They took him out to stone him.

—*in perils in the wilderness*, —

There were times when Paul was traveling in areas that there were virtually no people there. And, again, the dangers that could be in that situation.

— *in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren*;

Oh, that's got to be a sad thing to see. But perils outside the Church came from both the Jews and the Gentiles. But sometimes even the Church was not a safe place for Paul because people who *pretended* to be brethren were unfaithful and self-serving and attacking him, even as the ones we're talking about here in Corinth. We still have to remember that even though there were false brethren within the Church, it didn't

stop it from being God's true Church. God didn't keep them from being there. But He did require us—and does require us—to recognize when individuals come along who may have a good outward appearance, but, are not really living God's way.

[37:57]

Paul goes on to say he was: [**verse 27**] *in weariness and toil*, —

The previous verses talk about trials that come from outside. As he continues on, he's talking about trials that are more kind of internal—something we go through there. He talks about *weariness* and *toil*, two words that express *heavy, hard* labor.

—*in sleeplessness often*, —

There are probably several ways we could take that. In some cases, it may be not being able to sleep because work needs to be done. In some cases, it may be lying awake with just your mind so wrapped up in what's going on and wondering what to do that you can't rest. Sometimes it may be that you simply choose to stay awake because somebody's in need. You've got to be there to help them work through things.

He talks about: —*in hunger and thirst*, —

Again, this could be a reference to the many times when he really didn't know where his next meal was coming from.

He talks about: —*in fastings often*, —

And again, it's kind of surprising. The commentaries, several of them, talk about how: "Oh, this is saying"—that "Paul was saying he didn't really have enough food to even get by at times." I don't see that. I really think this is Paul saying that he voluntarily chose to fast in various situations, probably fairly often, because he wanted to help the people who were going through difficulties, and he needed God's guidance and help to do that.

I remember many years ago when a fellow minister offered to fast with me about a problem that I was facing—a health issue that I was having trouble with. Even though that minister, unfortunately, left the Church many years later, I still remember how it felt to know that here was a brother-minister who was fasting for me and lifting up my concern. I think that's a part of what Paul is doing here.

He talks about: —*in cold and nakedness*—

The nakedness, again, could have been without adequate clothing. But again, remember that oftentimes in Scripture, nakedness could refer to lack of shelter as well, and that may be what he's saying.

[40:05]

Then he goes on: **verse 28** *besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.*

As a shepherd, Paul cared very deeply about the people who had been called to the truth through him. As we read his epistles—and we read the book of **Acts**—it appears that the Churches were constantly under some kind of threat, either from within or from outside. Paul wasn't the kind of person who could somehow compartmentalize his shepherding, his concern for God's people. It was a part of everything he did. It permeated him. So, he has a *deep concern* daily *for all the Churches*.

I think, again, if you have the opportunity sometime to talk with your pastor, I think you'll find that he has a great deal of understanding about what Paul means there, because as a pastor, as a shepherd, if you're going to be effective at all, you have a very deep concern for God's people. And when they're going through a difficult time, you can't just kind of set that aside and forget it. Something you think very deeply about.

Paul says: [**verse 29**] *Who is weak, and I am not weak?* —

"Listen, I understand." An individual is weak, who's going through a difficult time, who doesn't seem to have the strength that he or she needs to face the trial that they're going through. Paul says: "I know what it feels like. I know what it feels like to be too weak to be able to keep going. And yet you have to keep going."

—*Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?*

When someone stumbles in their Christian walk, when they walk away, when they stumble out of the pathway, when they leave, perhaps, the Church of God for a period of time or for good, he says: "I can't just look at that and say, 'Oh, well. It doesn't matter to me.' This does matter. It's very deeply important."

He says: **verse 30** *If I need to boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity.*

He says: "Okay, if I need to somehow exalt myself, what I will exalt instead is God, because God allowed me"—and we're going to see this as we go a little further—"God allowed me to have a very difficult problem" of some sort. Perhaps a physical problem. "And yet, always, through all this, God has continued to bring me through."

[42:32]

He says: **verse 31** *The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. 32 In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; 33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.*

Now why does Paul bring that up right here? Well, we could probably come up with several reasons. But one that seems to make sense—at least to me—is that Paul is saying: "From the very beginning of the time that God used me, that Jesus Christ placed me in this position of His apostle, I was powerless. There were those who were out to do me in. And, I didn't confront them and stand there and call down fire from heaven on them. I got let down through the wall in a basket, and I fled." Now there wasn't something wrong with that. That was the right thing for Paul to do at that point. "But," he said, "I'm not presenting myself as a great, bold warrior. I'm, instead, a frail human being, and I struggled from the very beginning, and I still do to this day."

We move on to **chapter 12**. And again, the division between the chapters is completely artificial.

He says: **verse 1** *It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast.* —

"It's not going to make anybody, probably, believe me any more. It's not something that's going to make someone say, 'Oh, wow! You're right, Paul. You have done more than all these other people.' No," he says, "that's not really going to win you over or convict you. But," he says, "*I will come to something else.*"

—*I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord:*

In other words, he's saying: "All of these things that I could say, 'Well, I did this, or I was able to accomplish that.'" He said: "Beyond that, Jesus Christ has given me some special insights." Do these other people claim to have special insights? Did Jesus Christ come to them and show them things? Probably not.

The example that we find in the following verses is not found anywhere else. He's going to tell us about a special vision, although he's not going to tell us the details. He's just going to assert that he **had** this special vision given to him by Jesus Christ. He evidently didn't go around telling people all about it. This may be the only time he ever even revealed to anyone that this had taken place. So he goes on to describe this.

And, let's pick it up here in **verse 2**: *I know a man in Christ* —

Not "I knew" in the past tense like the *King James* has it. "I know him. I still know him today."

—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.

Now, Paul is basically saying: "This vision that I received—this revelation from Jesus Christ—was so real, it so impressed itself upon me that I really don't know if it was a vision or I was actually there. It just was so profound, so powerful. I really can't say one way or another."

[45:53]

Now, who was this man he's talking about? Well, most of the commentaries will quickly recognize Paul's talking about himself. He's not talking about someone else. Consider: there are a number of reasons why we would say that:

First of all, Paul knew the **exact time** this revelation took place. If **2 Corinthians** was written around 56/57 A.D., that would put the vision around 42 to 43. That's probably the time when Paul was in Tarsus during the time just before Barnabas came to bring him over to Antioch to help out there. We have no record of what took place during those years in Paul's life. So it may very well have been then. But he knew the timing. He didn't just say: "Well, he told me about 'this happened to [him] one time.'" It's *fourteen years ago*.

Second, the inability to determine whether the vision was entirely in his mind, or it was a bodily—he was bodily present indicates somebody who went through the experience. He personally, at this point, didn't know.

Third, Paul would not be embarrassed to describe somebody else's experience. I think that's a very strong proof that Paul is the one that's involved here. If it had been somebody else's experience, he wouldn't say: "Well, I'm kind of embarrassed to tell you about this." But, since it was his own experience, then that would make sense.

And fourth, someone else's experience would really make no sense in the context of what we're talking about. Paul is talking about how you know he is a servant of Jesus Christ. And, to tell the story of somebody else—you know, "I knew someone who had this" —it would be like one of us today saying: "Oh, I knew a person who was miraculously healed." Okay. What does that have to do with making **me** a servant of Jesus Christ? Nothing. So, it doesn't make sense unless it has to do with that.

Now what are we talking about here? He says he *was caught up to the third heaven*. This phrase causes the commentators a lot of confusion. Some think that Paul was referring to a Jewish idea that was at least believed by some in the first century. And that was that there were seven levels of heaven, and that Paul tells us he's going up to the third one. I don't see any evidence of that here at all. That was Jewish mysticism that taught that. That was not mainstream Judaism at all.

We've understood the "first heaven" to refer to the air in which the birds and the clouds exist, the "second

heaven” as a reference to what we would call “outer space,” where the stars, the planets, the galaxies all exist, and the *third heaven* referring to God’s throne.

The phrase *first heaven* only occurs once in the Scripture. That’s in **Revelation 21 verse 1**. The phrase “second heaven” doesn’t occur at all. But since Scripture specifically, as here, refers to a *third heaven*, well, if there’s a *first* and a *third*, there must be a “second.” So, it’s a perfectly reasonable thing for us to see. *Third heaven* only occurs here [**2 Corinthians 12:2**]. We therefore have no specific place in Scripture to go to define the term.

[49:16]

He goes on to tell us a little bit more. He says: [**2 Corinthians 12:3**] *And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—*

So, again, he is making the point that he’s not claiming some special insight for himself.

He goes on to say: [**verse 4**] *how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.*

The word *Paradise* only occurs in two other places in Scripture: **Luke 23 verse 43** and **Revelation 2, in verse 7**. Most commentaries believe—and I think we would agree with this—that *Paradise* and *third heaven* are essentially synonymous.

Barclay says:

The word Paradise comes from a Persian word which means a walled garden. When a Persian king wished to confer a very special honor on someone especially dear to him, he made him a companion of the garden, and gave him the right to walk in the royal gardens with him in intimate companionship.

Expositor’s Bible Commentary goes on to say:

What Paul heard and saw, human words were inadequate to relate. What is more, he was **not** permitted to try to share the content of the revelation, perhaps because it had been designed for him alone, to fortify him for future service and suffering. Glimpses the New Testament **does** give of the coming glory are aimed at strengthening faith and promoting holiness, not at satisfying curiosity.

I think that’s something that we need to keep in mind. As God gave those visions to Paul, it wasn’t a matter of satisfying Paul’s curiosity. And it’s not something that we should be seeking in that way.

But, He gave Paul special visions to encourage and strengthen him. The book of **Acts [9:3-5]** shows us that. That’s not something that we normally see in our lives today. Paul was a unique servant. Paul faced trials you and I will *never* face. And he needed extra encouragement and strengthening. Apparently, Jesus Christ gave it to him.

[51:24]

Paul goes on to say: **verse 5** *Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities.*

The recipient of the vision is identified only as *a man in Christ*, **verse 2**. Paul doesn’t wish to point to himself as someone really worthy of special honor because Jesus Christ had given him visions. He simply wanted them to think of him as a fellow believer. He didn’t seek a vision or receive a vision as a reward for his deeds. God simply decided to give him a vision for God’s own purposes.

He goes on to say: **verse 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.*

If he wanted to boast, he would not be embarrassed by the things he claimed because he would only be speaking the truth. Could the same be said for Paul's critics?

I like the *New Living Translation* of this. Paul says: *If I wanted* (Let's see, I need to go further here [on the screen]. Sorry.) *If I wanted to boast, I would be no fool in doing so, because I would be telling the truth. But (he says,) I won't do it, because I don't want anyone to give me credit beyond what they can see in my life or hear in my message,*

He wasn't interested in boasting because he had no need or desire to make people think of him as some special or different person, different from other Christians. He wanted them to judge him on the basis of what they'd seen in him, not in boasting. Not in what his critics were saying about him either. He was perfectly willing to face the judgment of these people. But he asked to be judged on the right basis.

That leads us up to **verse 7**.

But again, we are out of time for this particular class. So we will stop for today, and we'll look forward to picking it up again next time in **2 Corinthians chapter 12** and **verse 7**.

Thanks again for joining us. We look forward to seeing you next time.

[53:34]